Performance, Cultural Identity, and Feminist Practice in the Oral History of an African-American Domestic Worker.

Elondust Patrick Johnson
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/6192

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6” x 9” black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
PERFORMANCE, CULTURAL IDENTITY, AND FEMINIST PRACTICE IN THE ORAL HISTORY OF AN AFRICAN AMERICAN DOMESTIC WORKER

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in The Department of Speech Communication

by

Elondust Patrick Johnson
B.A., University of North Carolina, 1989
M.A., University of North Carolina, 1991
May 1996

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank God, for giving me the strength and the courage to finish this project.

To my advisor and friend, Ruth Laurion Bowman, thank you for your guidance, encouragement, and "close reading" of the many, many drafts of this project. "As regards" the latter, your critical eye fine tuned my writing. "Thereby," you helped me take the study to another level of sophistication. "By means of performance," then, we "co-authored" a rich and provocative study.

To my committee members, Michael Bowman, Mary Frances HopKins, Andrew King, Jill Brody, Emily Toth, and Femi Euba, thank you for your insightful and helpful comments. Your input was invaluable.

To Soyini Madison, Ira Blake, Onawumi Jean Moss, thanks for being there when I needed to vent, for reading chapters, and for pointing me in the right directions. Most of all, thanks for being the women that you are.

To my partners in crime, Sharon Croft, Dan Heaton, and Leigh Anne Howard, thanks for being true friends throughout this long and arduous journey. The dinners, parties, and quiet visits surely helped me get through.

To my family, thank you for patience while I finished this project. Your love and support helped me get over the hump. I hope the finished product was worth the wait.

And finally, and most importantly, thank you, grandmother, for opening up your life to me and the world. I will treasure your stories for years to come.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** ........................................................................................................ iii

**ABSTRACT** ................................................................................................................... vi

**CHAPTER 1**

INTRODUCTION: IN SEARCH OF GRANDMA'S STORIES .......................... 1

**CHAPTER 2**

PERFORMANCE AND ETHNOGRAPHY: COLLECTING, TRANSCRIBING AND INTERPRETING THE ORAL NARRATIVE 13

- Notes from the Field .............................................................. 13
- Oral History As Performance .................................................. 17
- Ethnography And/As Dialogic Performance ............................ 33
- The Narrative And/As Dialogic Performance ......................... 41
- Interpretive Perspectives ....................................................... 44
- Method of Transcription ....................................................... 60

**CHAPTER 3**

NEVAH HAD A CROSS WORD: THE TRANSCRIBED NARRATIVE OF MARY RYNE ........................................ 65

- Mary Rhyne's Labor History ................................................. 65
- Mary Rhyne's Narrative ....................................................... 68
- Nevah Had A Cross Word ...................................................... 68
- Y'all Ain't Havin' No Party ..................................................... 72
- Dey Didn't Pay Nuthin' ......................................................... 75
- We All Just One Family ....................................................... 79
- We Were the Best of Friends ............................................... 85
- Ah Nevah Will Forget Dat Mornin' ......................................... 88
- Oh Dey Nice People .............................................................. 89
- Ah Don't Want No End 'Partment ........................................ 92
- Better Dan Makin' Nu'lin' ...................................................... 95
- As Long As Ah Stay Black .................................................... 98
- Every Chris'mas ................................................................. 101
- Dey Nevah Was Too Much Trouble ....................................... 104
- Dey's More In Managin' Dan Dey Is In Money ....................... 112
- Dat's Uh Nice Piece Uh Furniture ........................................ 114
- Dat's De Exact Reason Ah Could Always Get Uh Job ............. 116
- Dey Nevah Did Say Nuthin' 'Bout It In Front Uh Me ............... 119
- Ain't Nuthin' 'Bout Uh Sick Group ....................................... 123
- Ah'd Cut De Grass .............................................................. 126
- Ain't Worth It ................................................................... 130

**CHAPTER 4**

PERFORMING DOMESTIC LABOR: "MAKING DO" AND RE-MAKING ................................................................. 132

- "Ah Done Ol' An Broke Down": Physical Hardships and Low Pay of Domestic Labor ............................................. 141
- Authorizing Power: "Like One of the Family" ......................... 151
- "Proud Mary": The Valuing of Domestic Work ...................... 176
- "Homeplace": After Domestic Work ..................................... 186
- Stories Never Told: Silence As Resistance ............................ 197

---

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
v

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the personal narrative of Mary Rhyne, an elderly African American domestic worker. The study describes the ethnographic process of collecting, transcribing and interpreting the informant's oral history. Interpretive and theoretical perspectives concerned with African American culture, domestic labor, and feminist practice are used to analyze the narrative. Further, the ethnographic process, the informant's oral "telling," and the events that she recalls and recounts are viewed as, and in terms of, performance.

Performance foregrounds the collaborative and "fictional" aspects of the ethnographer-informant relationship. It directs attention toward the "performance event" as a site and situation where the teller reconstructs her past in the present and by means of culture-specific ways of speaking. In particular, Mary Rhyne draws on expressions and practices that are common to the African American Signifyin' and Gospel performance traditions. In turn, the study examines how these culture-specific ways of speaking about domestic labor operate in light of contemporary social labor theories and African American feminist theories. In sum, Mary Rhyne's performance--as a woman, an African American and a domestic worker--is viewed as its own theory in practice.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: IN SEARCH OF GRANDMA'S STORIES

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair. (Hughes 30)

The wisdom and encouragement that the speaker passes on to her son in Langston Hughes's poem, "Mother to Son," reflects that which my grandmother passed on to me. Raised by her grandfather, a former slave, grandmother was raised the "slavery time way." Thus, she never was afforded the luxury of a crystal stair; yet, she's "been a-climbin' on." And as I listen to her stories of the hard times she experienced, there in the midst of darkness shines a light of hope—the hope that her children and their children will know better days than the ones her life has afforded her.

I did not appreciate my grandmother's stories until I was in my late teens. When I was a child, I did not understand what it meant to eat blood pudding, pea mush, and meal bread. And though I had experienced spankings, I could not identify with my grandmother's stories of physical abuse. She told me stories of her grandfather tying her to the joist in the ceiling of their one room shack. While she hung there, he beat her with a
strap and left her hanging from the joist for many hours after the beating. Following that story, she usually told another story—how when she and her grandfather had built a fence together, she enacted her revenge on him: she hit her grandfather over the head with a hammer. While I listened to these stories with wild-eyed fascination, I did not understand why my grandmother told them to me.

When I left home to attend college, I began to better understand why my grandmother told stories. At first, I understood them because I found I needed advice from her. In response to my problems, she would tell me: “Book learnin’ don’t give you life learnin’”; “Don’t forget to remember where you come from”; “Save your lil’ change and you’ll have big money one day.” I also found that when I gave advice to my friends, I would often speak in her vernacular: “Don’t be so Heaven bound that you’re no earthly good”; “Don’t let your mouth start something your ass can’t finish”; “A hard head makes a soft ass.” Like Alice Walker, then, I realized that . . . through years of listening to my [grandmother’s] stories of her life, I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories—like her life—must be recorded. (240)

Thus, my search began: “I went in search of the secret of what has fed that muzzled and often mutilated, but vibrant, creative spirit that the black woman has inherited, and that pops out in the wild and unlikely places to this day” (Walker 239). This study reflects my continuous journey: in search of grandma’s stories.

This study examines the oral narrative of Mary Rhyne,¹ an elderly African American domestic worker and my grandmother. The narrative

---

¹ “Mary Rhyne” is a pseudonym for my grandmother. I persuaded her that it would be best not to use her real name because her life history includes other people who may want to remain anonymous. After some thought, my
was collected in a series of interviews that I held with Mary Rhyne in May 1993. The focus of our conversations centered around her experiences as a domestic worker. The stories and anecdotes, as well as the more brusque remarks and silences, that she shared with me concerning her years of managing her employers' home and children, offer a rich narrative site of study. It is a site where my grandmother recalled her past by means of speaking about it in the present. In this way, she performed for me, and for herself, what it meant and what it means to her to be a domestic worker. The narrative also reveals the "past" events that constitute domestic work for this woman. Her employers' home, the make-up of the Smith family, her duties and responsibilities, and the employer/employee relationship are disclosed. Imbedded in Mary Rhyne's present telling of the past events are other discourses that inform what she says and how. A complex matrix of race, class, gender, European American and African American cultural practices, and my own ethnographic process and pursuit are at work in and on this narrative. Conversely, Mary Rhyne's performance—her telling me (and, by means of this study, the academy) about her history as a domestic worker—is based in experiential, or "lived," knowledge. Her narrative is, then, a site that can inform how we view and talk about race, class, gender and culture. This study, therefore, analyzes Mary Rhyne's narrative as a performance, and as a performance that informs and is informed by these various and interwoven sites of discursive action.

I conducted this research through ethnographic practice which consisted of three parts. First, I went "into the field" and conducted an in-

grandmother became adamant about my using pseudonyms for all of the people involved, especially her employers and their family members. She speaks to and visits with these people on a regular basis and feels that any defamatory remarks about them might jeopardize her relationship with them. Therefore, the names of the people mentioned by my grandmother have been changed to protect their identities.
depth series of interviews with my informant, my grandmother. Specifically, I collected my grandmother's oral history concerning her experiences as a domestic worker. Second, I transcribed her oral narrative into print using a poetic model of transcription. Third, I drew on various interpretive perspectives in order to "unpack" and discuss what I understand to be a complex narrative site, implicit to oral histories in general and my grandmother's narrative in particular.

As I discuss in detail in Chapter Two, the ethnographic method that I pursue is that which Dwight Conquergood identifies as a "dialogic" performance ethnography ("Between Experience" 46-47). A dialogic ethnographic method acknowledges the vulnerability of both the informant and the researcher, as it directs attention to the "fictive" nature of ethnographic encounters. The method admits that the process in which the researcher and the informant participate is "artificial." That is, in this case, arranging for, having and taping an interview is not an everyday occurrence for either my grandmother or me. It is a "made up" event and activity. In addition, the method admits that the researcher, as well as the researched, creates what is said, done, saved and studied. In other words, the method emphasizes an encounter of collaboration, co-authorship and dialogue. The result of viewing and practicing ethnography in this way is that the researcher learns to resist characterizing the encounter in "fixed" subject-object categories. Instead, the informant and the researcher are permitted, or permit themselves, to alternate between and sometimes merge the self/other, expert/initiand roles that frequently characterize the ethnographic encounter.

2 See Geertz, "Thinking" 154; and Conquergood, "Performing" 61.
As I also discuss in Chapter Two, I transcribed Mary's oral narrative into print using a poetic model of transcription because the poetic model is able to illustrate, on the printed page, how the teller performed her narrative. In addition to content, the model offers the researcher a way to document and, thereby, study the vocal and physical dimensions, or "character," of the storyteller's performance. Because I view an oral narrative such as this as a performance, and also as a performance rich in culture-specific ways of speaking and behaving, it was crucial for me to find a way to document how my grandmother chose to speak as well as what she chose to say. The poetic model provides me with a method of documentation that services both needs.

In Chapter Two, I identify and discuss the various interpretive perspectives that I draw on. The perspectives that I use to analyze the narrative range from those that are specific to Mary Rhyne's African American culture, to those that address domestic labor, and feminist issues. Although my grandmother would not necessarily categorize herself as a "feminist," I have devoted a chapter to interpreting her narrative from a feminist perspective because the events of her life experiences—being a poor, black woman of the South—engender an indigenous feminism. Her "theory" of feminism reveals a life of autonomy in the face of race and class oppression. And this, her theorizing, is concretized and made known by means of performance.

The performance theories and methods that I draw on to describe and analyze Mary's performance are, for the most part, culture oriented. That is, my study of her performance emphasizes how Mary constructs culture, or a cultural identity, and how Mary draws on various cultural sites, practices and expressions in order to do so. Elemental to my pursuit of
her performance as and of culture is the understanding that people perform in culture specific and context specific ways. What Mary says and how she says it is constantly informed by the cultural codes, discourses and practices with which she is most familiar. Although I emphasize in my analysis how aspects of African American culture appear to prevail in Mary's performance, the community in which she presently lives also appears to influence significantly how she, at present, constructs her cultural identity. This community consists of poor, elderly and, for the most part, white residents. Mary is one of three African Americans who live in the community.

Although Mary appears to prefer to foreground the codes, discourses and practices found in these two cultural sites, the particularities of the performance context effect her use of other culture-specific codes, discourses and practices. For instance, Mary knew that the "academy" was going to read her narrative. Out of respect for what she understands to be the academy's cultural standards as regards language practices, she refused to use profanity when being taped. In response to the invisible audience, then, Mary drew on a cultural practice (i.e., "proper"-speak) that is not typical of her everyday speech practices. Thereby, the "academy" became a part of the cultural identity that she constructed in her performance.

In addition to the audience, other context variables, such as the setting, situation, topic, and in this case the live or visible audience (i.e., myself), affect and effect the kind of cultural identity the performer creates. Clearly, in my asking my grandmother to talk about her experiences as a domestic, "I" influence the culture that she constructs, as do the codes, discourses and practices that characterized domestic service as she knew and experienced it.
As the interpreter of Mary's performance, then, I pursue an analysis that describes and discusses the cross-cultural specifics that Mary draws on and uses in her performance, and in response to the specific context in which she performs.

A culture-specific analysis of a performance also directs attention toward the broader social and cultural context that variously contrasts, as well as supports, the performer's construction of a (her) culture. Although I am concerned with the specific "dynamics of the storytelling performance event," I understand that Mary's "narrative as storytelling performance begins a dialogue between narrative and society" (Langellier 249). That is, Mary's perspective on and construction of a domestic worker (herself) is potentially able to speak to, about and/or against the view of "the domestic" as constructed in fictional and nonfictional, historical and theoretical studies. This is not to say that Mary's narrative is more, or less, important than the others. Rather, by means of comparing and contrasting her construction with others, Mary's narrative becomes part of and is able to inform the social perspective--i.e., the way that "we" view, think and talk about the domestic worker in American (US) society and culture.

On another level, I am also interested in how Mary uses performance to, in Richard Bauman's terms, "emerge" (Verbal Art 38). Emergence references the act of validating, empowering, or self-authorizing one's identity by means of performance. Thereby, the emergent quality of Mary's performance permits her to wear multiple "masks" in her construction of her cultural identity. The identity she constructs through these masks proffers a reconceptualization of academic notions of "theory," particularly feminist theory.
Performance also permits me, the researcher/author of the study, to speak because, as I explain in Chapter Two, my interpretive bias is also part of the ethnographic-performance event, the "fragile fiction," as Conquergood terms it, of recalling "history" and performing it "orally" ("Performing" 60-62).

In Chapter Two, "Performance and Ethnography: Collecting, Transcribing and Interpreting the Oral Narrative," I address the theoretical and methodological concerns that inform the study. In the introduction to the chapter, "Notes From the Field," I describe my fieldwork experience. My description of the Tate Terrace community, its residents, my grandmother and her home functions to contextualize my research, and the theories and methods that I proceed to discuss in the chapter.

In the next section, "Oral History As Performance," I view and support Mary's oral narrative as a verbal art performance. Drawing on the studies of folklorists Elizabeth Fine and Richard Bauman, I identify the three main characteristics of verbal art performance and discuss how Mary's oral history specifically reflects them. Both Fine and Bauman point out that specific "keys" and metacommunicative codes situate verbal art as an aesthetic mode of communication. Verbal art is also constituted by a "particular event" (Fine 58), or, as Bauman discusses, by specific spatial and temporal factors that set the performed narrative apart from everyday speech practices. These factors constitute what Bauman calls the "performance event" (Verbal Art 15-24). Third, verbal art performances are culture specific. This characteristic informs both the aesthetics of the performance and the context, or performance event, as created by the performer and her audience.
In the third section of the chapter, I discuss the nature, scope and purpose of doing a dialogic performance ethnography. Informed by the work of performance ethnographers and anthropologists, such as Johannes Fabian, Dwight Conquergood, Clifford Geertz, and Victor Turner, I direct attention toward the instability of subject positions of the researcher and the researched in ethnographic encounters. Because each participant exists as an unfixed entity, I argue that the ethnographic experience is a "fiction." As such, I call attention to the "dialogic" nature of the "fragile fiction" created by the give-and-take dynamic between the participants. I then apply these theories to my experience in the field of my grandmother's narrative. I contend that we, my grandmother and I, co-authored the "fragile fiction" that comprises grandmother's oral history and, thereby, the ethnographic encounter was dialogic.

In "The Narrative And/As Dialogic Performance," I draw from the prior section to discuss how Mary's performance is dialogic. Specifically, I detail the various roles Mary plays in the narrative event. In some instances, Mary claims authority in the present performance situation, while, at other times, she disclaims authority. I suggest that Mary's roles in both the past and present are in dialogue, the result of which affirms and disaffirms her position of authority.

In the section, "Interpretive Perspectives," I contend that multiple perspectives "thicken" my reading of Mary's narrative. I argue that a dialogic text requires various lenses through which to view it because of the number of voices found therein. I discern four perspectives that I chose to guide this study. They are the Signifyin' tradition, the gospel tradition, social labor theory, and feminist theory.
My focus on Signifyin' directs attention toward its use of indirection in general and specifically verbal gaming. African Americans signify on one another by talking around a subject or hinting at what they really mean. In light of the "Signifyin' Monkey" tales found in African American folklore, I discuss how the informant's performance style, in the interview situation and in the domestic work site, resemble that of the Signifyin' monkey.

I also discuss the gospel performance tradition. The gospel tradition is used as a means of survival because those in the gospel tradition arrest religion from the abstract and integrate it into their daily lives by means of performance. In addition, those in the gospel tradition celebrate their faith in a celebratory and joyous way.

In my discussion of social labor theory, I review the various fictional and nonfictional studies conducted on domestic labor in the United States. I point out that these theories offer a point of comparison between my grandmother's construction of domestic service and those accounted in these studies.

I discuss why I have chosen to use African American feminist theory to interpret and evaluate the narrative. I foreground my discussion with a history of the feminist movement in the United States. I then go on to describe the ways in which the movement, at various historical moments, has silenced or ignored the voices of women of color. Drawing on theories by Alice Walker and Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, I argue that the theories of women of color relate to my grandmother's narrative as she implicitly draws on them to enact her own feminist theory.
I conclude Chapter Two by drawing on performance and folklore scholars such as Elizabeth Fine, Dennis Tedlock and Soyini Madison to discuss why I used a poetic, rather than prosaic, model to transcribe my grandmother's narrative.

Chapter Three, "‘Nevah Had Uh Cross Word': The Transcribed Narrative of Mary Rhyne," contains the transcribed narrative in its entirety. I chose to feature the narrative in its own chapter in my study because it is the primary document. Its placement contextualizes my discussion of other topics and issues that I formulate throughout the study. Also, the narrative serves as an analogue for one of my research goals. That goal is to bring a silent voice from margin to center. I begin the chapter with my grandmother's domestic labor history to guide the reader through the narrative and to offer supplemental information for my discussion and interpretation of the narrative in later chapters.

In Chapter Four, "Performing Domestic Labor: ‘Making Do' and Re-Making," I focus on how Mary constructs and performs the role of the domestic worker and how her construction compares and contrasts with other fictional and nonfictional written constructions—literature, oral histories, historical, social-economic and theoretical studies. I introduce Mary's construction with a discussion of the "mammy" figure. This prototypical image serves as an analogue to the varying roles and masks Mary uses in the narrative and narrated sites. Then, I direct attention toward four characteristics of domestic labor as Mary defines them. As a point of comparison, I draw on the studies of Michel de Certeau, Judith Rollins, Trudier Harris, David Katzman and John Gwaltney, to provide the social-historical and fictional depictions of domestic work. These studies
contextualize the informant's narrative within the larger historical scope of domestic work as it was developed in this country.

In Chapter Five, "Feminist Tricksters And Mary's Monster Discourse," I begin with a summary of the history, theories, and practices of feminism in the United States. I offer a brief history of European and African American women's collaborative efforts in their fight against sexism. I then discuss how race and class affect the way these two groups of women theorize their lives. In the latter part of the chapter, I contend that my grandmother's narrative is its own "theory." Unlike "normative" constructions of feminist theory, however, I argue that my grandmother's particular "theory in the flesh" offers an alternative view of feminist discourse.

In Chapter Six, "Conclusion," I discuss the implications of the study as well as offer new questions for further research. Specifically, I address the ways in which this study offers alternative ways to interpret oral histories. I discuss the ways that Mary's performance of her oral history contributes to our knowledge about what it means to be a woman, an African American, a domestic worker, and aged. As Soyini Madison reminds us: "A performed life history expresses that which is unique and creative in the enactment of an individual's life stories and [social, cultural and historical] experiences" and practices ("Ethnography" 288). For grandmother, the performance of her life as a domestic may reveal to her and to us a piece of history, culture, and identity that was formerly hidden or silenced.
CHAPTER TWO

PERFORMANCE AND ETHNOGRAPHY: COLLECTING, TRANSCRIBING AND INTERPRETING THE ORAL NARRATIVE

Notes From the Field

My grandmother lives in Kings Mountain, North Carolina, a small rural town on the border of the Carolinas. The federal government designated the city as an historical landmark because the battle fought there during the Revolutionary War proved to be a turning point in the fighting in the South. The battleground was preserved as Kings Mountain Military Park in 1931. The anniversary of the Battle of Kings Mountain is celebrated each year with a parade and festivities.

Judged by my experiences in Kings Mountain, the residents are warm and friendly. They seem content with their lives and they display a great efficacy for making people feel a part of their community. For the most part, the city is comprised of an older generation. When shopping with my grandmother or when driving around the town sightseeing, I rarely saw young people.

My grandmother lives in public housing for senior citizens. The name of her community is Tate Terrace. My grandmother is one of only two African American women who live in Tate Terrace. There is also one African American male, who lives next door to her.

The two rows of apartments that comprise Tate Terrace sit at the bottom of a hill in one of the town’s poorer neighborhoods. Each apartment has a small front porch with guard rails and an aluminum framed screen door. In front of the apartments is a small lawn area dotted with rose bushes and young maple trees. Behind the apartments are four rows of clothes lines that run parallel to a narrow sidewalk. The back porches, which are smaller than the front ones, contain a bend for
garbage and a conglomeration of different items—chairs, chests, bottles, cans—that the residents have placed there. My grandmother and a few other residents also have planted flowers or tomato plants in front of and behind their apartments.

The last time I walked along the narrow sidewalk that leads to my grandmother's apartment was the summer of 1990. Nonetheless, on this visit in 1993, I remembered grandmother's instructions not to park in Nanna's parking space and to approach her apartment from the back, not the front, so that her nosy neighbors would not "know her business." No matter her precautions, grandmother's neighbors always seemed to know when she had company. These are the community "rules" or rituals that I recalled being in place when I had last visited Tate Terrace: parking spaces contested by folks who cannot drive or do not own cars; the preoccupation with each other's lives, especially their visitors; and the constant acts of politesse in face-to-face encounters followed by swearing in the privacy of their own apartments—at least in my grandmother's.

A few people have died since my last visit, while others, as ill as they may be, rebuke death whenever it comes calling. The folks of Tate Terrace know that their lives are drawing to a close, and their constant aches and pains, multiple bottles of medicine, and forgetfulness are constant reminders. Yet, there is something in the way that Ruby smiles at me, or the way that Claudine cocks her head when she tells me "lies" about herself or her neighbors, that suggests to me that life, or living, occupies these people's minds and time more so than death. Perhaps, the presence of an outsider offers these people an audience for their performances. Their behavior becomes a "show," as my grandmother says, that is as involving,
complicated, and entertaining as performances produced for the stage or in cinema.

Living in this community, among these people, is where my grandmother feels most comfortable. Her relationships with them designate her as special and, to a certain extent, confirm that she is in control of her life. How ironic, then, that my brother called me on the first night of my visit to try to convince me to persuade my grandmother to move to Hickory where her biological family lives. It was ironic because on this same night I realized how much my grandmother is needed at Tate Terrace and how much the community is a part of her. It is, so it seems, centered around her. All of the residents know and respect her. For instance, during my stay, a number of residents came to her for advice, others to borrow food items, and one to borrow money. In addition, she mediated disputes between feuding residents. Also, her apartment is located in the center of the community and, therefore, she is audience to most of the dramatic events of the day. Thus, in many ways my grandmother feels more needed by the residents of Tate Terrace than by her own family, who have their own lives and families. Her family does not depend on her as do the folks of Tate Terrace. My grandmother feels, for example, that her friends and neighbors need someone to “look after them” since most of their children have abandoned them or visit infrequently. My grandmother provides nurturing and emotional support to their lives and they to hers.

When my grandmother visits with her children, she lacks the autonomy and self-reliance she has at home. Her children and grandchildren feel the need to protect her because of her age. Although she is not resentful, my grandmother is too independent to be ruled by her
children. At Tate Terrace she enjoys her independence and freedom to come and go as she pleases. She enjoys the control she has over her life and, to a certain extent, over the lives of others.

She also enjoyed the autonomy that she experienced in the Smiths', her employers', household. Five days out of the week, my grandmother was left alone and in charge of the Smiths' home and their four children. The autonomy, authority, and control that she, in part, experienced as a domestic seems to have carried over into how she lives her life at Tate Terrace.

I was in Kings Mountain for three days when my grandmother told me that she wanted to perform her narrative. The way she communicated her desire to me suggested that she did not look forward to telling me about her life as a domestic. She would much rather talk about the people of Tate Terrace. The excitement, impatience, and eagerness with which my grandmother had approached the last interview had diminished. Three years earlier she could not wait to tell me stories about Claudine and her grandchildren, and stories about her other friends at Tate Terrace.\(^1\) In those stories, my grandmother was always the one who was smarter than everyone else--the trickster. I can only assume that she felt that her stories about being a domestic would cast her in a different light—one in which she was no longer the weaver of tales, the joker duping the gullible. Instead, she might have seen herself as the trickster whose "tricks" were a matter of survival rather than "play." Whatever the reasons, my grandmother's attitude toward talking about her years with the Smiths influenced her performance style. It was stiff, reserved, and formal. I found I had to work hard as an interviewer to obtain information. Most of

\(^1\) See Johnson, "Ethnography."
her answers to my questions were short and to the point unless something I asked or she said sparked a fond memory, at which point she would elaborate and tell a more detailed or exclusive story.

The interview took place on Tuesday, May 18, 1993. We had just finished supper and had moved to the living room with two bowls of ice cream. After we ate the ice cream, I got out my pad and pencil and tested the tape recorder. She did not look at me. Instead, she looked out of the window to her right over which a shade was half-pulled. She sat on a green, faux leather couch with floral print pillows surrounding her. The arm rest had a rust-colored, crocheted arm cover over it. On the back of the couch was a multi-colored crocheted quilt. My grandmother was dressed in her customary polyester, lime and white striped, cut-off shorts and pink, polyester blouse. She did not wear a bra or shoes. Loosely tied around her head, was a sheer scarf with an apricot flower design on it. After I tested the tape recorder, I placed it on the end table next to my grandmother and asked the first question.

**Oral History As Performance**

From the outset, I view my grandmother's oral history as a performance. It is through performance that she presents herself to herself while simultaneously she presents herself to and for an audience. My grandmother "constructs" her life history by refiguring it in the present. At the moment of this gestalt, her narrative is also dialogic in that it speaks to a number of other discourses, theories, and practices which include ethnographic research, cultural traditions, and feminism to name but a few.

In this chapter, I discuss why oral histories are performance, why such performances are "dialogic," and what effect these and other
theoretical perspectives have on my interpretation of my grandmother's
oral history.

In the first section of the chapter, I draw on theories from
disciplines such as linguistics, folklore and anthropology to discuss how
oral histories are performances. In particular, I examine oral histories as a
verbal art form that is characterized as an aesthetic mode of
communication, a performance event, and cross-culturally variable. Based
on these characteristics of verbal art, I conclude that my grandmother's
oral narrative is a performance.

In the next section, I discuss how I collected and how I will interpret
my grandmother's oral history performance. Drawing on the studies of
Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner and Dwight Conquergood, I identify and
discuss how my ethnographic practices are "dialogic" in orientation. I also
explain how my grandmother's narrative internally dialogizes other
literary, cultural, and historical texts and practices. Some of these inter-
discursive expressions and practices are indigenous to the culture of the
verbal artist, while others are interpretive perspectives that I have chosen
to use to view the primary text, the point being to engage my
grandmother's interdiscursive dialogue as well as to admit and permit my
own.

In the last section of the chapter, I focus on methods of transcription
used to translate verbal art forms to a written text. I provide examples of
two methods, prosaic and poetic, and discuss why I chose the poetic method.

Theories concerning verbal expression or "verbal art" are
numerous and far reaching. Folklorists and linguists in particular have
identified and collected instances of verbal art in the cultural and social
lives of various communities, resulting in a range of perspectives. As argued by Richard Bauman, many scholars have begun to equate verbal art and/as performance. "[B]asic to the developing performance approach," Bauman writes, is the researcher's interest in the "dual sense of artistic action--the doing of folklore--and artistic event--the performance situation, involving performer, art form, audience, and setting" (Verbal Art 4; emphasis in original). In addition to context, then, researchers now direct attention toward studying the act of telling and the context in which the telling occurs. Langellier writes:

... storytelling is first of all a way of speaking by a storyteller to an audience in a social situation—in a word, a performance. Approaching personal narrative as storytelling performance focuses scholarly attention on how a story is told (that is, performed), on how it delights or compels its listeners. Analytic attention shifts from a text-centered approach emphasizing the formal aspects of a story-text, be they linguistic or literary features, to a concern with the dynamics of the storytelling performance event. In the same shift from text to performance, performance is itself reconceptualized as an aesthetic mode of communication with ramifications in a social and cultural situation. (253)

These additional research interests reveal a performance-centered approach to verbal art in particular, and to storytelling in general.

In her study, The Folklore Text: From Performance to Print, Elizabeth Fine synthesizes research done in such fields as performance, folklore, anthropology, and linguistics to locate those aspects of verbal art on which scholars, in general, concentrate. In sum, Fine observes that "[t]he major performance theorists share a perspective that verbal art is: (1) an aesthetic mode of communication, (2) integrally related to a particular event, and (3) culture-specific and cross-culturally variable"

---

2 See Abrahams; Babcock, "Story"; Bauman, Verbal Art; Ben-Amos; Dundes; Fine; Hymes, "Breakthrough" and "Discovering"; Bruce Jackson; Labov and Waletsky; Smitherman; and Tedlock, Spoken Word and "Oral Poetics."
I will use these three characteristics to discuss how verbal art, and particularly my grandmother's oral history, is a performance.

**Verbal Art as an Aesthetic Mode of Communication**

Those who concern themselves with the aesthetic nature of verbal art direct their attention toward how something is said in addition to what is said. In other words, they concentrate on form as well as content. According to Fine, "[t]his attention to the stylistic and aesthetic qualities of verbal art led to the formulation of a concept of performance as a special mode of communication" (58). Among those who situate verbal art within this "special" communicative mode is Richard Bauman. Bauman observes:

Performance involves on the part of the performer an assumption of accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content. From the point of view of the audience, the act of expression on the part of the performer is thus marked as subject to evaluation for the way it is done, for the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer's display of competence. (Verbal Art 11)

I believe that Bauman's notion of performer accountability supports the idea that the performer's intent is a part of the interpretive process. In other words, the performer understands and acknowledges that she is performing and thus incorporates culturally specific expressions and practices to signify to her audience that she is in a performance mode. The audience sees and hears these clues and they take them into account as they construct an interpretation of what she says and how. The audience also evaluates how skillful and effective the performer's use of practices, that they know of and/or have used themselves, appears to be.

According to Bauman, these metacommunicative devices, or "keys," are what frame or signify a narrative as being a performance. Bauman points out that the most frequently used performance keys are "special codes, figurative language, parallelism, special paralinguistic features,
special formulae, appeal to tradition, and disclaimer of performance" (Verbal Art 16). Although not all inclusive, these seven keys provide a basic guide for analyzing verbal art as performance. Bauman is careful to note that these keys are culturally and contextually variable.

The preceding list of formal "keys" or devices are used by my grandmother in her narrative. In the episode, “Dey Didn’t Pay Nuthin’,” grandmother makes use of parallelism, which, according to Bauman, “involves repetition, with systematic variation, of phonic, grammatical, semantic, or prosodic structures, the combination of invariant and variant elements in the construction of an utterance” (Verbal Art 18). The following excerpt is from the above-mentioned episode. The cited line numbers refer to those that accompany the transcribed narrative in Chapter Three. (see Appendix A for poetic symbols):

Ah’d clean up de kitchen
an' den
Ah'd wash
Ah'd do the washin'
an' git my lil' washin' done

(spreads both hands and makes prancing motion as if playing a piano)

an' den Ah'd fix dinnah
get mah dinner fixed
an' den Ah'd fix suppah.
den aftah Ah fixed suppah
den of course Ah cleaned de house/Ah/had/tuh/clean/de/house/up

(10 sec pause)

oh Ah just did everythang__
Ah did everythang around that house__
had eight rooms/dat house had eight rooms
an' Ah did everythang around dat house
everythang__ (lines 279-293)

In this excerpt, parallelism is apparent in Mary's use of repetition (“an' den Ah'd”) and its systematic variations (“... Ah'd wash/Ah'd do the
washin'”; “... Ah'd fix *dinnah*/get mah dinner fixed”). Bauman notes that the repetitive use of language may “serve as mnemonic aids to the performer of a fixed traditional text, or enhance the fluency of the improvisational or spontaneous performance” (Verbal Art 18-19). As regards my grandmother’s use of repetition, it likely serves as a mnemonic device that helps her remember her daily chores and the order in which she performed them.

In addition to its mnemonic function, the repetition serves as an iconic representation of the redundancy of her daily chores and tasks. The emphasis grandmother places on “*dinnah*” and “*suppah*” also shows how she uses formal devices to accentuate, or point out, her view of the chores as methodical and repetitive.

According to Deborah Tannen, repetition also “allows a speaker to set up a paradigm and slot in new information—where the frame for the new information stands ready, rather than having to be newly formulated” (48). As an example, Tannen offers the following excerpt from a narrative of a woman talking about a man in her office:

```
And he knows Spanish,
and he knows French,
and he knows English,
and he knows German,
and He is a Gentleman. (48)
```

In Mary’s narrative, “*an’ den Ah’d*,” functions as a paradigmatic frame, in much the same way as does “*and he knows*” in Tannen’s example. It is a way of slotting in new information while, simultaneously, using language in a “more efficient, less energy-draining way” (Tannen 48).
Grandmother also uses paralinguistic features in her performance such as, in this case, the prancing motion she makes with her hands. The up and down movement coincides with the verbal stress that she places on key words. While these movements do not denote what she says, they do support the rhythm of her speech. And, the repetitious rhythm of both her speech and movement communicates the rhythm of the work of which she speaks. Grandmother's use of these keying devices suggests that she is not merely reporting, or recounting, her tale, but performing it. She has left the realm of ordinary conversation interaction and, as Bauman says, has assumed responsibility for a more aesthetic telling of the tale.

In addition, Mary's use of certain repetitious patterns resembles those found in African American music and verbal art traditions. As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Four, blues and gospel music use repetition as a mnemonic aid, as a way to slot in information, and to accentuate a particular theme and/or point.

**Verbal Art and the Performance Event**

Just as folklore, communication, and performance scholars have come to recognize the communicative function of aesthetic forms and formulas in verbal art performance, so too have they noticed that a plethora of variables affect the nature of verbal art performances. These variables include the physical setting and the relationship between the storyteller and the audience.

As is the case with performances that occur in theaters on a formal stage, verbal art performances frequently occur in a space that in some way is set apart from everyday life. When the time came for me to interview my grandmother, she demarcated the living room as the “stage.” We did not discuss “domestic work” when in the kitchen eating supper. It
was clear that I was to "hold off" until we arranged, and were seated in, the living room. To "set the stage," grandmother closed her front door so that her neighbors would not disturb us. Because she did not have an air conditioner and because she knew the interview would be long, she prepared each of us a bowl of ice cream to "cool us down." Then, we gathered and arranged our "props." My grandmother made herself comfortable on the couch by propping her feet up on the ottoman and by placing one of her throw pillows on her lap. I tested my tape recorder to make sure that it was working and in a place where it could pick up and record both of our voices. I also gathered my pad and pencil for writing, and pulled my chair close to my grandmother. Throughout the interview, grandmother told me to "cut the tape off" so that she could check on a pot of beans cooking on the stove. Again, the "space" of the living room, not the kitchen, was designated as the performance arena. If she had designated the entire apartment as the performance space, grandmother would have continued to tell her story while doing other chores.

In addition to my props signifying that I was an audience member, more so than the performer in this event, grandmother established her own "code of conduct" to position me as the audience to her performance. In particular, throughout her performance she would tell me to "stop writin' and listen." Her command not only signaled a performance mode, but it demonstrated that, in her opinion, I was not being a cooperative or collaborative audience member. Similar to African Americans who "play the dozens," grandmother desired my active rather than passive participation in the telling of her story, and writing is, apparently, a passive or detached activity in her view. As with many
storytellers/performers, grandmother wanted my attention focused on her rather than on myself and my "writin'."

Like most narrators, grandmother managed two temporal and spatial frames when she told her stories about her experiences. In other words, she constructed past events in the present. Borrowing from the work of Roman Jakobson, Richard Bauman distinguishes these two narrative sites—past and present—as the "narrative event" and the "narrated event" (Story 2). Bakhtin explains:

... before us are two events—the event that is narrated in the work and the event of narration itself (we ourselves participate in the latter, as listeners or readers); these events take place in different times (which are marked by different durations as well) and in different places, but at the same time these two events are indissolubly united in a single complex event that we might call the work in the totality of all events, including the external material givenness of the work, and its text, and the world represented in the text, and the author-creator and the listener or reader; thus we perceive the fullness of the work in all its wholeness and indivisibility, but at the same time we understand the diversity of the elements that constitute it. (Dialogic 255)

The narrative event constitutes the present-tense telling situation, while the narrated event constitutes the past-tense "told" situations and events. In performance, the narrated events are contextualized by the present telling.

Within each site, the narrated and the narrative events, grandmother verbally and nonverbally signifies that she is performing. As regards nonverbal behavior, she uses well-known or "conventional" performance practices to create framed and heightened moments, set apart in time and space from everyday life. As discussed, grandmother uses certain props such as her pillow and ottoman to set the stage for her performance. When she discusses the tools she used in her work (e.g., a broom, vacuum, pots and pans, iron), she imaginatively creates the objects

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
by miming how she used them. Similar to oral interpretation techniques, grandmother also changes the angle of her eye focus when she embodies another person. Commonly, she uses a center eye focus for herself as narrator. When she performs the other characters, she looks slightly to the left or right of center. Mary’s use of nonverbal expressions to frame and accent her past experiences is perhaps most cogent when she points to and rubs the scars on her hand. A result of a kitchen fire, the scars concretely link the body to the past event and, in their performance or presentation, add to, alter and even criticize their “past” value.

As regards verbal signifiers, Mary frequently varies the quality of her own voice to suggest other characters. Usually, she does so to comment on the personality of the character. Whether she uses a whiny and childlike voice or deep and obnoxious voice, Mary’s verbal posing illustrates the rhetorical nature of performance in that the voices function to persuade the listener of her credibility as a narrator. For instance, when she speaks as “herself” in the narrative she uses a calm and rational voice. On the other hand, she attributes a whiny, annoying voice to the Smiths’ children and, sometimes, to Mrs. Smith herself.

One of the most significant or specific indicators of the performance event was Mary’s choice to monitor what is for her an everyday speech practice. In response to what she perceives to be the conventions and standards of the academy, she refused, while being taped, to use profanity. In her everyday conversation, Mary does not use profanity in a malicious manner to harm, to hurt, or to demean others. Rather, she uses it in the way that it often functions in African American communities—figuratively and metaphorically. Examples of some of her sayings are: “She gits on mah nerves so bad, she make mah ass wanna cut sto’ wood”; “My hair is nappier
than a sheep's ass”; “She's nastier than a cat's ass”; “Stuff like that tears me
uh new asshole”; and “Ain't nuthin' but a lil' shit-ass!”

Although my grandmother frequently uses sayings such as these in
her day-to-day interactions with friends and family, she refrains from
using such language in mixed company, with nonfamily members, with
strangers, and on tape in front of the academic audience that she imagined
would listen to her. L. L. Langness and Gelya Frank address an aspect of
this phenomenon when they write:

The sociologist Georg Simmel . . . argued that every culture must
have some concept of privacy because in every society individuals
have certain roles to play with particular categories of people. Thus
individuals have to screen their reactions and behavior from some
people on some occasions. “Shame” and “respect” regulate relations
in all cultures. Degrees of social distance are expressed both
spatially and linguistically—by the style of speech, terms of address,
content, and amount of interaction. How all of this is done depends
on the culture. (128; emphasis in original)

Thus, grandmother keyed her performance through her use of “proper"
speech.

Bauman contends that the performance event also excites an
emergent quality. He writes:

The concept of emergence is necessary to the study of performance
as a means toward comprehending the uniqueness of particular
performances within the context of performance as a generalized
cultural system in a community.

The emergent quality of performance resides in the interplay
between communicative resources, individual competence, and the
goals of the participants, within the context of particular situations.
. . . Relevant here are the keys to performance, genres, acts, events,
and ground rules for the conduct of performance that make up the
structured system of conventionalized performance for the
community. The goals of the participants include those that are
intrinsic to performance—the display of competence, the focusing of
attention on oneself as performer, the enhancement of experience—
as well as the other desired ends toward which performance is
brought to bear; these latter will be highly culture- and situation
specific. (Verbal Art 37-38)
Relevant to my grandmother's performance is Bauman's identification of emergence as an "enhancement of experience" and as "culture- and situation specific."

As I discussed above, Mary often uses different voices to comment on, more so than accurately imitate, the other characters in her stories. In so doing, she recodes the discourse of the past in (and in light of) the present situation. The significance of this recoding is that it often enhances her social status within both the narrated and narrative events. As regards cultural and situational specificity, the home setting and our shared African American and family cultures provide her with a relatively safe or comfortable site to claim authority. In turn, the emergent aspect permits her to control how I, and by way of this study, the academy, perceive her.

For example, in the episode, "We All Just One Family," my grandmother tells the story of the time when Mr. Smith was going to leave his family. Although she relates that she "didn't know what tuh do," it is she who convinces him to stay. This particular episode demonstrates how the performance setting (her home as opposed to the Smiths') and the audience (me as opposed to the Smiths) effect the telling of the story. One of the effects is that grandmother emerges as an authority figure:

YOU GOT ALONG WITH MR. SMITH?

Mr. Smith?
yeah
he-was-nice.
we a ll just one family___
one big family__
it was nevah uh cross word
we all just/everybody/went/along

THERE WAS NEVER A TIME WHEN YOU AND MRS. SMITH OR ANY OF THE OTHERS HAD A DISAGREEMENT OR ANYTHING?
(45 sec pause)

(she tilts her head back and puts her right index finger under her chin)

Mr. Smith use tuh drank
sometimes/an'
he came in deah drankin' one time an' said he was gwoin leave
he went in neah an' got de
suitcases

(points to the floor)

an' he was gonna leave/dem little youngins just uh hoopin' an' uh hollerin'
an' uh screamin' an' uh holdin' de do'
got on mah nerves so bad/Ah went in neah/Ah tol' 'em
Ah said
"Now what in de world do you mean?"
Ah said
"Dese lil' chil' ren is jus' hollerin' an'
an' goin' on heah"
Ah said
"PUT DEM SUIITCASES DOWN!
SET DEM SUITCASES BACK DOWN"
an' de chil'ren/a 1 1
fo' of 'em
just whoopin' an' hollerin'
"d a d d v don't leave/d a d d v don't leave/d a d d v don't leave"
Ah didn' wanna git in to it/but Ah had tuh git in to it dat time

WHAT DID MS. SMITH SAY?

(emphatically, jerking her head to the right)

NOTHIN'
just

(She begins to giggle.)

NOTHIN'
'cause see him an' huh had been into it
she wa'n't doing nu'in' but just stan'in' neah

(stiffens her body)

Ah went in neah/Oh Lord Ah was jus'/'dis/upset me so bad
Ah didn't know what tuh do_
Ah jus' got all ovah Mr. Smith
he come brought the suitcase in neah an' sat it down
an' dem chil'ren
(makes pulling motion)

dey just **pullin'**
dey was pullin' de suitcase
some at de do'
holdin' de do'
so he couldn't go out de do'

(we both get tickled)

**LORD**

dat was de biggest mess you evah see.

**SO HE STAYED?**

oh yeah
he stayed

(she giggles) (387-446)

In her account of the incident, grandmother constructs a narrative where she is the only one in the house who is in control of the situation. The children are crying, Mrs. Smith is "just stan'in' neah," and Mr. Smith is drunk. Grandmother foregrounds herself as the authority figure when she tells Mr. Smith, "PUT DEM SUITCASES DOWN! SET DEM SUITCASES BACK DOWN!" Although she says, "Ah didn't know what tuh do," she does move to action when she "got all ovah Mr. Smith." She also positions herself as the protector of the children. By dramatizing the hysterical state of the children barring the door and crying repeatedly "daddy don't leave," grandmother paints a picture of chaos which she "had tuh git into," since Mrs. Smith "wa'n't doin' nu'in.'" Through the performance of this story, my grandmother transforms her position within a family where "we all just/everybody/went/along" without a "cross word" to a position where she projects herself as the crucial mediating agent in the family crisis. This kind of self-fashioning within the performance event exemplifies the emergent quality of performance, and it suggests how the variables of context, performer, and audience affect how the story is told. Within a
different setting and before a different audience, for instance, grandmother might not tell this story or her manner might be more self-effacing. In the context of her own home and with me as her audience, grandmother takes advantage of the opportunity to highlight her (temporary) claim to authority in the past event. And it is by means of performance that these "emergent" aspects surface.

My grandmother's performance of this event functions to legitimize the teller and her culture, and as political praxis. Barbara Myerhoff suggests:

Such performances are opportunities for appearing, an indispensable ingredient of being itself, for unless we exist in the eyes of others, we may come to doubt even our own existence. Being is a social, psychological construct, made, not given. Thus it is erroneous to think of performances as optional, arbitrary, or merely decorative embellishments as we in Western societies are inclined to do. In this sense, arenas for appearing are essential, and culture serves as a stage as well as mirror, providing opportunities for self- and collective proclamations of being. ("Life History" 103-104)

Moreover, in the act of "emerging" or, as Myerhoff would have it, "appearing," the teller learns about and enacts self-empowering practices. Myerhoff observes:

people exercise power over their images, in their own eyes and to some extent in the eyes of whoever may be observing them. Sometimes the image is the only part of their lives subject to control. It may lead to a realization of personal power and serve as a source of pleasure and understanding in the workings of consciousness. ("Life History" 100)

For the elderly and disenfranchised, the recognition, construction and maintenance of one's self image and cultural identity function to sustain them when social systems and codes fail to do so.

The Cultural Specificity of Verbal Art

As discussed above, what frames a performance as a performance varies across cultures and, more specifically, is grounded in the rules, conventions and expectations of the text, setting, performer and audience.
According to Fine, the concept of performance as culturally specific "constitutes an important corrective to the prevalent tendency to generalize about the organization, style, and significance of verbal art based on the study of verbal art in one culture" (65). For instance, while the repetition of words, phrases, or sentences in a particular verbal performance might be insignificant in one culture, in another, it might be called "the blues." According to Fine, these culturally variable expectations situate the performer within a "performance tradition" of culturally specific signifying practices on which the teller consciously or unconsciously draws. Fine writes:

When individuals assume the performer and audience roles and focus their energies in activating an item from the performance tradition, in the manner appropriate to that tradition, then they are engaged in an artistic verbal performance. This performance, indicated by the intersection of performer, audience, and performance tradition, is differentiated from other modes of communication by its characteristics as an aesthetic transaction. (78)

Because of the unique and peculiar history of African Americans in this country, their performance traditions reflect the fusion of African rituals and communicative practices with those of Europeans, as well as those that arose from the collective experience of slavery. Thus, African American cultural expressions share a common history, distinctive practices, and specific meanings given the context in which they are used. In the same vein, these cultural expressions reflect the values of African American culture, induce self-knowledge and plural reflexivity, and function as what Conquergood might call "an indigenous native epistemology" (Conquergood, "Performing" 60).

As culture specific expressions and practices are elemental to how I view and interpret Mary's narrative, I offer support for this aspect of
verbal art within the section “Interpretive Perspectives” in the present chapter.

**Ethnography And/As Dialogic Performance**

In his study of theater in Shaba, Zaire, Johannes Fabian urges a “performative” anthropology. Fabian contends that ethnographies are “questionable representations” unless they are critical and forthcoming about their process. And, he believes that approaching ethnography as performance is one way to engage an exegesis of the ethnographic process. Fabian explains:

> ... what . . .  we call “performance” is involved in creatively giving expression and meaning to experience; it is also required in studying such expressions. I shall call this “discovery” because this is how [it] struck me at a certain moment during ethnographic research. As I think about it, it becomes clear to me that this experience of a sudden event was but an intensification of a process that lasted many years. It began with an attempt to overcome the prevailing positivist conception of anthropological knowledge production in the late sixties and has since resulted in the conviction that the asymmetrical view we used to take of our work (subject here, object there; theory/method on our side, reality and facts on theirs) is more ideological than epistemological in nature. Performance . . .  is not what they do and we observe; we are both engaged in it. Our scientific, academic culture may take us along different roads, into other directions, but our attempts at making sense are not in essence different and certainly not of a higher order than those made by the people whom we study. (xiv-xv)

Fabian’s view of a performative anthropology helps me view my own ethnographic practice as performance. Going into the field of Tate Terrace and on to the stage arranged by my grandmother in her living room, recognizing and playing the roles of African American, male, grandson, ethnographer, academician, sometimes “expert,” often times “initand,” effected a process or experience similar to that that Fabian describes. As a result, I discovered that doing ethnography is less a scientific practice and more an interpretive one. Clifford Geertz writes:

> Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be
therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Interpretation 5)

Geertz proposes that the ethnographer go about the business of interpretation by adopting Gilbert Ryle's notion of "thick description."

Geertz and Ryle suggest that human action is undergirded by layers of meanings that people embody and create for themselves. "There is no one action or one story whose interpretation can be grasped as an isolating entity apart from history, context, or utterer" (Madison, "Ethnography" 38). To dismiss this dynamic is to engage in what Geertz calls "thin description":

Culture is public because meaning is. You can't wink (or burlesque one) without knowing what counts as a wink or how, physically, to contract your eyelids, and you can't conduct a sheep raid (or mimic one) without knowing what it is to steal a sheep and how practically to go about it. But to draw from such truths the conclusion that knowing how to wink is winking and knowing how to steal a sheep is sheep raiding is to betray as deep a confusion as taking thin description for thick, to identify winking with eyelid contractions or sheep raiding with chasing woolly animals out of pastures. (Interpretation 12)

Geertz's examples suggest that, as in everyday life, the verbal and nonverbal expressions used in performance can be interpreted "thinly" or, as he advocates, "thickly"—in recognition of their social-cultural inscriptions and the resulting multiple layers of meaning.

Social literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia complements Geertz's "web" metaphor and supports the theory that utterances (i.e., expressions) signify different meanings depending on the specific time, space, and social conditions in which they occur. Moreover, Bakhtin posits that because of the evanescence, contingency, and instability of an utterance, the forces that imbue meaning under one set of conditions cannot be recouped under any other conditions (Dialogic 263).
In addition, Bakhtin's concept of "dialogism" views signs and symbols as incomplete, unfixed and variable due to the ongoing competition or "dialogue" between centripetal forces, which pull toward a moral center of culture, and centrifugal forces, which pull away from the stabilizing effects of centralized and fixed meanings. Bakhtin explains:

Every utterance participates in the "unitary language" (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces).

Such is the fleeting language of a day, of an epoch, a social group, a genre, a school and so forth. It is possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of any utterance, once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language. (Dialogic 272)

Some performances are the "products" of centrifugal forces, but they also "mirror" and sustain the centripetal forces of cultural process. This reciprocal flow of forces resembles a spinning top spiraling downward in the fashion of a vortex, stabilized only by its competing forces.

Victor Turner also suggests a reciprocal relationship between contending forces in his concept of "structure" and "anti-structure" or "communitas." According to Turner, "structure" represents the centripetal forces that pull inward toward a centralizing core. Structure adheres to the normative, conventional, and hierarchical systems and the discourses that uphold the same. In Western capitalist societies, institutions that favor differentiation and division of labor are examples of structure. "Anti-structure" or communitas is the "dissolution of normative social structure, with its role-sets, statuses, jural rights and duties, etc." (Ritual 28). Communitas, the manifestation of anti-structure, reflects the shifting, spontaneous and often transitory forms of affiliation and affection that may develop between participants when sharing tasks or when taking part in activities such as cultural rituals, festivals, and celebrations.
Communitas favors non-differentiation and is more likely to be egalitarian (Bowman 2).

Bakhtin’s concepts of heteroglossia and dialogue, coupled with Geertz’s and Ryle’s theories of thick description, and Turner’s notion of structure and anti-structure or communitas, stress that no form of social or cultural process is static, univocal, monolithic, or simplistic. Given that, the analysis of a cultural expression, such as a verbal art performance, asks the researcher to be aware of the multiple and contending forms and forces. Bakhtin suggests:

Discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse . . . toward the object: if we detach ourselves from this impulse all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation of the fate of a given word in life. To study the word as such, ignoring the impulse that reaches beyond it, is just as senseless as to study psychological experience outside the context of the real life toward which it was directed and by which it is determined. (Dialogic 292)

Similar to study of discourse, these scholars seem to advocate a “dialogic” method and practice toward the study of social and cultural processes, whereby the subject positioning of all participants is ever-evolving, and whereby the interpreter is cognizant of the multiple discourses at work at any given moment. Speaking directly to the method and practices of performance ethnographers, Dwight Conquergood urges that this “dialogue” be rigorous, as well as genuine. He writes:

A commitment to dialogue insists on keeping alive the interanimating tension between Self and Other. It resists closure and totalizing domination of a single viewpoint, unitary system or thought. The dialogical project counters the normative with the performative, the canonical with the carnivalesque, Appollonian rationality with Dionysian disorder. Instead of silencing positivism, the performance paradigm would strive to engage it in an enlivening conversation. Dialogicalism strives to bring as many voices as possible into the human conversation, without any one of them suppressing or silencing the other. (“Between Experience” 47-48)
This dialogic stance toward ethnography affords an egalitarian approach to ethnographic research, for within the dialogue between “self” and “other,” the ethnographer is also positioned as “other.”

According to Geertz, the transmutability of subject positions is due in part to the constructed nature of the ethnographic encounter. In essence, he calls the anthropological encounter a “fiction”:

It is this fiction—fiction, not falsehood—that lies at the heart of successful anthropological field research; and, because it is never completely convincing for any of the participants, it renders such research, considered as a form of conduct, continuously ironic. (“Thinking” 154)

The “ironic” aspect of anthropological research characterizes, in particular, the relationship between the ethnographer and the informant. This relationship is contingent upon “the implicit agreement to regard one another, in the face of some very serious indications to the contrary, as members of the same cultural universe” (“Thinking” 152). The willingness to suspend disbelief is crucial to forging and maintaining the “ironic” relationship and, when successful, it produces an ethical base for ethnographic practices—a contract or set of ground rules that both the informant and the ethnographer recognize and agree to follow or uphold.

To construe ethnographic practice as, in general, a “fiction” and, more specifically, a practice that is “acted out” or performed is to liberate it from the totalizing effect that the informant is a fixed object and therefore inferior to the ethnographer. Instead, the informant is recognized as a thinking, theorizing, and culture-processing human being. Conquergood states:

Thinking about ethnographic practice as a disciplinary performance will help displace positivist claims of objectivity by which knowledge of the other is abstracted from its historical and dialogical conditions. ... Positivist claims have the moral consequences of fixing people in subject-object categories in an alignment of power relations where the fieldworker observes from a
privileged distance the Other who becomes the field studied. The performative view brings ethnographic and native together as co-actors, mutually engaged collaborators in a fragile fiction. There is an interdependence between Self and Other in the performative view, both are vulnerable. Instead of the researcher presented as detached and controlling, the performative view admits the fragile situation of the fieldworker. ("Performing" 61)

Ethnographers like Geertz, Conquergood and Turner have been instrumental in reconceptualizing fieldwork research in terms of a dialogic approach. Unlike these scholars, who have engaged cultures other than their own, I was, in general, familiar with the subject and her setting.\(^3\) However, because of alterations in our "standard" text, context, relationship and goals, we crossed into less familiar territory. At my prompting, we engaged in a dialogue concerning my grandmother's past history as a domestic worker. This aspect of her life was unfamiliar to me and, perhaps, to her as well, at least as regards her oral and "public" expression of it. And, throughout our collaborative effort, I tried, as the many scholars urge, to carry out field research that was/is dialogic.

Bakhtin's comments concerning the novelistic form are useful in regard to how I legitimize my fieldwork research as a dialogic practice. As a dialogic construct, Bakhtin claims that the novel "shift[s] . . . the temporal center of artistic orientation" (Dialogic 27). Whereas, in the monologic epic, the author exists on a separate temporal plane than that of the fictional world and its heroes, the novel "permits the author, in all his masks and faces, to move freely onto the field of his represented world, a field that in the epic had been absolutely inaccessible and closed" (Dialogic 27). This aspect of Bakhtin's theory serves as an apt analogy for the kind of ethnographic research I practiced—as it was essential that I not exist on

\(^3\) Conquergood worked with the Hmong refugees in Chicago, and Turner with the Yoruba in East Africa. See Conquergood, "Health Theatre" 174-208; and Turner, Ritual 44-93.
a separate plane, that I move into the “field” that constitutes my grandmother's world, and that I, like her, wear the different “masks and faces” required of and permitted me. As a result, our subject positions were constantly shifting, evolving, and transforming what are, otherwise, relatively stable and familiar roles and positions.

During the ethnographic encounter my role as audience to my grandmother's narrative altered. I listened to her stories as “grandson,” as “ethnographer” and as “academician.” I related to her and responded to what she said, personally, culturally, and in light of my academic and professional obligations and goals. My role-playing was, however, more impure than pure. I did not substitute one mask for another. Rather, my role-playing effected what Vincent Crapanzano identifies as a “bifurcated” sense of self (72).

According to Crapanzano, bifurcation is not a schizophrenic condition where one has no control over his or her actions. Instead, bifurcation refers to the conscious balancing act a researcher performs in the ethnographic encounter. In “On the Writing of Ethnography,” Crapanzano discusses the duality of “self constitution” when he writes:

The ethnographer wants to reconstitute his old self—or his new professional self—through an act of writing that is addressed to the significant others within his own world. He wants, too, to address, and must inevitably address, those illiterate others of his fieldwork—not simply out of good faith, professional responsibility, obligation, but also out of a necessity to declare them worthy of having been and continuing to be that silent audience by which he identifies himself as an ethnographer and obtains his sense of self. (72)

This multiple subject position stems from the researcher’s need to appear ethical and credible in the eyes of the academy and to be ethically responsible to the culture and the subject studied.

Within the ethnographic site of my grandmother's home in Tate Terrace, I heard the same information, but processed it very differently.
because of my multiple subject positions. For example, as I listened to and recorded my grandmother's life history, there were many moments of recognition either because I knew the people, places, or events to which she referred or because I had heard the story before. On the other hand, there were times during the interview when I mentally made notations about how what she was saying tied into a particular theory. Still, there were other times when I felt she was withholding information and I tried to come up with an explanation for her reluctance. The process of being drawn into a performer's story, while maintaining a critical distance, is the challenge of doing fieldwork that is dialogic. It requires playing roles --i.e., performing--and these roles effect shifting perspectives and shifting meanings, which question the position of "the expert."

In addition to interviewing my grandmother, I spent time getting to know the people who live at Tate Terrace. I also interviewed my grandmother's former employer, Mrs. Smith (see Appendix B). My interactions with the community members and Mrs. Smith functioned to complicate or problematize my grandmother's narrative and my personal, cultural, and academic interpretation of it. My interactions with the residents of Tate Terrace revealed nuances about these people that contradicted my grandmother's construction of them. Those whom she termed and depicted as "pickles" (i.e., crazy), I found to be "sane." Whereas Mary's attitude toward her relationship with Mrs. Smith was ambivalent, Mrs. Smith tended toward a romanticized or ideal depiction. In addition, while conducting the interview with Mrs. Smith, I found it difficult to hear her refer to my grandmother as a "mammy" and remain silent. The interview was one moment in the process where my role as an
academician/ethnographer transcended, to the point of silence, my role as grandson/African American.

Dialogic ethnographic practice engages the researcher and the researched in an ongoing conversation. During the ethnographic encounter, both participants become vulnerable and their subject positions transformative as they participate in writing a “fragile fiction.” As regards this study, I entered the field and played the multiple roles that were required of me as a co-actor or collaborator of this specific “fiction.” I also broadened the contextual field to include other voices and points of view besides my grandmother’s. Additionally, I did not valorize my grandmother or place her in a separate, culturally fixed, closed, pure, or true site. Instead, I engaged multiple voices to bring myself and the reader to a better understanding of my grandmother’s narrative.

The Narrative And/As Dialogic Performance

As I entered the field constituted by Tate Terrace and my grandmother’s home, I, in turn, asked my grandmother to enter the “field” of her past history as a domestic. To do so, she drew on roles and masks from her present and her past. She involved herself in two different sites of self-construction, the narrated and narrative events. Among the many masks that she constructed were those of the matriarch, gossip, caregiver, and trickster.

In our relationship, grandmother plays the role of the matriarch. She has always been and always will be the one in authority in our relationship. This is her endowed position, as she is older, more experienced, and the matriarch of our family. It is her legitimate belief that she is the “expert” in those areas that constitute a good part of her life experience. These areas include housework, cooking, quilting, and family
matters. On the other hand, in our relationship, she disclaims the "expert" role to me in matters associated with education, books, and driving.

In her community of Tate Terrace, my grandmother enacts a number of other roles. She is friend and gossip. Although her own health is failing, when a resident is sick, she becomes a diligent caretaker. Also, when one of her neighbors needs advice or has a fight with a loved one, she becomes a counselor and mediator.

My grandmother is also what might be recognized as a trickster. It is not uncommon for her to stir up trouble or dupe the gullible. For example, after telling me about the romantic relationship between her ninety-two-year-old neighbor and the neighbor's thirty-two-year-old, mentally-challenged boyfriend, my grandmother invited the man over so that I could meet him and so that she could emphasize his mental incapacities. She did this by asking him questions to which she knew the answers and by "complimenting" him on his relationship with her neighbor. After, and sometimes during, his replies to her, she would turn her head toward me and snicker. All of my grandmother's trickery was for my benefit. She was performing the trickster because she had an audience.

These various roles, among others, are present in her everyday dealings, and they inform and are informed by the narrative that she tells in the more formal performance situation. Performance, then, draws on the dialogue of everyday roles.

In the performance of her narrative, grandmother also played less familiar roles. As I discussed earlier, she accommodated or "made room" for my academic goals when she arranged her living room for the interview, spoke to a topic she had not chosen, and altered her everyday speech practices to "play to" the invisible academic audience and their cultural
"standards." The effect of Mary's self-censorship is two-fold. It is an act of
self-empowerment and self-preservation, and it is an act that "silences"
normative reactions to her speech. In brief, in enacting this performance
choice, Mary disclaims authority to exercise authority.

My grandmother realizes that outside her immediate world, her
profanity may be misread, deemed gross or even blasphemous by readers
who lack knowledge of the cultural context. To avoid being misread by this
foreign or "other" audience, Mary deletes all profanity from her speech
when being taped. Thereby, she ingests or accommodates the "proper"-
speak of the academy. On one level, then, she disowns her authority to me
and the academy that I, in this case, represent. On another level, however,
she claims her authority by refusing to disclose this aspect of her everyday
vernacular. Mary's choice implies that not even I, her grandson, with all
of my "book" sense can contextualize her use of profanity for the foreign
audience. It also suggests how she preserves or protects an aspect of
herself that she deems "unpublishable."

Lastly, grandmother engages in verbal role-playing in the
narrative event, and to depict characters in the narrated events. Her
verbal role-playing is also dialogic. Bakhtin states that "[a novelist] may
turn up on the field of representation in any authorial pose, he may depict
real moments in his own life or make allusions to them, he may interfere
in the conversations of his heroes, he may openly polemicize with his
literary enemies and so forth" (Dialogic 27). In the case of my
grandmother's narrative, such authorial poses often take the form of her
positioning herself as an authority figure in the home of her employer or
in her community at Tate Terrace.

4 An exception is found in lines 724-726 of the narrative.
However, as in the episode, "We All Just One Family," Mary often claims authority in a second-hand or dual-voiced way. That is, she uses the speech and dialogue of other characters to infer and enforce her own authority. Influenced by the work of Bakhtin, Deborah Tannen argues that dialogue in storytelling is “constructed” discourse because it is often second-hand or “reported” speech (101). According to Bakhtin, these voices or discourses stem from the intentions of both the author and the characters she creates. The narrative dissonance endemic to the novelistic mode—that is, the constructed nature of both the author-creator and the narrator—is a form of heteroglossia:

Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms for its incorporation), is *another’s speech in another’s language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of *double-voiced discourse*. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. And all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, they—as it were—know about each other (just as two exchanges in a dialogue know of each other and are structured in the mutual knowledge of each other); it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other. (Dialogic 324; emphasis in original)

In my analysis of Mary’s narrative in Chapter Four, I emphasize the heteroglot nature of her discourse in order to specify of what it consists, and how it operates. One of the merits of such an analysis is that it directs attention toward how her narrative legitimates and delegitimates or contests sites, systems and discourses of authority and control.

**Interpretive Perspectives**

Understanding a dialogic text requires more than one interpretive lens. The infinite number of voices speaking in dialogue in a text are difficult to unmask through one critical lens. Because my grandmother’s narrative is a dialogic construct, I analyze it in Chapters Four and Five
from multiple perspectives. The value of this critical stance lies in its ability to illuminate more than one signifying practice and agenda within the narrative. Also, a multi-faceted critical approach allows me to distance myself from thinking of this narrative as solely “grandmother’s” story. Instead, I am able to engage in what Tzvetan Todorov calls a “dialogic criticism” where one speaks “not of works but to works, rather with works” (72; emphasis in original). Through this process I am able to speak with, upon, or against my grandmother’s narrative. Henry Glassie reminds us:

The reason to study people, to order experience into ethnography, is not to produce more entries for the central file or more trinkets for milord’s cabinet or curiosities. It is to stimulate thought, to assure us there are things we do not know, things we must know, things capable of unsettling the world we inhabit. (12-13)

Using multiple interpretive lenses to analyze my grandmother’s narrative is my attempt to “stimulate thought” about her life as a domestic worker and about how her voice—even when it is silenced—tells us something about what it means to be black, female, poor, and aged in contemporary society.

Theoretically, the number of perspectives I could use to analyze the narrative is infinite. Thus, in my analysis I choose to focus on those interpretive perspectives that I found embedded in and authorized by the narrator herself, and that are integral to my goals as a researcher. In particular, I use a culture-specific lens, a perspective that views her narrative in terms of domestic labor practices and theories, and a feminist perspective.

I use a culture-specific lens to view Mary’s narrative performance in terms of codes and signifiers that are common to the African American community. In particular, the “Signifyin’” and “gospel” traditions are embedded in and used by Mary throughout her narrative, and in both the
narrated and narrative events. Her use of these traditions reveals the codes of her community as well as reflects how Mary identifies herself and relates to the world around her.

The Signifyin’ Tradition

The Signifyin’ tradition belongs to a group of verbal and nonverbal communicative forms that social linguists, folklorists, sociologists and literary critics refer to as the “black vernacular.” While some scholars view Signifyin’ as a verbal art form which had its origin in slavery, others have argued persuasively that Signifyin’, as it manifests itself in African American culture, is a transformed version of an art form indigenous to Africa.5 Nonetheless, the use of Signifyin’ in this study focuses on its practice in the United States.

Signifyin’ can be a kind of ritual insult, a form of play, a rhetorical tool, a strategy of survival, or even a form of political practice. As a form of ritual insult, Signifyin’ is characterized as skillful verbal play that emphasizes “put downs.” In African American communities this practice is known as “playing the dozens.” The “dozens” is a verbal insult game whereby participants engage each other by defaming each other and/or each other’s relatives. This ritualistic performance requires audience participation, for it is the audience that determines who is the most skilled signifier. Historically, the most extreme insult possible while playing the game is to say something derogatory about an opponent’s mother. Such insults would often incite fights. On the other hand, Lawrence Levine comments:

Though the Dozens could end in physical violence, it was not the planned or even preferred climax. The Dozens was an oral contest, a joking relationship, a ritual of permitted disrespect in which the

5 See Henry Louis Gates, Jr. 3-43.
winner was recognized on the basis of verbal facility, originality, ingenuity, and humor. (347-48)

In Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*, she provides an illustration of the dozens:

Then Gold spoke up and said, "Now, lemme tell one. Ah know one about a man as black as Gene."
"Whut you always crackin' me for?" . . . "Ah ain't a bit blacker than you."
"Oh, yes you is, Gene. Youse a whole heap blacker than Ah is."
"Aw, go head on, Gold. Youse blacker than me. You jus' look my color cause youse fat. If you wasn't no fatter than me you'd be so black till lightnin' bugs would follow you at twelve o'clock in de day, thinkin' its midnight."
"Dat's a lie, youse blacker than Ah ever dared to be. Youse lam' black. Youse so black till they have to throw a sheet over yo' head so de sun kin rise every mornin'. Ah know yo' ma cried when she seen you..." (28)

In this passage the character Gold wins the contest as she tops Gene's put down by intensifying the degree of blackness when referring to his skin color and by ending her insult with a reference to his mother. In the novel, the other characters hiss and howl at Gold's score, but discontinue the game before it gets out of hand. In addition, as each insult provokes the next, the degree of figurative exaggeration increases. Levine observes that this characteristic of Signifyin' was a characteristic of early nineteenth-century American folklore and posits that "[t]his pattern was well represented in black folklore" (351). My grandmother embodies this exaggeration in her own speech when she uses such phrases as "dey'll steal/short'nin' out uh biscuit."

Playing the dozens is a direct way of Signifyin'. However, the most distinct characteristic about Signifyin' is its incorporation of indirection. It is the use of indirection that history and sociology scholars discuss most often when they theorize about slave culture. During the days of slavery, blacks used indirect Signifyin' in spirituals and in worksongs to comment on their conditions, belittle whites, and/or communicate to other slaves.
their plans of escape and/or rebellion: "[S]laves used the subtleties of their song to comment on the whites around them with a freedom denied them in other forms of expression" (Levine 11). In other words, slaves encoded messages in forms that only they could decipher. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. states that

the black vernacular has assumed the singular role as the black person's ultimate sign of difference, a blackness of the tongue. It is in the vernacular that, since slavery, the black person has encoded private yet communal cultural rituals. (xix)

Moreover, blacks use nonverbal forms of Signifyin' such as rolling the eyes, poking the lips, "snapping," and "throwing shade" which are also forms of indirection.6

Claudia Mitchell-Kenan offers a formal definition of indirect Signifyin' when she writes:

Meaning conveyed is not apparent meaning. Apparent meaning serves as a key which directs hearers to some shared knowledge, attitudes, and values or signals that reference must be processed metaphorically. The words spoken may actually refer to this shared knowledge by contradicting it or by giving what is known to be an impossible explanation of some obvious fact. The indirection, then, depends for its decoding upon shared knowledge of the participants, and this shared knowledge operates on two levels. It must be employed, first of all, by the participants in a speech act in the recognition that signifyin' is occurring and that the dictionary-syntactical meaning of the utterance is to be ignored. Secondly, this shared knowledge must be employed in the reinterpretation of the utterance. It is the cleverness used in directing the attention of the hearer and audience to this shared knowledge upon which a speaker's artistic talent is judged. (325; emphasis in original)

In other words, those who are a part of Signifyin' tradition recognize certain speech acts as such. Their recognition and validation of these speech acts supports, in general, the shared cultural knowledge common to folkloristic forms and, specifically, the encoded messages embodied in verbal art.

6 See Johnson, "SNAP!" 122-142.
The "Signifying Monkey" tales found in African American folklore also are vital to the discussion of the Signifyin' performance tradition. In Chapters Four and Five, I analyze how my grandmother's performance style, in the narrative and in many of the narrated situations, resembles that of the Signifying Monkey. Known for his verbal dexterity, irreverence toward those in authority, and trickery, the monkey in these tales serves as the primary example of the trickster figure in African American culture. The monkey is an agitator—one who stirs up trouble between the lion (the "king" of the jungle) and the elephant. Usually, the monkey reports to the lion that the elephant has verbally maligned the lion and his family. Failing to recognize the monkey's lying as Signifyin', the lion approaches the elephant and a battle ensues in which the elephant is the victor. Battered and irritated, the lion returns to seek revenge on the monkey, who scurries up a tree to safety. In some versions of this tale, the monkey is allowed to triumph a second time.

According to Mitchell-Kernan, most African Americans identify with the monkey. Despite his villainous behavior, they view the lion as a fool and "a puppet who moves when his strings are pulled" (323). In addition, the characters of the lion and the monkey sometimes become allegories for racial types: "The monkey may be portrayed as Black or white and similarly the lion. When both monkey and lion are Black, they are not of a kind in other respects" (Mitchell-Kernan 323). I gather from the informants in Mitchell-Kernan's study that in those instances when the monkey is portrayed as white and the lion is portrayed as black, the lion catches and kills the monkey. In other words, when both races are

---

7 For actual texts of the tales, see Bruce Jackson 43-232.
represented in these tales, the tale usually ends with the “black” character as victor.

As an allegory for race relations, the “Signifying Monkey” tales operate on another level as well. Mitchell-Kernan suggests, for example, that the lion and the monkey do not share the same language. She posits that

[t]here seems something of symbolic relevance from the perspective of this poem; the lion is not able to interpret the monkey’s use of language, he is an outsider, un-hip, in a word. To anyone in the know, the monkey’s intent should be transparent. If the lion were hip, he could not have been duped. (323)

The discrepancy in language use between the monkey and the lion is of great interest to me, particularly when the monkey and lion are fashioned as racial types. In analyzing my grandmother’s narrative, I look for instances where she portrays herself as the monkey—the trickster—and her employer as the lion—the gullible. I pay close attention to those times when it appears that it is language use that enables my grandmother to dupe or signify on her employer, as well as instances where it is my grandmother who is duped. I also analyze my grandmother’s narrative style with this trickster in mind, noting similarities between her verbal dexterity and that used by the monkey. Finally, I extend the context in which I view the use of Signifyin’ and argue that my grandmother’s narrative is a trickster discourse when interfaced with other discourses such as mainstream feminist theory.

In the following, I illustrate indirect as well as direct Signifyin’ by using examples from a narrative that I collected from my grandmother in 1990. In the episode, my grandmother recounts a story about Claudine, her neighbor. Claudine thinks that her daughter tried to kill her because, as my grandmother explains, the daughter blames Claudine for being ugly. At
this point, my grandmother is directly Signifyin' on Claudine's daughter's Signifyin'. She says:

Ah say
"Well
she don't like yo' looks?"^^
Ah thought tuh mahse'f no Ah know she don't" (Johnson, "Ethnography" 129)

By including the afterthought, my grandmother is Signifyin' on Claudine in the present context. Even when she tries to console Claudine she indirectly signifies on her by saying:

"AH^AAA tol' uh
'WELL YOU'SE HUH MAMA!
AH SAID 'AIN'T NU'IN' YOU KIN DO" (Johnson, "Ethnography" 129)

When grandmother tells Claudine that there's nothing Claudine can do, Grandmother implies that Claudine is indeed ugly, but it is beyond Claudine's control. Like the lion, Claudine misses the double entendre. In her performance, Grandmother is aware of her own Signifyin' in that her volume is increased because she is laughing uncontrollably. Later, grandmother's Signifyin' becomes cutting as she parodies Claudine's ways of talking without teeth and exaggerates the thickness of Claudine's lower lip by pulling out her own lower lip.

Grandmother also tells of how she signified on Claudine in Claudine's presence:

Ah jus' looked/at/uh
Ah said
"UMPH!"
she don't know what Ah be gruntin' fuh
Ah say
"UMPH!
UMPH/UMPH/UMPH..." (Johnson, "Ethnography" 130)

In this instance, Claudine is, according to my grandmother, unaware of grandmother's Signifyin'. The grunts signify Claudine's physical ugliness.
But Grandmother does it in an indirect way to disguise her intent to Claudine.

My grandmother's ultimate insult is calling Claudine's mother ugly. She tries to add religious disclaimers because she knows that this is the ultimate insult that a black could give to another, but she signifies anyway:

Lawd Jesus
You know Lawd Ah don't mean no harm 'cause
she jus' like/You made huh like You made me or anybody
else/but/she/had/de/uglies'/mama/Ah/have/evah--
she had de uglies' motha
now she did
she had de uglies' motha/Ah knew huh motha well
Claudine had de uglies' mama Ah evah seen in mah
life/now/she/couldn'
he'p/it (Johnson, "Ethnography" 130-131)

My grandmother's disclaimer is related to her fear of blaspheming against the Lord, for within the African American gospel tradition, it is impolite to talk about someone's looks because no one can help how the Lord made him or her. My grandmother's disclaimer is an aside as she speaks directly to the Lord. It is short lived, however, as within the same breath she moves to comment on Claudine's mother.

The Gospel Tradition

Historically, religion has played a vital role in shaping the consciousness of African Americans. From the days of slavery, when African Americans met "down by river side" to have revivals and to plan revolts, to the 1960's, when the African American church became the backbone of the Civil Rights Movement, to the 1990's, when the black church became, in many ways, the culminating force behind African American spiritualism, communalism, and political activism, religion has constituted a vital force in the African American world view. It comes as no surprise, then, that many of the components of the black church,
particularly music, serve as ways for African Americans to express and interpret their daily lives.

One of those components is gospel music. Gospel music emerged as a reflection of the shift in black religious consciousness at the turn of the century. Other musical forms such as the blues and jazz also had an effect on this music. Thus, gospel music marked a departure from its predecessor, the spiritual. Levine writes: “Where the spirituals proved their point by analogy, precedent, and concrete example, the gospel ethos was largely one of pure faith” (176).

Moreover, the expression of faith in gospel music is physically animated, resulting in stylized as well as personalized movement of the body. In her autobiography, Mahalia Jackson relives her early exposure to the performative nature of gospel music:

Those people had no choir and no organ. They used the drum, the cymbal, the tambourine, and the steel triangle. Everybody sang and they clapped and stomped their feet and sang with their whole bodies. They had a beat, a powerful beat, a rhythm we held on to from slavery days, and their music was so strong and expressive it used to bring the tears to my eyes. (72)

The rhythm, beat, and movement of gospel music culminate in joyful expression. Whether it be through a verbalization of “Amen,” “Hallelujah,” “Thank you Jesus,” or “Yes, Lord,” or through nonverbal such as waving the hand, stomping the feet, shouting, or crying, gospel faith is always expressed physically. The gospel performance tradition is an active manifestation of religion. Those who are a part of the gospel tradition celebrate their religion happily and joyfully in their daily activities. Any burdens, problems, headaches, or heartaches are “taken to the Lord in prayer.” By knowing that they need not worry about the trials of life on earth, African Americans in the gospel tradition often celebrate the rewards that await them in Heaven. My grandmother’s faith, embodied
and enacted through the gospel tradition, flourishes visibly in her day-to-day activities: She may break out into song in the middle of baking a cake or when quilting, or she may throw up her hands in the midst of giving testimony about how good God has been to her. Whatever the case, her faith is not quiet. "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands" undergirds the expression of her undaunted faith. And through her noise making—her performance—faith is revealed, identified, and sustained.

To demonstrate how my grandmother's narrative reflects the gospel tradition, I draw on an excerpt from the episode, "We All Just One Family." In this excerpt, my grandmother recounts one of her many trips with her employers and their children.

WE HAD TO GO CROSS DAT WATAH
Lord/Hammercy/Jesus
Ah'm just so upset Ah didn't know what in dis world tuh/Ah thought we nevah was gonna get across dat watah
way on
(waves her hands)

way cross
de ocean
way cross
miles/an'/miles/an'/miles
an' we went down neah

at dat place___ (lines 476-487)

In her telling of this story, my grandmother embodies a familiar iconographic signifier within black church traditions. She waves her hands. Waving the hands serves as a nonverbal signifier that often accompanies a testimony. It is usually an expression of faith. Those in the gospel tradition may wave their hands in response to a particular point made by a preacher, to encourage a choir or soloist, or while participating in a communal ritual during any part of the church service. In addition,
there are references to this behavior in certain gospel songs that demonstrate its power.

The song “There’s a Man Over the River,” for example, tells the story of Jesus who is on the other side of a river healing and giving sight to the blind. The entire song is devoted to how one can get to the other side of the river to see Jesus. One of the lines in the song states, “If I cannot say a word, I’ll just wave my hand.” When this song is sung in church services, the members of the congregation usually wave their hands during this line. My grandmother’s use of the hand waving draws from the gospel tradition and reinscribes the action in the context of her own performance.

In another instance, when I asked my grandmother about her employment status after she moved out of the Smiths’ home, grandmother waves her hand during her response to solidify her testimony that she continues to work for the Smiths today:

EVEN AFTER YOU STOPPED WORKING FOR THEM AT THE HOUSE, YOU STILL WENT OVER THERE TO WORK FOR THEM?

AND STILL TUH NOW!
STILL
(waving her hands)
STILL TUH DE DAY!/STILL TUH DE DAY! (lines 521-525)

And, as if she were actually testifying in church, my grandmother increases her volume and stresses particular words, almost in the same way she would say, “The Lord’s been so good to me.”

In the first excerpt discussed above, grandmother alludes to another gospel song, “Jordan River I’m Bound to Cross,” when she comments, “Ah thought we/nevah was gonna get across dat watah.” In the song, there are barriers to crossing the river Jordan, and though Jesus is not visible on the
other side, the "other side" is a metaphor for Heaven. The main point that the song makes is that no one can help another person to cross the river. Based on his or her service to and faith in God, each must get across the river on his or her own.

Transforming sacred traditions into secular contexts, particularly into the performance site of the oral narrative, is not uncommon to my grandmother because the performance tradition in which she is grounded reflects a way of life that manifests itself in every aspect of daily living.

In addition to the Signifyin' and gospel traditions, I incorporate other "culture-specific" perspectives in my analysis. These perspectives include the blues tradition, the folk sermon, rap music, and the toast tradition—all of which utilize repetition. The repetition found in these cultural expressions, I contend, resembles that used in my grandmother's narrative.

Social Labor Theory

In Chapter Four, fictional and nonfictional accounts of domestic labor practices and social labor theories help me view and analyze the narrative within its broader social context. As my study is concerned with how my grandmother performs and constructs her own labor history, this perspective informs and is informed by the narrative's content. The dialogue between fictional and nonfictional constructions of domestic labor and my grandmother's discourse renders a broad, rich, and complex representation of domestic work in general and my grandmother's domestic labor history in specific. These additional views direct attention toward the social-economic aspects of domestic service and the maintenance of a "social and economic underclass." According to Judith Rollins:
The distinct pattern of domestic service in twentieth-century America—older, married, live-out domestics who retain a life-long “maid-of-all-work” status and whose daughters may well enter domestic work—appears to be directly related to racism, not only through the exclusion of these women from other jobs, but also by the prevention of men of color from obtaining wages sufficient to support their families. Domestic service, in this context, rather than functioning as a gateway through which socioeconomic marginals pass into the mainstream, functions to reinforce racial and ethnic stereotypes and maintain those biologically “deviant” in a social and economic underclass. (55)

Rollins’ argument directs attention toward the limited employment opportunities available to African American women and to the difficulty of choosing domestic work over other kinds of employment. In addition, African American women’s entrapment in domestic created a unique relationship between domestics and their employers. Certain aspects of this relationship uphold long held stereotypes of African Americans, while others appear to subvert these stereotypes. In particular, I focus on the social construction of the “mammy” figure and how “she” relates to my grandmother’s construction of herself as a domestic worker.

One of the most intriguing aspects concerning the domestic worker in African American literature is the mammy. Whether portrayed as a sassy, strong willed character, such as Mildred in Alice Childress’, Like One of the Family: Conversations from a Domestic’s Life, or a man in drag as in Richard Wright’s “Man of All Work,” the domestic worker varies—in character, the roles she plays, background, and education. Literary critic and folklorist, Trudier Harris traces the portrayal of the domestic worker in African American literature. Harris notes that

... literature grows out of life; and obviously, too, knowledge about black domestics is so pervasive in black life and culture that Blacks who read such literary works automatically bring to them information with which they can offer immediate responses. The exchange approximates that which occurs between a folk storyteller and his audience; readers of tales of domestics, like the listeners in the folk audience, can respond with appreciation, dismay, skepticism, or agreement which stems from their own knowledge of
the drama/tale that is unfolding before them. There is a reflective, complementary relationship between the world represented by history and folklore, and that of novels and dramas. The fact of that relationship is its own justification. (7-8)

Harris' point is well taken in that African American literature reflects the lived experiences of many African American domestic workers.

The culture specific "trickster" figure and tradition help me to evaluate my grandmother's subversive and conservative actions. Theories about the effects of colonization on the disenfranchised is one place to begin, for it is here where subordinate cultures adapt strategies that are paramount to their survival. Such an analysis begins with language, especially when the colonized people's language is different from that of their colonizer's. A domestic worker, for example, must inevitably learn her employer's language in order to survive in the domestic site. In addition, she must maintain the indigenous language of her own culture. To manage both, she engages in mask-wearing and role-playing, representing a self for her employer and one for her community. Though African Americans generally employ these performances--role-playing strategies--the domestic worker must master these performances, for more than the acquisition of language, they determine her status within the domestic site.

Feminist Discourse

Similar to the concept of "performance," "feminism" has become a contested term among scholars. During the different "waves" of the feminist movement, women theorists and activists have grappled with what constitutes feminist theory and action and, specifically, whose concerns and experiences are most important in constructing what that theory and practice might be.
Historically, white middle-class academicians/theoreticians have privileged their experiences in the construction of feminist discourse. As a result, the voices of women of color have been silenced and their participation in “mainstream” feminist movement minimal. To forge a space to validate their own views, many women of color openly criticized white, middle-class feminist discourse that ignored the concerns of poor, working-class and lesbian women of color. The fecundity of theories produced by women of color resulted in alternative ways of describing and theorizing feminism. Alice Walker’s use of the term “womanist” rather than feminist is one example. For Walker, womanism speaks directly to the unique experiences of black women. Walker defines “womanist” thus:

1. From womanish. (Opp. of “girlish,” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “You acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. (xi)

Similar to Walker, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa coined the phrase “theory in the flesh,” to describe how the theories of women of color draw on their life experiences and their cultural traditions. Although mainstream feminist thought offers much in the way of analysis, African American womanist theory, such as that described by Walker, and “theory in the flesh,” as defined by Moraga and Anzaldúa, reveal more about the nature of domestic work and feminism primarily because domestic work has historically been an African American female job. Accordingly, Patricia Collins sees analyzing black women’s work as one of the “core” themes in black feminist thought, “especially Black women’s labor market victimization as ‘mules’” (43). The black-woman-as-mule metaphor is a mainstay in much of the writing on and about black women’s oppression,
for it analogizes how the black woman's position has been lowered to that of a beast of burden; the bearer of everybody's burdens.

Given the theories discussed above, I contend that Mary's oral narrative is a feminist "theory in the flesh." By means of performing her narrative, Mary theorizes about her life experiences as a domestic worker. Her oral history performance is grounded in social politic, cultural traditions, and marginality. As such, Mary's narrative represents a "trickster," "monster" discourse that alters the ways in which we define feminist theory.

**Method of Transcription**

While the linguistic and paralinguistic features of verbal art performance are crucial to understanding the performance text, they are difficult to translate to print. Capturing the nuances of vocal variability and physical movement would be nearly impossible without a form of transcription that is sensitive to these phenomena. While no written text can replicate a performance text, a number of folklorists and ethnographers have devised methods to suggest in print the verbal and nonverbal interplay. Elizabeth Fine, for instance, has been instrumental in developing what is now called the "performance-centered text."

According to Fine, the performance-centered text is a "report" that captures aspects of verbal performance, including aural, visual, tactile, and olfactory channels. Taking all of these factors into account, the transformation of verbal art to the printed page, is an "intersemiotic translation" (89). By means of an intersemiotic translation Fine believes that the ephemeral nature of performance becomes stable enough for analysis:

A performance of verbal art is something more than words. Each of us has, at one time or another, sat under the spell of a performer,
conscious of the artistry of voice and body. Yet this art of artistic verbal performance focuses on the linguistic level. We can read about themes, formulae, images, or narrative structure, but most critics invariably ignore or shortchange the elements which make artistic verbal performance different from written literature.

Certainly a major reason why we know so little about the poetics of verbal art performance is that they are ephemeral. Even when we have audio and video of film recordings to preserve them, the sounds and images are fluid—they will not hold still for analysis. If only we could make folklore texts which could combine the stability of print with the recording capabilities of film or video, then we could make folklore texts which could combine the stability of print with the aesthetic patterning and social impact of verbal art. (1)

The "aesthetic patterning" and "social impact" to which Fine refers are captured in the performance-centered text, for this text respects the body, gestures, movements and voice of the performer and how these aspects converge to convey meaning. It is Fine and Speer's belief that "... from the outset, it is the total configuration that matters, the way in which the body (including 'mind') of the performer enacts" (374). The authors also insist that "the performance frame uses culturally conventionalized metacommunication devices so that all behavior that takes place within the frame is to be understood as performance" (376).

In addition to capturing metacommunicative and culturally specific linguistic patterns, Fine's performance-centered text emphasizes the poetic, rather than the prosaic, mode of transcribing oral speech. Soyini Madison agrees, explaining that "The performance-centered text embraces the personal utterances of the performer through a poetic text, where words are placed symbolically in relation to how they are uttered" ("Ethnography" 5). Similarly, Paul Atkinson argues that the "typographical shape of the printed page can give the reader all sorts of clues as to how it may be read" (83).
In addition to Fine, Dennis Tedlock’s transcription of Zuni narratives incorporates the poetic style. In his “oral poetics,” Tedlock tries to capture the variability of the human speech patterns:

For the most part, the natives in primary oral cultures do not sing stories but speak them. They do not memorize stories but remember them. They are not talking digital computers, programmed to retrieve stored formulas in the right order. The digital computer lacks what we call in English the mind’s eyes: a good narrator sees his story, and such ready-made phrases as he may use are not ‘the substance’ of his thoughts but an aid in the rapid verbal expression of that thought, not the internal equivalent of a written text but a bag of tricks. Even taken by themselves, these ready-made phrases are highly variable: their wording is free from metrical restraints, and their delivery draws upon all the power of the human voice. The performer may pause now in one place and now in another; he may stress this word or that word; he may sound angry or surprised, serious or sarcastic; he may use a gesture where a word would have been expected. The sung epic puts a crimp in all these powers, and the conventional written text does away with them. (“Oral Poetics” 507-508; emphasis in original)

My grandmother’s narrative exemplifies the “ready-made phrases” of which Tedlock speaks. The ways in which she articulates them are contingent on the context, her mood, the particular point she is trying to make, and verbal expressions rooted in African American culture. But as Tedlock suggests, the “conventional written text does away with” all of these metanarrative features of oral narratives.

The poetic text captures the dramatic dimensions of the performance, where varying line lengths and the positioning of words on the page give the reader a sense of the rhythm, timing, and personal style of the storyteller. Henry Glassie states:

For years our perceptions were so conditioned by literary conventions that we had nothing better to call tales than prose. Recently, noting similarities between the spoken narrative and modern verse (much as critics have noted similarities between folk art and modern painting), we have begun to think of them as poetry. (39)
The poetic conventions reflected in the performance text, then, proffer a representation of verbal art performance that respects pauses, word emphasis, rhyme and rhythm, similar to poetry.

To illustrate Glassie's point and to give an example of the difference between the poetic performance-centered text and the prose style, I have transcribed a portion of my grandmother's narrative both ways. The meanings of the performance symbols used in the poetic text are provided in Appendix A.

Prose Style

Ah didn't tell you about when she got sick. Yeah, when she was sick, she went up tuh huh daughtah's tuh stay. Dey come an' got 'uh an' took 'uh up tuh huh house an' she said huh daughtah tried tuh kill 'uh. "Billy Ann! She tried tuh kill meh!" Ah said, "Claudine, tried tuh kill yah?" "Yeah, she tried tuh kill meh. Ah come out thu' de do." An' say she had uh, had uh slide door. An' she said if she hadn' ducked like dat, say she'd uh cut 'uh in two.

Poetic Style

Ah didn't tell you about when she got sick
yeah when she wuz sick
she went up tuh huh daughtah's.
tuh stay
dey come an' got 'uh
an' took 'uh up tuh huh house
an' she said huh daughtah tried tuh kill 'uh
"BILLY ANN!
SHE TRIED TUH KILL MEH!___"
Ah said
"Claudine
tried tuh kill yah?"^^/"YEAH/SHE/TRIED/TUH/KILL/MEH__.
AH COME OUT THU' DE
DEDODO"
an' say she had uh
had uh

(she makes a sliding motion with her hands)

s l i d e d o o r
an' she said if she hadn' ducked like dat say she'd uh cut 'uh in two

(Johnson, "Ethnography" 128)
Tedlock aptly contrasts the two styles:

What we have done so far, if we have punctuated our visible text according to the rising and falling contours of oratorical periods and shaped its lines and stanzas according to stops, and starts of dramatic timing, is to begin to free ourselves from the inertia, from the established trajectory, of the whole dictation era, an era that stretches (in the west) all the way back to the making of the Homeric texts. We have begun to construct an open text—not a text whose notation closes in upon features that can be assigned certified membership in self-sufficient codes such as those of syntax and scansion, but a text that forces even the reading eye to consider whether the peculiarities of audible sentences and audible lines might be good speaking rather than bad writing .... (Spoken Word 7; emphasis in original)

Tedlock's notion of "peculiarities of audible sentences and audible lines" is of particular importance to my use of the poetic text, for my grandmother's use of black vernacular speech requires a method of transcription that illuminates the relative "peculiarities" so often found in her verbal art.
MARY RHYNE'S LABOR HISTORY

Mary Rhyne was born on February 26, 1914, in York County, South Carolina. The second oldest of five children, Mary, along with her siblings, Ervin, Ernest, Damon, and DeMaxine, was raised by her paternal grandfather on a small farm outside Gastonia, North Carolina. In 1930, she moved to Kings Mountain, North Carolina, where she met and married Jim McHaney. Together, they had five children, two girls and three boys. When she and Jim separated in 1949, she moved to Hickory, North Carolina, and lived with her oldest daughter, Sarah. Shortly after, she secured a place of her own in an apartment complex called the Embassy Apartments. She made her living cleaning homes and working part-time in a factory. By 1954, all of her children had relocated to Hickory.

In the Fall of 1955, Gene and Virginia Smith and Virginia Smith's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Friar, hired Mary as a domestic day worker. Both couples lived in Hickory. In the Spring of 1956, after the birth of the Smiths' youngest daughter, Carol, Mary quit her job with the Friars and became a live-in domestic for the Smiths. Mary lived with and worked for the Smiths for the next 17 years, resulting in a total of 18 years of service for the Smiths. As a day worker Mary received approximately twenty-five dollars a week. As a live-in, her salary ranged between twenty-five and fifty dollars a week.

Mary's work day included cleaning the Smiths' eight room house, taking out their garbage, taking care of their lawn, and preparing their meals. She spent most of her day washing and ironing clothes, especially
those of the four children. Mary prepared only two meals a day, breakfast and dinner, because the children lunched at school and the Smiths were at work. On the holidays, especially Thanksgiving and Christmas, the Smiths and their relatives helped Mary prepare the meal. They also expected Mary to sit at the family dinner table and eat the holiday meal with them, which she often did. After the meal, Mary washed the dishes by herself and by hand. The Smiths did not own a dishwasher.

During the weekdays, the four children, Eddie, Patti, Jimmy, and Carol, were entirely under Mary's supervision. Their parents lived forty-five minutes away in Shelby, North Carolina, where they owned and managed a hotel. During the week, Mary saw the children off to school, made sure that they did their homework, and prepared their meals. She also disciplined them at her discretion. Mary and the children spent the weekends in Shelby, the Smiths picking them up on Friday evening and returning them to Hickory on Sunday.

Mary did not have scheduled days off. On the average, she took off three to four days each year and, on some days, after she completed her chores at the Smiths', Mary visited with her own family who lived across town. She spent most holidays at the Smiths'. This routine continued until 1970 when, having sold their hotel, the Smiths returned to and lived permanently in Hickory. Mary left the Smiths' employ three years later.

In May 1973, a week before Carol, the youngest child was married, Mary left the Smiths' home and never returned. According to Mary and Mrs. Smith, Mary went to visit her sick brother in Washington, D. C. Because his sickness was life threatening, Mary remained in Washington for two weeks. When she returned to North Carolina, Mary decided not to go back to work for the Smiths. Instead, she moved to Kings Mountain.
Rather than inform the Smiths of her decision herself, Mary called one of the Smiths' neighbors, Tanya H., and instructed her to tell the Smiths that she had quit.

Between 1973 and 1976, Mary had little contact with the Smiths. During those years, she worked at the Oxford Mill, a shirt factory in Kings Mountain. After three years, however, the factory was sold and Mary was laid off. At the age of 62, Mary retired from full-time employment.

In 1976, Mary regained contact with the Smiths and, until recently, did housework for them when she went to Hickory to visit her family. Although Mr. Smith is deceased, Mrs. Smith and her children keep in contact with Mary and speak fondly of her. On many occasions, Mrs. Smith has asked Mary to join her on trips to visit Mrs. Smith's children, who live in various cities on the east coast. The children, now parents themselves, remember Mary on Christmas and her birthday with cards, presents and pictures of their children.

Known to the Smiths as "Daisy," Mary also speaks highly of the Smith family and looks forward to their calls, cards, and visits. She is also fond of the Smith children's children and carries their pictures in her wallet along side her own grandchildren and great grandchildren. The Smith children have made certain that their children develop a relationship with their second "grandmother."

Due to arthritis and failing eyesight, Mary is no longer able to work. She receives a social security check of two hundred and thirty-two dollars every month. At the age of 82, Mary enjoys collecting "whatnots," gardening, quilting and cooking. When she visits her children in Hickory, North Carolina, she often entertains her grandchildren and great grandchildren with her stories.
Mary Rhyne's Narrative

Nevah Had A Cross Word

1 Ah stayed at the Smiths' 'bout
2 twenty/nineteen yeahs.
3 (10 sec pause)

4 When Ah first went there
5 Ca'uh [Carol] wasn't/born
6 Jimmy
7 was eight months ol'.
8 Eddie was eight yeah ol'
9 and.
10 Patty was six yeah ol'
11 (looks at me)
12 and.
13 (10 sec pause)
14 and
15 Ah stayed deah an
16 kep' 'em/kept de house/Ms. Smith 'nem went to
17 uh
18 Shelby
19 an' bought uh
20 mo'/uh/hotel
21 down in Shelby
22 bought uh hotel down in Shelby
23 an' Ah/dey stayed down neah/an' Ah stayed in de house
24 an' looked at dem chil'ren
25 an Ah sent 'em tuh school
26 Ah sent Eddie/Eddie
27 an Patty went tuh Appalachian
28 tuh college
29 an Ah kep' Jimmy and Ca'uh deah at de house
30 an' sent dem tuh school
31 at Oakwood school—
32 (There is a 1 minute pause here. She crosses her right leg over her
left, shaking it while staring out the window.)
33 Ah raised
34 Ah raised dem kids--
35 did/ever' thang
36 (30 sec pause)
37 WHAT WERE SOME OF THE THINGS YOU DID?

38 (Abruptly)

39 Oh Ah cleaned house.
40 did all de washin'/an' Ms. Smith didn't know nothin' 'bout
41 what de chil'ren need
42 they clothes/an' when dey git out uh clothes/when dey needed
43 somthin'
44 Ah had tuh
45 tell/uh
46 what the chil'ren need--
47 dresses.
48 panties/whatever/dey/need/Ah/had/tuh/tell/uh
49 she didn't know dat stuff 'cause see
50 she/wa'n't/deah.
51 wit' de chil'ren.

52 HOW OLD WERE THE KIDS?

53 OK.
54 Like Ah was tellin' yuh
55 Ah thought Ah tol' yuh Ca'uh wasn't born--
56 Jimmy was eight months old
57 an'
58 Eddie was de ol'est one/he was eight yeah old
59 an' Patty was six yeah old
60 dat's when Ah first went ovah deah--
61 an' den Ca'uh was born
62 uh.--
63 an' when Ah lef' deah
64 Ca'uh was
65 ol' enough/Ca'uh was
66 sixteen or seventeen/Lord/Ah/done/forgot

67 (30 sec pause)

68 YOU WORKED FOR THE FRIERS TOO?

69 Yeah
70 went ovah at Ms. Frier's
71 Ah worked at Ms. Frier's house
72 worked for Ms. Frier
73 Mr. Frier got sick
74 an' Ah'd leave the Smith's
75 an' got ovah deah an'
76 clean/up/an'
77 rake the y a r d
78 go out deah an' rake de y a r d
79 an' Ah wash an' ahrn
80 an'
81 cook
82 an' clean de house ___

83 THEN YOU WOULD GO BACK OVER TO THE SMITHS'? 

84 (cutting me off)
85 go back ovah to de Smith's--
86 Ms. Smith is ol' Ms. Frier's daughter

87 OH?

88 uh huh
89 dat's Ms. Frier's daughter
90 dat's/how/come/Ah/did/that
91 Ms. Frier's daughter___
92 so dat's what Ah'd communicate
93 to de board
94 but Ah stayed with the Smith's
95 an' worked fuh huh motha

96 SO YOU LIVED WITH THEM ALL THE TIME?

97 (cutting me off again)
98 ALL THE TIME.
99 Ah lived wit' the Smiths all de time___
100 Ah lived with them all de time
101 Ah didn't go home til' sometime middle of de weekend
102 ovah tuh my house___
103 som'time/an'/den___
104 de weekend
105 Ah'd start baking cakes
106 on
107 Friday
108 started baking cakes on Friday
109 four or five or six
110 cakes
111 that Ah'd bake
112 on
113 Friday___
114 an' den Ms. Smith would come up aftah me and de
115 chil'ren
116 on uh
117 Saturday
118 mornin'
119 or maybe it was
120 FRIDAY
121 night___
122 ovah deah/we/have/tuh/go/back
123 but Ah'd take de chil'ren
124 an' all dem
125 cakes
126 an' we go back down neah
127 an' stay till Sunday evenin'

128 AT THE HOTEL?

129 At the motel
130 Ah meant the hotel
131 an' den dey'd bring me back home.
132 an' have tuh send the youngin's tuh school--
133 Ca'uh say
134 Ca'uh will tell yuh right now/say
135 "Ah ain't got but two mama's
136 Ah got one white mama and one black mama"
137 she tickle me
138 (giggles)
139 black mama and uh white mama_
140 (10 sec pause)
141 an' she'd dance
Y'all Ain't Havin' No Party

142 WERE THE KIDS BAD?

143 NO^
144 Ca'uh was de sweetest lil' thang you ever seen/evah time she's go out--
145 she wouldn't go out uh dat y a r d^
146 but she'd come an' tell me about that Jimmy
147 Lord Jesus
148 that Jimmy

149 (shakes her head)
150 that Jimmy was some'in'
151 that lil' fellah
152 when he was about.
153 two yeah old Ah reckon
154 Ah looked for 'im one day
155 an' he goin' on up through deah wit' nothin' on but his diaper
156 goin' up through deah/in snow

157 (points out the window with her finger)
158 Ah had tuh run out get 'im
den.
159 Ms. Smith nem used tuh live in Shelby
160 so
dey had uh motorbike up deah
give him uh motorbike
162 so
de police--
163 Jimmy had went on de highway
164 wit' dis motorbike/an' dey wouldn't 'low den
165 so
de police brought Jimmy in
166 an' heah come Jimmy
167 an' he started cryin'____

168 (closes her eyes and shakes her head)
169 he started cryin'____
170 Ah said
171 "Jimmy^1"
172 Ah said
173 "Now Ah tol' you not to go out uh dis yard."
174 Ah said
175 "Now you been WAY OVAH YONDAH ON DE HIGHWAY WIT DAT
176 MOTORBIKE."
177 Ah said
178 "Now you know betta than t h a t."
179 he was just uh cryin'___/he just cried___
180 so
73

185 de police brought 'im on
186 an' Ah said,
187 "Your/mothah/an'/fathah'/gwoin/git/you/boy"
188 dat was tuh scare 'im up
189 so

190 WELL
dey wanted tuh have uh
192 party
dis night
194 Saturday night
195 mother/nem/wa'n't/neah--
dey git so mad at me til dey didn't know what tuh do/wanted tuh have
197 uh p a r t y
198 Ah said
199 "Y'all ain't havin' no party hea h."
200 Ah said
201 "Your mother an' daddy tol' me tuh stay heah an' take ca'uh uh y'all
202 an' take care of dis house"/an'
203 Ah said
204 "I'm gonna do it."

(In a whiny voice)

205 "You can go tuhnight."
207 Ah said
208 "Ah ain't goin' nowhere!"

(shakes her head)

210 Ah said
211 "Ah ain't goin' nowhere."
212 Oh dey'd get so mad at me dey didn't know what tuh do/Ah said
213 "Ah ain't goin' nowhere"/an' Ah said
214 "An' y'all ain't havin' no party in heah either."

(emphatically)

216 Ah said
217 "Y'all ain't havin' no party."
218 Dey'd get so mad at me dey'd didn't know what tuh do."

(15 sec pause)

(abruptly in whiny voice)

221 "Daisy won't let us do nuthin"
222 "Don't want us tuh do nuthin'"
223 Ah said
224 "YOU AIN'T GONNA DO IT WHILE AH'M HEAH.
225 wait til' your mama an' daddy come home."--

226 THEY WERE IN HIGHSCHOOL THEN?
74  
227  LORD, YEAH IN HIGHSCHOOL  
228  Patty had uh boyfriend/an'/Jimmy  
229  (laughs and shakes her head)  
230  YEAH^^  
231  Patty had huh boyfriend/an'/Jimmy  
232  he  
233  big ol' thang/he didn't have no  
234  date or nuthin' for uh  
235  big boy  
236  an'  
237  an' uh  
238  Ca'uh wa'n't no  
239  no trouble/but that  
240  that Eddie  
241  an' Patty/see dey was growin'  
242  an' dey wanted tuh  
243  have dey party wit' dey friends  
244  want dey friends tuh come in  
245  an' have uh party on Saturday night  
246  "They ain't havin' none heah."  
247  Oh  
248  dey could've killed me.  
249  DID THEY LISTEN TO YOU PRETTY WELL?  
250  (nods her head)  
251  <<yes>>  
252  dey listened tuh me good 'cause  
253  dey mutha' an' dey fatha' 'allowed 'em to  
254  dey-'llowed-'em-to  
255  uh-numbah-uh-yeahs  
256  only dem times when dey wanted tuh have uh lil' party  
257  an' couldn't have any  
258  dey'd git mad  
259  but/Ah/didn'/care/nuthin'/"bout/dat  
260  but other than that  
261  they'd listen to meh
Dev Didn't Pay Nuthin'

262 WHAT WAS YOUR WORKDAY LIKE? WOULD YOU GET UP IN THE MORNING?

263 (looks at me)
264 Me?
265 OK
266 first thang Ah'd do was get up in the morning
dat time dey didn't have no dishwasher
268 at dat time
269 Ah'd go
270 an' fix
271 breakfast
272 Ah'd fix breakfas' in de mornin'
273 an'

274 (puts her hands together as if praying)
275 first thing Ah'd do/Ah'd go an' git everybody outta bed
276 Ah'd get up in de mornin'
277 gwoin in de kitchen
278 an' fix breakfas'
279 an' dey'd come an' eat
280 Ah'd clean up de kitchen
281 an' den
282 Ah'd wash
283 Ah'd do the washin'
284 an' git my lil' washin' done

285 (spreads both hands and makes prancing motion as if playing a piano)
286 an' den Ah'd fix dinnah
287 get mah dinner fixed
288 an' den Ah'd fix suppah.
289 den aftah Ah fixed suppah
290 den of course Ah cleaned de house/Ah/had/tuh/clean/de/house/up

291 (10 sec pause)
292 oh Ah just did everythang
293 Ah did everythang around that house
294 had eight rooms/dat house had eight rooms
295 an' Ah did everythang around dat house
296 everythang
297 plus be dem chap's [children's] nanny
DID THEY PAY WELL?

nah
dey didn't pay nuthin'
didn't pay
Ah don't think
crosses her legs)
back den
you know
wa'n't
wa'n't gittin' too much p.a.v
Ah thank Ah got twenty-five dollahs uh week
(10 sec pause)
have stayed day and night
(opens her hands)
stayin' there
you know
on de
on de lot
stayin' there
all de there

SO YOU GOT TO EAT?

oh yeah/oh yeah
Ah got tuh eat whatevah Ah wanted
whatevah they got
an' dey'd
buy me c l o t h e s __-
an' Ah
one/thang/about/it/Ah/got/sick/deah/one/time
Ah got sick^ an'
b'lieve it was three of us in de bed at de s a m e time__
three-of-us-in-de-bed-at-de-same-time
sick
all of us/me/an'/dem/youngin's/in/de/bed
an' dey looked aftah me just like dey did de rest of 'em
an' Ah got sick one day an' had tuh go to de hospital_
dey/put/me/in/de/hospital
dey took ca'uh of d a t
an'
dem s c a r s deah
(points to her left hand and makes a circling motion)
Ah got all dat burned off
all dat was cooked/all dat just cooked
so
took me uh long time tuh get up
so
dey had tuh take ca'uh of all uh dat

HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

hit was a frying pan on de stove
an' it caught--
this had grease or some'in' or anothah on de stove
an' Ah ran to it

(pulls her hand up, imagining the fire)
it blazed up
an' Ah ran to it
tuh
put it out/but/Ah/couldn't/so/Ah/couldn't/put/it/out/so
SCARED me so
Ah just
grabbed it up
just grapped the handle
an' dat grease just cooked
just cooked dat hand
all dat skin was just like
tar
so
Ah had tuh
keep de bandage on it
fuh Ah don't know how long
everyday/everyday
thought one time they was gonna have tuh take the skin off my hip

(puts her hand on her hip)
an' draft it on
but dey didn't have to do that
Dr. Fry
that was mah doctah

YOU WERE COOKING SOMETHING FOR THEM?

yeah
Ah was cookin' dey suppah
yeah Ah was cookin' suppah
porkchops
Ah b'lieve it was porkchops
wa'n't nobody deah at dat time an' Ms. Smith had went aftah de chil'ren
fuh school de next day

(30 sec pause)
YOU GOT ALONG WITH MR. SMITH?

Mr. Smith?
yeah he-was-nice.

we all just one family one big family it was nevah uh cross word

we all just/everybody/went/along

THERE WAS NEVER A TIME WHEN YOU AND MRS. SMITH OR ANY OF THE OTHERS HAD A DISAGREEMENT OR ANYTHING?

(10 sec pause)

(she tilts her head back and puts her right index finger under her chin)

Mr. Smith use tuh drank sometime/an' he came in deah drunkin' one time an' said he was gwoin leave he went in neah an' got de suitcases

(points to the floor)

an' he was gonna leave/dem little youngins just uh hoopin' an' uh hollerin' an' uh screamin' an' uh holdin' de do'
got on mah nerves so bad/Ah went in neah/Ah tol' 'em Ah said

"Now what in de world do you mean?"

Ah said

"Dese lil' chil' ren is jus' hollerin' an'

an' goin' on heah"

Ah said

"PUT DEM SUITCASES DOWN!

SET DEM SUITCASES BACK DOWN"

an' de chil'ren/a 1 1

fo' of 'em

just whoopin' an' hollerin' "d a d d y don't leave/d a d d y don't leave/d a d d y don't leave"

Ah didn' wanna git in to it/but Ah had tuh git in to it dat time

WHAT DID MS. SMITH SAY?

(NOthin')

just

(emphatically, jerking her head to the right)
424 (She begins to giggle.)
425 **NOTHIN'**
426 'cause see him an' huh had been into it
427 she wa'n't doing nu'in' but just *stan'in'* neah
428 (stiffens her body)
429 Ah went in neah/Oh Lord Ah was jus'/dis/upset me so bad
430 Ah didn't know what tuh do____
431 Ah jus' got all ovah Mr. Smith
432 he come brought the suitcase in neah an' sat it down
433 an' dem chil'ren
434 (makes pulling motion)
435 dey just *pullin'*
436 dey was pullin' de suitcase
437 some at de do'
438 holdin' de do'
439 so he couldn't go out de do'
440 (we both get tickled)
441 **LORD**^^
442 dat was de biggest mess you evah see.
443 **SO HE STAYED?**
444 oh yeah
445 he stayed
446 (she giggles)
447 (10 sec pause)
448 **YOU USED TO GO ON TRIPS WITH THEM, DIDN'T YOU?**
449 **Lord*/yeah/Ah went
450 **uh**
451 where is
452 where was it that
453 **uh**
454 where/*bout/is/it/that/**uh**
455 that part of Florida that/**uh**
456 Ray Charles went tuh school?
457 blind school down neah/some part of Florida down neah
458 where he went
81

459 TALLAHASSEE?

460 no
461 hit was de
462 o l' part
463 dey say hit was de o l' part uh Florida
464 de o l' part of Florida—
465 Ah can't think of dat name

466 JACKSONVILLE?

467 no
468 hit wasn't Jacksonville
469 Patty live in Jacksonville
470 Florida
471 dat's where dese chil'ren was--
472 'course
473 Patty
474 didn't have no child til lil' aftah she
475 m a r r i e d--
476 WE HAD TO GO CROSS DAT WATAH
477 Lord/Hammercy/Jesus
478 Ah'm just so upset Ah didn't know what in dis world tuh/Ah thought we
479 nevah was gonna get across dat watah
480 w a y on

481 (waves her hands)

482 w a y cross
483 de ocean
484 way cross
485 miles/an'/miles/an'/miles
486 an' we went down neah
487 at dat place—
488 an'
489 Ah went tuh JACKSONVILLE
490 stayed down neah about two weeks
491 an' Ah went tuh--
492 since uh
493 Eddie
494 Ah mean
495 Jimmy
496 an' his wife

497 (mumbles to herself trying to remember where Jimmy lives)

498 is-it-Miami?
499 you know where
500 Flossie live?
501 ATLANTA?

502 Atlanta____
503 Ah went down neah
504 Ah went down neah about two weeks
505 yeah
506 Ah/was/all/de/time/goin'/somewhere/wid/'em
507 wherevah dey'd go Ah'd go
508 Ah misses dat too--
509 dey went tuh
510 Ms. Smith nem took me to
511 she took me tuh--
512 took de two oldes'
513 Patty an'
514 Eddie/Ah thank
515 an' left the two
516 little ones there wid me
517 dey went off an' stayed uh week
518 an' Ah had tuh stay home an' keep dem two lil'
519 chil'ren--

520 (10 sec pause)

521 EVEN AFTER YOU STOPPED WORKING FOR THEM AT THE HOUSE, YOU
   STILL WENT OVER THERE TO WORK FOR THEM?

522 AND STILL TUH NOW!
523 STILL

524 (waving her hands)

525 STILL TUH DE DAY!/STILL TUH DE DAY!
526 she called me las' week
527 wanted tuh know when Ah was comin' up
528 an' Ah was up tuh yuh mama's house las' week/but
529 Ah thought she wanted me tuh come ovah deah
530 an' spend de day or spend de night wid 'uh
531 so she wanted me tuh come ovah deah an'
532 talk wid 'uh
533 yeah Ah go ovah deah
534 you know
535 an' if Ah see some'in' --
536 WHATEVAH
537 you know
538 Ah'll do it--
539 yeah
540 still--
541 aftah Ah
542 Aftah Ah
543 quit work
544 well
545 still
Ah'd go
Ah'd still go ovah an' do thangs
tuh he)p '/em
tuh/he)p/'em/out

AND THE KIDS STILL KEEP IN TOUCH WITH YOU?

Lord hammercy/yeah
Ah didn't show yuh Ca'uh's lil' ol'
lil' ol'
youngin'?
Ah showed yuh one of 'em didn't Ah?-- yeah Ca'uh Ca'uh live in Fort Fort Myers?

(thinking to herself)

Fort Myers Florida an' uh she she write me an' when she has huh babies she

(in whiny voice)

"Well Daisy you got another GRAND
Got another GRAND"
an' uh an'
jimmy
send me/he/ain't/been/long/sunt [sent]/me/dis/picture

(dis

(shows me the picture)

family/whole family
dis is his wife an' two girls
an'
Eddie
Ah don't heah from Eddie any much regular as Ah used to

he sends his-- he got three boys
he sends me dey pictures-- DEY ALL STAY IN TOUCH
all of 'em
send me uh card or some'in'-- Pattv

Pattv
she live in
Jacksonville
dey-always-think-'bout-me
AN' E V E R Y CHRIS'MAS THAT CA'UH
every chris'mas dat Ca'uh send me uh
(pats the sofa with her hand)
fruitbasket
every Chris'mas
so many oranges
so many othah grapes/e v e r y Chris'mas
she'll do that
every Chris'mas--
an' Ms. Smith'll send me uh
uh case of
pickles

WHEN YOU WERE WORKING FOR THEM, DID THEY GIVE YOU THINGS?
CLOTHES?
oh-yeah/oh-yeah
when Ah was stayin' wid' e'm
Ms. Smith bought me most of my clothes
she'd buy my clothes
they bought me clothes
Mr. Frier
would go up in de mountains
(spreads her hands apart)
an' go git one of dem great big ol' hams
an' bring 'em back
an' so
he'd spice 'em an' Ah had tuh trim 'em
had/tuh/trim/'em

(long pause)
We Were the Best of Friends

620 Were there any other black women who worked in the neighborhood that you knew?

621 next door
622 Ms.
623 Ms. uh
624 Honeywell
625 now
626 when Ah first went tuh work fuh Ms. Smith 
627 Ms. Angel nem lived
628 Ms. Angel lived next door
629 where Ms. Smith duplex is now
630 Ms. Angel had two chil'ren'

631 (pointing to me)
632 two girls
633 but she didn't have nobody workin' fuh her
634 she just--
635 but dat's where she lived
636 an' den aftah Ms. Angel moved
637 Ms. Angel nem bought them uh home
638 an' aftah dey
639 moved
640 well
641 Mr. and Mrs. Honeywell live there
642 an' so dey had uh
643 uh
644 dey uh
645 Bell
646 Bell Frederick worked deah
647 for 'em uh 'mount of time
648 an' den
649 dey was uh black girl
650 from Lawndale

651 (points in the air)
652 before Bell

653 (10 sec pause)
654 Ah can't think of her las' name
655 but she worked deah
656 Bell Frederick
657 Calvin Frederick's wife
658 she work deah--
659 an' den Mr. Hunt
660 Mr. Hunt

661 (looks at me)
you know
he was uh teacher
an' so
he lived deah
an' den some black
some black folks worked for him
Mr. Hunt
Ah used tuh go down neah and baby sit fuh
Mr. Hunt
(points to waist and makes downward sweeping motion)
Ah say baby 'cause Davis was paralyzed from heah down—
from his waist down
an' so
an'
an/‘uh
Ah'd go an' babysit fuh 'im
he'd as' me if Ah'd babysit
an' Ah would
-babysit-fuh-‘im
dey bought dem uh home
don down below Ms. Smith nem
Ah'd go down neah sometime
an' he'p see after 'im--
(10 sec pause)
an' Ms. Niles
Janet Niles
right across de street from de Smiths
dey had
let's see
(puts her right index finger up to her mouth)
what-was-her-name
(long pause)
Ah can't remember his wife name
was it Niles?^
Niles Ah thank--
an' den when Ah stayed wit' Ms. Smith
Ah'd go up deah wit' Grandmama Smith/well see dat was
Mr. Smith mama and daddy
Ah'd go up deah an' he'p dem some too
grandmama
-Ah/-call/-‘uh/-grandmama
dat's what de chil'ren call 'uh
grandmama/uh huh
-Ah'd-go-up-deah-an'-he'p-dem
DID YOU EVER SEE MS. BELL ON A REGULAR BASIS? DID Y'ALL EVER GET TOGETHER OR SOMETHING?

oh Lord yeah
we was best of friends
um hum
she was right deah near 'em
so
she'd come ovah deah
she was ovah deah side uh me
an' uh
Bell
she'd come ovah deah
an' we'd make--
Ah would
Ah would make custards
an' cakes
well she say

(in whiny voice)

"Ah, Ms. Daisy/you/sho'll/do/make/uh/good/cake"
shit
she was in de cake 'fo you even cut it

(We both laugh)

she wouldn't eat ol' custards--
yeah
all of us would have tuh bake
but we sho'll did have uh good time__

(10 sec pause)

s h o ' l l did
me and Bell talks about it now__
when Ah go home sometime Ah call Bell--
dat lil' gal is som'in'

(in whiny voice)

"How you Ms. D a i s y"^^
SHE SAY "AH'M BELL'S DAUGHTER"/AH/SAY/"AH/KNOW"

(laughs at the recollection)

Ah say Ah know you Bell's daughter

(she turns and looks out the window)

(45 sec pause)
Ah Nevah Will Forget Dat Mornin'

744 MR. SMITH IS DEAD?

745 yeah
746 Mr. Smith been dead
747 three yeahs

748 (crosses her hands over left knee)
749 he had uh heart attack
750 (10 sec pause)

751 reason Ah know so well 'cause Ca'uh's baby
752 went down neah tuh see Ca'uh's baby--
753 ol'est lil' boy--
754 he's two yeah ol' now
755 so he was just three weeks old
756 when we went down neah--
757 an' we came back--
758 Ah/nevah/will/forget/dat/mornin'/Eddie/called
759 Eddie called
760 Ah knew it had tuh be somethin'
761 "Hey Daisy
762 how you doin'?"
763 Ah knew it was somethin' den
764 den he told me he had a bit uh bad news/Ah/said/"WHAT?"
765 "What kinda bad news?"
766 he said

767 (in solemn voice)

768 "My daddy passed dis mornin"
769 Ah said
770 "Lord hammercy Jesus"

771 (30 sec pause)
Oh Dev Nice People

772 WHAT KIND OF WORK DID YOU DO BEFORE YOU WENT TO WORK FOR THE SMITHS?

773 Let's see
774 Ah moved
775 let me see
776 me and Coleman

777 (points out the window)

778 lived ovah yondah on [untelligible] highway
779 when Ah lived
780 when Ah moved ovah heah
781 Ah worked ovah heah at de
782 school house
783 an' uh
784 right underneath dat bridge right out yondah
785 School
786 worked up deah at E. School
787 fuh lunch
788 an' den Ah didn't work up deah long before Ah went up deah
789 til Ah found out about Ms. Smith

790 HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT IT?

791 Ms. Smith's?

792 UH HUH

793 Ca'uhlyn Rinehart/now/you/know/Ms. Ca'uhlyn
794 Ca'uhlyn useta work fuh 'em
795 Ca'uhlyn was gonna have uh c h i l e/Ca'uhlyn was pregnant
796 an' she was gonna have uh baby
797 an'
798 she knowed Ah had moved up deah an' knew Ah wanted uh
799 job
800 Ca'uhlyn did
801 so/she called me
802 an'as' me
803 would Ah go
804 an' work fuh de Smith's
805 Ca'uhlyn recommended dem

806 (smooths out her pants)

807 said/"Oh dey n i c e people"
808 say
809 "Ah been workin' fuh 'em"--
810 how long had she been workin' fuh 'em
811 let's see
812 -Ah-don't-know
but she was pregnant
so dat's how
dat's how Ah got tuh get on wit Ms. Smith

WOULD MS. SMITH COME PICK YOU UP?

Yeah
she/come/an'/picked/me/up/'fo/Ah/stared/stavin'/wit'/em
she come an' pick me up an' bring me back home
an' den
Ah just started stavin' ovah deah--
an' den Ah moved in one--
see Ah was up deah in de Smith's
apartment

(puts her hands together as if praying)

Ah moved in one of de
'partments
Ah moved in one--
no
when Ah first moved
Ah stayed wit' yuh mama
an'daddy
til Ah
'til Ah got uh 'partment
next door

(motions to the left with right hand)

an' de en
an' de en
Ah got
Ah tol' dat Ah had tuh have uh house--
DAT'S/HOW/COME/MY/LEGS/LIKE/DEY/IS
my arthritis
dis is all from de mill houses
dese ain't nuthin' but mill floors
dese ol' cement floors
my legs
an' so
Ah told Ms. Smith
Ah tol' 'em
ef Ah couldn't get uh house somewhere
den Ah was gonna
move back tuh King's Mountain--
so.
dey got me dat lil' fo' room
white house
down neah
an' Ah let
Boot an' Jake live wit' me down neah
in de
white house
down below de
Zerden's nem
where ya'll useta stay right deah at the Zerden's
so dat's how come Ah was down neah
Ah was still.
at dey house
but Ah didn't have tuh pay no rent
didn't have tuh do nuthin' but buy mah gas
so

HOW LONG DID YOU LIVE IN YOUR APARTMENT BEFORE YOU MOVED IN WITH THEM?

 Oh
befo' Ah just stayed wit' dem
an' stayed wit' dem?
Ah don't know how long Ah stayed up deah
when Ah started workin' fuh dem
when Ah was up deah in de
'partment
you know back den we called it de
Em'assy [Embassy]
Em'assy 'partments

(points at me)

stayed up deah
'boun ih yeah
Ah reckon it was uh yeah
den Ah moved down neah--
dey let me have dat house down neah
an' Ah moved down neah
an' den Ah come back an' forth fuh uh w h i l e
back/an'/forth
an' den aftah
aftah
Ca'uh
aftah Ca'uh was born
den Ah jus' started stayin'
ovah deah at night
course Ah'd come home sometime de weekend
you know 'cause
Boot an' Jake was deah
an' so Ah'd come home
de weekend
you/now
Ah'd call evah now an' then
an' Ah'd go ovah deah an' see yuh mothah

(30 sec pause)
Ah Don't Want No End 'Partment

906  AFTER YOU FINISHED WORKING FOR THEM WHAT DID YOU DO?

907  yeah
908  Ah got ti'ed
909  an' den Ah left
910  an' moved
911  back tuh
912  Kings Mountain____
913  an' Ah moved back
914  Ah stayed wit'
915  Edna
916  an' Nash
917  'til Ah got mah house down neah in
918  Pine Manah [Manor]
919  stayed down neah at Pine Manah seven yeahs
920  den Ah move heah
921  dey got me dis place
922  Ms.
923  Ms. uh--
924  Sissy
925  she's dead now
926  -bless-her-heart
927  she was de sweetest thang

928  (closes her eyes)

929  an' uh
930  Ms. Pfifer
931  was working at de bank
932  at dat time
933  reckon she don't work deah now/'cause
934  she reti'ed
935  but uh
936  Ah went tuh
937  Winston Salem
938  when Doris lil' boy was born____
939  Ryan
940  Ron
941  Ah was up deah waitin' on dat chile tuh be born
942  an' de phone rang

943  (puts her right index finger up to her mouth)

944  Ah b'lieve it was Ms. Pfiefer
945  dat tol' me--
946  Sissy had call
947  an' tol' me dat Junior--
948  dey had uh
949  uh house
950  fuh me
an' dey had done tol' me dat dey had tuh give me three choices an' Ah didn't like neither one uh de places an' so dis time when dey called dis time well Sissy said "Well tell yuh what dey don't give yuh but t h r e e t i m e s" say "If yuh turn de fifth turn de fifth de third one away" say "Dey won't dey won't you know dey won't give you none" so Ah said well Lord Ah reckon Ah betteh try tuh take dis one/Ah/was/in Winston when when dey called an' uh Eve-- dat's de woman at de housin' authority Ah tol' her (shaking her head)

"WELL AH DON'T HAVE ANY MONEY TUH PUT UP FOR UH DEPOSIT" she said "Well dat's alright"-- see Ms. Pfifer had done talked to 'uh an' tol' 'em-- "Dat's alright if you don't have any money tuh put up fuh uh deposit Just let me know if you want the house." an' Ah tol' 'uh "yes Ah guess Ah'll take/it" Ah said "Ah'm just poor an' Ah ain't"-- Ah come on home an' run up deah an' got de sheet fixed it went up deah an' deah sit Mr. Harper at dat time of the day-- so he give me de key

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
an' me an'

Sissy
come on down heah
looked at it
y'know
Ah tol' Sissy/Ah said
"Ah don't want no end 'partment
an' dis heah is uh end 'partment
AH DON'T LIKE IT"
Ah/know/Ah/had/tuh/git/som'in'
at dat time
so.
Ah been heah twelve yeahs__
dat chile--
Ah went up deah tuh [unintelligible]
an' come on
come on
down dis way

(15 sec pause)
Better Dan Makin' Nu'in

1021 YOU STILL DO HOUSEWORK NOW?

1022 Um hum
1023 still/yeah
1024 dat's what Ah do at home

1025 DO YOU DO THE SAME THING?

1026 WELL
1027 Ah jus' clean house/Ah run de vacuum
1028 now let's see
1029 Ah got fo' rooms
1030 an'
1031 two bathrooms tuh clean [tomorrow]
1032 Ah run de vacuum an' dust---
1033 de man's wife DEAD
1034 Henderson Pike
1035 Henderson Pike
1036 Ah don't go ovah deah
1037 but
1038 some time in de day

1039 HE'S AN OLDER MAN?

1040 (plainly)

1041 he's seventy-fo'__
1042 yeah
1043 'bout seventy-fo'

1044 WERE YOU WORKING FOR HIM BEFORE HIS WIFE DIED?

1045 yeah
1046 'fore his wife died
1047 Ah'd go ovah deah an'
1048 he'n'im
1049 fuh his wife died
1050 she had altimey [althzeimers]

1051 (10 sec pause)

1052 WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT PEOPLE WHO SAY HOUSEWORK AIN'T A
     DECENT JOB?

1053 AH don't say nuthin'
1054 (shakes her leg)
1055 'cause/Ah/feel/it
1056 did de job fuh me
1057 BETTAH DAN MAKIN' NU'IN'
96

1058 make good money housekeepin'
1059 doing housework--
1060 Ah' done ol' an' broke down
1061 Ah can't
1062 Ah can't
1063 Ah jus' go an' do--
1064 dey know
1065 dat Ah can't do like Ah used to
1066 so Ah jus' tell him
1067 (10 sec pause)
1068 Ah can't do uh whole lot of hard work like Ah have when Ah was
1069 younger
1070 Ah go ovah tuh Ms. Pfifer's--
1071 now when Ah'm feelin' good
1072 when my hip don't hurt meh so bad--
1073 Ah go ovah tuh Ms. Pfifers
1074 an' stay.
1075 dat's on Friday--
1076 Ah go ovah deah tuh huh house--
1077 Ah go ovah deah tuh huh house--
1078 an' Ah jus'
1079 Ah jus' clean--
1080 Ah have two bathrooms at huh house
1081 (prancing motion with her hands)
1082 an' Ah run de vacuum
1083 in de
1084 bedroom an'
1085 git de
1086 living room
1087 an' de
1088 dining room
1089 fo'
1090 fo' rooms
1091 Ah run de vacuum
1092 an' dus'
1093 an' do de
1094 two baths--
1095 Ah go at eight o'clock
1096 an' stay deah til 'bout twelve

1098 DO YOU THINK IT'S HONEST WORK?

1099 (annoyed at the question)
1100 YEAH HITS GOOD HONES' HARD WORK
1101 well
1102 hit's work
Ah admit it's hard--
dey nice/dey nice tuh meh
dey very nice people
very nice people
real-nice-
As Long As Ah Stay Black

1108  WOULD YOU HAVE DONE SOMETHING ELSE IF COULD HAVE? WORKED ANOTHER JOB, SAY, IF YOU DIDN'T WORK FOR THE SMITHS WOULD YOU HAVE STILL DONE HOUSEWORK OR WOULD YOU HAVE DONE SOMETHING ELSE?

1109  WELL
1110  you know
1111  aftah Ah moved back hyeah--
1112  Ah moved back tuh Kings Mountain
1113  you know Ah worked at uh
1114  oh what's de name of it
1115  dey sol' out tuh--

1116  (pauses to think)
1117  down de road there
1118  down heah
1119  Ah can't remembah dat name right now
1120  de cloth place
1121  maybe hit'll come tuh meh
1122  but Ah worked on production

1123  (puts her hands together as if praying)
1124  an' Ah had to uh
1125  stack shirts
1126  DOZEN SHIRTS
1127  DAT'S TH IR T Y DOZEN SHIRTS
1128  Ah b'lieve uh day/we/were/on/production/thirty dozen
1129  uh day
1130  Ah say
1131  you know

1132  (closes her eyes)
1133  as long as Ah stay black
1134  Ah'll nevah have another production job
1135  workin' on production
1136  Lord hammercy--
1137  dat's how come Ah can't [unintelligible]
1138  but Ah worked deah
1139  worked deah three yeahs
1140  dat's where Ah reti'ed deah--
1141  at dat job

1142  (holds her hands out)
1143  Ah was sixty-two
1144  Ah was gwoin be sixty-two
1145  an' so.
1146  aftah dey sold out
aftah dey sold out tuh Piedmont
dey didn't want
dey didn't want nobody
sixty-two
dey didn't wanna hire anybody sixty-two
an' Ah was sixty-two

(10 sec pause)
MOST OF THE WOMEN DOWN HERE, DID THEY DO HOUSEWORK? THE BLACK FOLK?

nevah/did/do/housework/chile
didn't nobody do housework
can't nobody do housework
most of 'em worked in de mills
most of the peoples now work in de mill
can't hardly get nobody tuh do housework
no
didn't wanna do housework
black
but dey didn't wanna do it--
(points to me)
OXFORD
dat's de name of where Ah worked at
where dey sold it
de name of it is
oxford
down neah
sol' out

(15 sec pause)
(remembering the previous subject)
(nasty face)
no
you'd hear
(in whiny voice)
"Ah don't wanna do no ol' housework".
Ah don't mind doin' it
if it ain't
lot uh dat ol'
wa shi n' an' ahrnin'
got tuh keep dat ol' ahrn hot
(interrupts to check on a pot of stewed beef on the stove)

1187 IS THAT WHAT YOU HATED THE MOST? WASHING AND STUFF LIKE THAT?

1189 AW IT DIDN'T MATTER
1190 it didn't matter tuh me
1191 Ah was jus' sayin'--
1192 hit didn't really matter

1193 (opens her arms)

1194 Ah didn't pay it no attention
1195 wash
1196 Ah jus' went ahead an' did it
1197 an' a l l
1198 dat long Ah worked
1199 Ah nevah did have tuh argue
1200 nevah did have any w o r d s wid 'em
1201 always got along wid 'em

1202 (5 sec pause)

1203 som'in' Ah didn't lak
1204 well
1205 Ah nevah did say nothin'

1206 (10 sec pause)
Every Chris'mas

1207 DID YOU HAVE TO GO OVER THERE ON THE HOLIDAYS LIKE CHRISTMAS?

1208 where?
1209 ovah tuh Ms. Smith's?
1210 oh yes
1211 oh yes
1212 yeah Ah went ovah deah
1213 EVERY Chris'mas
1214 every Chris'mas
1215 dey had
1216 salt fish

1217 (sits up as if she has found new energy)

1218 EVERY Chris'mas
1219 salt fish
1220 an' uh
1221 Dr. Niles
1222 worked
1223 ovah deah
1224 y'know
1225 at uh
1226 Lenoir Rhvne
1227 E V E R Y Chris'mas
1228 here come Dr. Niles
1229 he'd come an' dey'd have salt fish
1230 an' dey'd have--
1231 he'd come in
1232 de first thang he call

1233 (whiny voice)

1234 "Eh Jean yah got any Wild Turkey?"
1235 den
1236 everybody had tuh come in the dining room

1237 (spreads her arms to show the size of the table)

1238 round de big family table
1239 everybody be sittin' deah
1240 'round dat table
1241 so
1242 Dr. Niles

1243 (she points to each place each person would be around the table)

1244 he'd be right heah at dis end
1245 an' Ah'd be right heah
1246 Ms. Smith would be right deah
1247 Mr. Smith would be right deah
1248 an' de othah chil'ren 'round
everybody sittin' 'round dat table
an' Dr. Niles would
would as'
(closes her eyes)
de blessin'
he would as' one of de sweetes' blessin's__
so
everybody would eat
Christmas
Chris'mas
Ah'd he'p tuh cook
we'd make all kinds of
shrimp
salad
pickled shrimp
all dat stuff--
done so much
(puts her hand on her heart)
when Ah use tuh/Ah/done/done/dat/sorta/cookin' /
Ah/can't/do/now
it jus' done
it jus' done
left meh
Ah done done mah part of it--
an Jimmy used tuh like
hamburger
uh
casserole
he have me make 'im one
(in excited child's voice)
"Daisy make me uh hamburger casserole"
an' Ah'd go in deah an make 'im uh
hamburger casserole__

SO AFTER YOU WOULD GO OVER TO THEIR HOUSE, YOU'D GO HOME?
oh yeah/oh yeah
see aftah Ah'd go ovah deah an' fix breakfas'
an'
dinnah
an' den dey'd take meh home/Ah would go home
(points at me)
Ah'd go tuh my house
Ah'd go home
or to yuh mama's
OH AND MY HOME
see
Ah lived right below yuh mama nem
Ah'd go down neah
yeah
Ah'd go home
(15 sec pause)
Dev Nevah Was Too Much Trouble

DO YOU HAVE ANY MORE STORIES ABOUT THE KIDS?

'bout dem chil'ren?
'bout Eddie nem?
uh
let me see
Eddie
Eddie nem
dey was pretty good
dey nevah was too much trouble__
sometime dey didn't wanna listen
but aftah Eddie an' Patty went off tuh school
see Ah didn't have nothin' but those two other ones
Eddie
an' Ca'uh
an' Jimmy
like Ah said
Jimmy was de worse one
Jimmy didn't wanna listen tuh anybody
Jimmy
Ca'uh was uh different story/she was so sweet
(closes her eyes)
Ah jus'
L o r d Ah jus' love dat lil' ol' youngin' tuh death
Ah hated tuh leave--
Ah had tuh cry one day
Ah/jus'/hated/tuh/leave/Ca'uh
Ah jus' had got attached tuh Ca'uh 'cause she was jus' uh sweet lil' ol'
youngin'
she wa'n't like Jimmy
DAT Jimmy was som'in' else
Jimmy'll tell yuh
(gets tickled)
he'll laugh an' tell yuh now
how Ah used tuh/"Yeah Daisy
can you 'member how you useta
run meh 'round de house with de broom?"

(laughs harder at the recollection)
yeah
he'll tell yuh
tell anybody
how Ah use tuh
run/’im/around/de/house/wid/de/broom__
he was de BOOGIE MAN
dat Jimmy
he was uh MESS

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
1343 (10 sec pause)

1344 all/every kind of mischievous
1345 wouldn't
1346 wouldn't listen tuh yuh
1347 wouldn't listen tuh nuthin'
1348 jus' in tuh som' in' a l l d e t i m e

1349 (10 sec pause)

1350 he was uh Jimmy an' uh half

1351 DID THEY EVER TALK ABOUT THEIR PARENT'S BEING GONE SO MUCH?

1352 WELL
1353 Jimmy
1354 Jimmy
1355 when dey was down in
1356 Shelby
1357 stayin' down neah
1358 Ah nevah will forget
1359 Jimmy would tell me
1360 say

1361 (in whiny voice)

1362 "Ah wish my mama an' daddy would stay home like
1363 other parents"
1364 dat's what he'd say
1365 "Ah wish my mama an' daddy would stay home like
1366 other parents
1367 jus' stay down neah in dat
1368 Shelby
1369 in dat ol'
1370 Shelby
1371 all de t i m e"
1372 Ca'uh
1373 Ca'uh nevah did have nothin' tuh say

1374 DO YOU THINK JIMMY WAS BEING BAD BECAUSE OF THAT?

1375 he could have
1376 um hum
1377 could have 'sented his parents fuh not being 'round
1378 Ah imagine it was
1379 but he'd say dat so many times
1380 kicking rocks

1381 (kicks her foot out and giggles)

1382 KICKIN' ROCKS
1383 "Ah wish my mama/my parents
would stay home like other
parents
stay gone all de time down yondah
in
Shelby"

(serious)
an' Ah know he did miss/'em--
(closes her eyes)

Ah'd git up e v e r y Sunday mornin'
an' git him an'
Ca'uh off tuh church
ev e r y Sunday mornin'
everybody 'round neah/dey say
"Ah 'clare Daisy"
say
"You d o e s such uh good job"
say
"You git dem chil'ren up an' gettin' 'em ready tuh send 'em tuh ch u r c h
every Sunday mornin"/Ah said
"Ah know"
Ca'uh
Ca'uh had uh lil' ol' hat
(mimes the hat)
with one of dem lil' ol' ribbons in it--
huh an' Jimmy
Ah'd dress 'em
an'
dey'd go
tuh church
an' come on back

DID SOMEBODY COME PICK THEM UP?

no
ovah deah where Holy Trinity
you know where Holy Trinity?

RIGHT DOWN THE STREET?

um hum
so hit wa'n't far
dey'd walk
dey'd walk up to de church
an' Ms. Frier
Ms. Frier at dat time
lived right across de street
1426 from de church
1427 Ms. Frier was right beside it
1428 so

1429 (15 sec pause)

1430 WHAT WERE SOME OF THE STUFF YOU'D FIX FOR THEM?

1431 de regular everyday stuff?
1432 WELL
1433 sometime
1434 I'd fix uh
1435 kraut dumplin's
1436 dey l o v e d kraut dumplin's

1437 KRAUT DUMPLINGS?

1438 KRAUT DUMPLIN'S ^^
1439 you know
1440 KRAUT

1441 LIKE SAUERKRAUT?

1442 SAUERKRAUT
1443 Ah'd fix sauerkraut dumplin's
1444 Ah'd fix
1445 Ah'd put mah--
1446 Ah'd open mah kraut

1447 (make mixing motion with her right hand)

1448 mix mah kraut
1449 an' then
1450 Ah would put
1451 jus' uh taste
1452 you take you uh
1453 cup uh flour
1454 self-rising flour
1455 put/jus'/uh/lil'/touch/of/baking/powder/in/dat
1456 an'
1457 an' uh
1458 egg
1459 an' beat it up
1460 an' let yuh
1461 kraut cook
1462 let yuh kraut cook--
1463 an' Bell
1464 she tol' meh de othah day when she called meh/she say
1465 "Ah thought you was gonna come up heah"
1466 say
1467 "An' Ah was gonna make us some kraut dumplin's"--
1468 an' so

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
ef yuh want som'in' good have uh lil' bit uh
pork
lil' bit uh pork
an' cook/it
dat pork in deah
de pork in deah
an' den put yuh kraut in deah
an' cook it in de pork grease
an' den put yuh
fix yuh dumplin's

(spoons out dumplings)

do spoon/'em
do spoon/'em
an' den put de led [lid] on dat
right ovah dat
an' when hit gits done/you know/it jus'
get tuh where it
you can jus' take you uh spoon an' jus'
dip dat up
an' put you uh lil' of dat kraut juice in it
an' dat stuff is delicio.us

(sha. je her head emphatically)

UMPH! it's delicious yeah Ah'd fix dat
an' den Ah'd
sometimes she'd want meh tuh fix
macaroni pie
an'
butter beans an'
white potatoes
an'
pinto beans an'
stuff like dat

1504 DID THEY LIKE YOUR COOKING?

(cutting me off)

LORD yes
dey liked mah cookin'
"Daisy fix meh"--
AH DON'T KNOW MAHSE'F HOW AH GOT TUH--
Ah fix
Ah make
slaw
an' Ah wouldn't grate it
Ah jus'--
1515 dey had big sharp knives an' Ah jus'
1516 Ah jus'
1517 (mimes cutting the cabbage)
1518 thin
1519 dey'd be right thin
1520 an' Ah'd fix dat
1521 an' dey'd say
1522 "Daisy make me some more of dat good slaw like you made"
1523 say
1524 "Ah don't know how you did it"
1525 Ah didn't know either how Ah made it
1526 but Ah made it
1527 an' Ah'd make slaw
1528 an' den Ah'd make uh
1529 (slaps her thigh)
1530 uh
casserole
squash casserole
dey l o v e d squash casserole
1534 Ah'd fix dat
1535 Ah/was/all/de/time/makin'/som'in'
yeah dey liked what Ah cooked
dey loved mah cookin'--
1538 fo' dey got uh dish washer
1539 Ah washed dishes everyday---
dey looked
1541 Ms. uh
1542 Ms.
1543 Grandmama say
1544 (in old, decrepit voice)
1545 "Ah 'clare"
say
1547 "one of dese days yuh jus' look out ovah deah"
say
1549 "jus' look in dat windah
1550 she'll be standin' in dat window
washin' dishes"--
1552 (smiles)
1553 Ah thought
1554 not ef dey had uh dishwasher
1555 (15 sec pause)
1556 SO THE KIDS STILL KEEP IN TOUCH WITH YOU NOW? THEY CALL YOU?
ALL of 'em
every one of 'em
keep in touch wit' meh
dey eithah send meh uh c a r d
or cakes or dey c a l l
Ca'uh's de baby
dat Ca'uh's gwoin talk tuh meh
Ca'uh's de baby
Ca'uh's gwoin call
dey all send me
dey'll send meh uh
card
or send meh uh family picture
wit' dey
chil' ren
Ms. Smith wants meh tuh go down tuh Eddie's wid/'uh
you know
pretty soon
an'
Eddie lives down heah at
(points to the right)

Belmont now
an Ca'uh's comin' up
dis month comin'
an' so Ms. Smith wants me tuh come up deah
Ca'uh an' huh two kids comin' up

YOU'VE SEEN SOME OF THOSE GRANDKIDS HAVEN'T YOU?
oh yeah
Ah've seen a l l de grandkids 'cept
Ca'uh's got two now
Ah ain't seen dis las' one
Ah've seen dat othah lil' ol' round head boy
(she frowns)
dey say he's playing golf
he three yeah ol'
say

(gets tickled)
say dey had it in de paper
say he de first three year old tuh evah play golf
(looks at me)
(emphatically)

GOLF--
PATTY GOT TWO
Madeline

an'

what is his name?

Lord how come Ah can't call dat othah lil' boy's name

she got two

Eddie got

Eddie got t h r e e

lil' boys__

an' Jimmy got

t w o

lil' girls__

Ah showed yuh de pictures of dem lil' girls

Dey had de name of some of 'em on heah

(shows me the pictures)

heah dey are

see

all of 'em's Jean
Dev's More In Managin' Dan Dev Is In Money

1617 IF YOU HADN'T BEEN STAYING WITH THEM DO YOU THINK YOU COULD HAVE LIVED OFF OF WHAT THEY PAID YOU? IF YOU WEREN'T STAYING IN THE HOUSE WITH THEM?

1618 now ef Ah coulda stayed an' ate--
1619 now see Ah stayed in dey house an' didn't pay no rent
1620 you know/Ah/had/tuh/pay/mah/bills/Ah/had/tuh/pay/mah
1621 light bill still
1622 but Ah didn't have tuh pay no rent
1623 den course
1624 as time went on
1625 Ah even had tuh pay
1626 watah
1627 you know yuh had tuh pay watah
1628 'cause back den
1629 you know wa'n't nobody gonna pay fuh yuh watah--
1630 when Ah first worked at Oxford
1631 when Ah went down neah
1632 tuh work fuh Oxford
1633 Ah didn't make but 'bout
two dollah an' som'in' an hour
1635 dat's all
1636 Ah thank Ah got some--
1637 when yuh get through
1638 Ah got some ol'
1639 stubs
1640 in deah
1641 Ah'm gonna let yuh see 'em
1642 Ah kep' 'em fuh souvenirs
1643 jus' let people know
1644 HOW PEOPLES HAD TUH LIVE
1645 what you had tuh live off of
1646 an' den now peoples makin' good an' dey still say de can't
dey can't do it--
1648 Ah jus' don't understand it
1649 Ah cannot understand it

1650 HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT WOMEN'S LIB AND ABOUT THE WOMEN NOT MAKING AS MUCH AS THE MEN?

1651 yeah
1652 Ah heard 'em talkin' 'bout it

1653 DO YOU THINK IT'S TRUE?

1654 yeah
1655 some of 'em do make more
1656 but women make good though
1657 some of these women make more than de men
1658 some of 'em do
1659 some make more
dey jus' don't know how tuh spend
don't know how tuh spend dey money
don't know how tuh
MANAGE
(points at me)
dey's more in managin' dan dey is in money
ef yuh don't know how tuh manage den yuh in bad shape_
jus' buy everythang yuh see
(10 sec pause)
Dat's Uh Nice Piece Uh Furniture

1669  MAMA DID HOUSE WORK TOO?

1670  who?
1671  your mama?
1672  yeah
1673  at dat time
1674  you know yuh mama did house--
1675  she worked fuh Ms. Nicks
1676  Ah nevah will forget huh--
1677  yeah Ah thank hit was 'fore you was born she
1678  went an' worked fuh
1679  Ms.
1680  Ms. Nicks___
1681  fo' you was born

1682  SO YOU WERE WORKING FOR MRS. SMITH AND SHE WAS WORKING FOR
    MRS. NICKS AT THE SAME TIME?

1683  at de time/yeah
1684  at de same time--

1685  (points to me)

1686  an' Ms. Peebles
1687  Ms. Peebles was Ms. Nicks
1688  mothah
1689  an' she worked fuh Mr. Peebles
1690  and Ms.
1691  Nick
1692  sho' did
1693  yeah
1694  Ah 'membah
1695  'cause soon as you was born
1696  we went tuh see my brother.
1697  John
1698  she was pregnant wit' yuh
1699  when we went tuh see him
1700  dat's right/she was workin' fuh Ms. Nick den
1701  'cause we went tuh see John/went tuh New Jersey
1702  tuh see mah brothah
1703  see he was mah half brothah__

1704  (10 sec pause)

1705  Sa'uh [Sarah] worked fuh Ms. Nicks
1706  she worked fuh Ms. Nicks an' she worked fuh Ms.
1707  Ms.
1708  Anderson
1709  she
1710  she did
1711  HOUSEWORK --
Ms. Nicks called huh de othah day
she had uh
(spreads her hands far apart)
great big ol' tv
it's uh good piece of furniture/but it won't play__
(giggles)
Greg said
Greg say
"DAT/AN'/NUTHIN'/ONLY/JUS'/SET/IT/ON/OUT/DEAH/ON/DE/ROAD!"
well
Sa'uh said
"Ah'm uh see if Ah can git dat thang fixed"
say
"Dat's uh nice piece uh furniture"
hit was uh nice piece uh furniture if it don't cost--
she jus' gonna see how much it cost
might not be too much/but
it is nice/too nice tuh tho' away
you know hit's uh nice piece uh furniture
so Ms. Nicks said she just hate tuh sit it out
so she called Sa'uh de next day
(masks a yawn)
tol' huh tuh come an' git it
(10 sec pause)
Dat's De Exact Reason Ah Could Always Get Uh Job

1737 LOOKING BACK, DO YOU STILL THINK YOU WOULD HAVE WORKED FOR THEM AS LONG AS YOU DID?

1738 what?
1739 worked fuh de Smiths?

1740 UH HUH

1741 oh yeah
1742 yeah
1743 if Ah had tuh do it all ovah again Ah'd work
1744 Ah'd he'p 'em
1745 Ah still he'p 'em
1746 like Ah said
1747 Ah have worked for 'em since Ah left deah
1748 an' work/an'/work/an'/work/an'
1749 so
1750 you know
1751 now Ah stayed
1752 as long as Ah s t a y e d at dey
1753 at dat house___
1754 long as Ah stayed deah
1755 Ah nevah
1756 rambled
1757 in dey stuff

1758 (opens imaginary drawers)

1759 in dey d r a w s
1760 in dey stuff
1761 Ah didn't know bit mo' dan some of de thangs on de--only
1762 foldin' de chill'rn's clothes
1763 but like RAMBLIN' IN EVERYTHANG/SEE
1764 Ah didn't do that
1765 Ah didn't do that
1766 Ah nevah did--
1767 when dey come back everythang was jus' like dey left/it
1768 Ah didn't ramble in dey stuff
1769 Ah'd fol' de chill'rn's c l o t h e s
1770 Ah'd fol' 'em
1771 de chill'rn's clothes

1772 DID SOME PEOPLE DO THAT?

1773 yeah
1774 some people stayin' de house
1775 dey ramble thu' thangs
1776 you know
1777 ramble an'
1778 tamper
SOME MAIDS TALK ABOUT HOW THEY USED TO STEAL STUFF AND TAKE THINGS

n o
DAT'S DE EXACT REASON AH COULD A L W A Y S GET UH JOB/’CAUSE peoples k n o w
(spreads her hands)

when Ah went tuh dey house
Ah didn't bother nuthin'
everythang was jus' like dey left it
Ah didn't bother dey stuff--
an' people s t e a l--/dey/can't/gi t/no/job
yuh heah me^^
dey/can't/gi t/no/job
an' peoples ain't wantin' nobody in dey house dat steal
(emphatically)
an' Ah don't blame 'em

(15 sec pause)

UH HUH
dey take it
Ah jus' nevah did do that
Ah nevah did do that
Ah was always
a l w a y s honest
Ah didn't want nuthin' Ah didn't work fuh
if dey give me some'in' Ah'd take it
if she didn't
if she didn't give it Ah didn't gi t it__
Ar nevah did
an' Ah nevah would
take de chile's stuff--
an' dat's de reason NOW
people's uh
uh suffer
w a n t i n' help
but
you know
you can't trust peoples in yuh house like you--
dey'll steal
dey'll steal

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
shortenin' out uh biscuit now
an' people jus' rather
jus' do de bes' dey can
dan tuh have somebody in de house workin'

(5 sec pause)
Dev Nevah Did Say Nuthin' 'Bout It in Front Uh Me

1825 NOW YOU WERE WORKING FOR THEM DURING THE TIME WHEN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND MARTIN LUTHER KING AND ALL THAT STUFF WAS GOING ON?

1826 (overlapping my question)

1827 WELL LORD YES
1828 LORD/YES/YES/Y E S^

1829 DID YOU EVER HEAR THE SMITHS TALK ABOUT IT?

1830 no
1831 well
1832 if dey did dey nevah did say nuthin' 'bout it in front uh me
1833 yeah Ah was ovah deah
1834 time all dat was
1835 goin' on--
1836 no
1837 dey nevah did
1838 nevah did say nuthin' tuh me 'bout it
1839 quite natural Ah know dey talk tuh dey selves
1840 Ah know dey say some'in' 'bout it tuh each other

1841 DID IT MAKE THINGS TENSE AROUND THERE WITH ALL THAT STUFF GOING ON?

1842 no
1843 it didn't tense up bad
1844 if it did Ah didn't have sense enough tuh pay attention tuh it
1845 (giggles)
1846 didn't bother me

1847 WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER PEOPLE WHO WORKED AROUND THERE?

1848 oh
1849 dey didn't pay it no attention--
1850 L A W D Ah nevah will forget when
1851 President Kennedy got shot--
1852 Ms. Smith took it real hard
1853 Mr. Smith say
1854 "SHE AIN'T GOT NO SENSE"
1855 say
1856 "AH DONE TOL' 'UH"
1857 say
1858 "SHE JUS' ACT LIKE SHE DON'T HEAR ME"
1859 an' did po' thang/she was jus' whoopin' an' hollerin' an' havin' uh fit
1860 THAT WAS IN THE EARLY SIXTIES WHEN KENNEDY GOT SHOT? '63' OR '64?

1861 SOME'IN' LIKE DAT
1862 WHEN WAS DAT?\(^\wedge\)\(^\wedge\)
1863 Ah wish Ah had uh kep' up wid dat__

1864 HE GOT SHOT BEFORE MARTIN LUTHER KING GOT SHOT, RIGHT?

1865 oh y e a h
1866 yeah he got shot 'fo Martin Luther Kang [King]
1867 (10 sec pause)

1868 DID YOU SEE IT ON TV ALL THIS STUFF ABOUT PRESIDENT KENNEDY?

1869 y e s.
1870 hit was uh shame
1871 LAWD
1872 dat was uh s a d time
1873 Ah'm tellin' you de truth
1874 dat was uh sad time
1875 s a d time__--
1876 yeah
1877 way back den
1878 see
1879 de Smiths was workin' down neah at
1880 at Shelby__
1881 at de motel
1882 down neah__
1883 an' so
1884 dey'd be down neah/so one de cooks
1885 in de kitchen
1886 Ah forget his name
1887 he didn't like black peoples
1888 an' one of de othah cooks she was talkin' 'bout
1889 'bout uh
1890 [untelligible]
1891 so
1892 dis guy didn't like/it
1893 you know

1894 A WHITE GUY?

1895 oh yeah hit was uh white guy
1896 he didn't like it
1897 an' dis woman

1898 (rubs her leg)

1899 she was talkin' good about it
1900 an' Ah said tuh mahse'f
1901 Ah said 'Why don't dis woman shut huh mouth/'cause
ain't no use in arg'in' wit' dese pe o p l e s
dey don't like somebody/jus' shut yuh mouth
jus' don't say nuthin
dat's what Ah say

WERE THERE A LOT OF BLACK PEOPLE WHO SEEMED TO, TO TRY TO HELP KING?

if/if
K i n g hadn't uh led us
if G o d hadn't uh been here we wouldn't did--
we still be r i d i n' on de back of de bus--
tuh de day
but you know
he knewed he was gwoin
die
he knewed
'tcause he said "Ah have
been tuh de top of de mountain/Ah've seen"--
oh Ah heared dat thang
he said
"Ah've s e e n
de top of de mountain"
"Ah've been tuh de top of de mountain"/he tol' 'em
he's seen
let de people know dat whatevah happen jus' happen--
WELL
did you see de othah night/dat uh
his wife wants dat
what was it she wants
wants some'in'
some kind of history he had
she said he had lef'--
everybody--
some
some of 'em up yondah
as'ed
somewhere
dat she wantin' 'em back down neah
an' dey say--
an' she say he had changed his mind
Ah/wouldn't/let/them/have/it--/dey/say/he/he/hadn't
say he tol' 'em dat
dat dev could have it--
whatevah/hit/was
Ah know you heard 'em talk about it
no longer dan I a s' week
musta been las' week
dey showed huh up deah
up on de court house
up on de court house
an' so
say she say she was so disappointed
1952 say she
1953 she

1954 WHO WAS THAT, CORETTA KING?

1955 yeah
1956 Coretta___
1957 whatevah dis w a s
1958 of Martin Luther King's
1959 she wanted it--
1960 DEY SAY he had donated it
1961 whatevah dis w a s
1962 tuh dat
1963 tuh dat
1964 Ah forget de name of de town__

1965 SOMEWHERE UP NORTH?

1966 um hum
1967 but uh
1968 Lorretta [Corretta]
1969 she wanted it tuh stay down neah
1970 in dat town__

1971 IN ATLANTA?

1972 um hum
1973 in Atlanta

1974 SO YOU'VE SEEN A LOT OF CHANGES FROM THEN TO NOW?

1975 (she puts her right hand under her chin and looks away)
1976 (5 sec pause)

1977 DO YOU THINK IT HAS GOTTEN A WHOLE LOT BETTER?

1978 it's got uh
1979 it's got bettah
1980 but it's still bad
1981 still bad
1982 DEM DEAH KLAN
1983 Ah'm uh lil' fearful of dem
1984 still
1985 -jus'-be-careful

1986 (10 sec pause)
Ain't Nuthin' But Uh Sick Group

1987 ALL THOSE PEOPLE THAT LIVE DOWN HERE, Y'ALL ABOUT THE SAME AGE. NOW, BACK IN THE SIXTIES, DO YOU THINK Y'ALL WOULD HAVE BEEN THE SAME KIND OF FRIENDS THAT YOU ARE NOW IF YOU HAD KNOWN THEM BACK THEN OR DO YOU THINK BECAUSE THEY ARE ELDERLY AND LIVE IN THE SAME PLACE THAT THAT'S WHY YOU'RE FRIENDS?

1988 Ah make uh
1989 friend de same everywhere Ah go
1990 an' Ah'm n i c e--
1991 an' way back in de sixties dey--
1992 you know
1993 Ah went aroun' most of de
1994 whites
1995 dey didn't
1996 make me no difference/dey didn't
1997 Ah didn't see uh whole lot uh

1998 (opens her hands)

1999 HATE
2000 you know
2001 an' 'sentment/Ah didn't
2002 Ah didn't pay 'em no 'ttention
2003 'cause Ah was tryin' tuh be nice tuh everybody/you know
2004 dey didn't have no--
2005 course now
2006 when we went
2007 an' got on de bus
2008 Ah/we did have tuh git in de back
2009 had tuh git in de back
2010 now Ah know that
2011 but
2012 othah den dat
2013 Ah didn't have no trouble

2014 (10 sec pause)

2015 I KNOW CLAUDINE LETS DE WHITE MAN DOWN THERE DO HER HOUSEWORK.

2016 p o lil' fellah
2017 everybody down heah ain't able tuh pull one anothah out de FIRE
2018 dey ain't able tuh do nuthin'__
2019 NANNA
2020 see
2021 she's about dead__
2022 an' Ms. Johnson
2023 she ain't able tuh do nuthin'__
2024 Madeline ain't able tuh do nuthin'__
2025 Mr. Bullock ain't able tuh do nuthin'__

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Mr. Littlejohn ain't able tuh do nuthin'

an' Ah'm not able tuh do nuthin'

(snears up her nose)

Claudine ain't able tuh do nuthin'

dat ol' man is seventy-fo'

he ain't able tuh do nuthin'

an'

Glenn an' his wife ain't able tuh do nuthin'

an' Pauline is sick

an' Ruby's sick

an' dat othah one on de othah end/she ain't able tuh do nuthin'

(giggle)

dis heah's uh

uh sick group down heah

ain't nuthin' but uh

sick group

BUT YOU'RE FRIENDS WITH ALL OF THEM?

all of 'em

(closes her eyes)

every one of 'em

yes Lord

DO YOU LOOK AFTER THEM WHEN THEY'RE SICK? DO YOU CHECK UP ON THEM?

yeah

yeah

Ah check 'em--

not all of 'em but

Ah check on 'em--

Claudine

she call me e v e r y mornin'

she done already tol' me

(in whiny voice)

"Yeah

yo' grandson'll be up deah/Ah won't check on yuh

every mornin'"cause see he's deah"

an' she call me an' she makes me sick/every mornin' 'bout

seven o'clock/ain't no sense in dat tho'

every mornin' seven o'clock

don't care about what Ah wanna do/Ah wanna sleep--

(in whiny voice)
"MA'UH [MARY]
how you doin'?
makes me sick
an'
GUSSIE
she'll wait 'til 'bout 'leven o'clock fo' she call__
an' dat burns me up--
Ah'd Cut De Grass

2072 (15 sec pause)
2073 (referring back to working for the Smiths)
2074 AH CUT DE GRASS

2075 YOU CUT THE GRASS?

2076 Ah'd go out deah an' take dat lawnmower an' cut dat grass
2077 yes Ah would
2078 Ah'd go out deah an' cut de grass
2079 not today
2080 Ah'd never try tuh cut no grass today chile___

2081 WHAT WOULD THEY HAVE DONE IF YOU HADN'T BEEN THERE?

2082 n o
2083 they wouldn't have done
2084 dat's what everybody say___
2085 good Lord
2086 L O R D/Ah say
2087 dey ought tuh have paid me uh thousand dollahs uh week
2088 'cause see Ah stayed--
2089 YOU/HEAH/ME/SAY/AH/STAYED/DEAH/AN'/TOOK/CARE
2090 UH/DEM/CHAPS
2091 an'
2092 an' dey was down yondah in
2093 in SHELBY
2094 an' wouldn't nobody else
2095 nobody else

2096 (folds her arms)

2097 wouldn't nobody else stay deah an--
2098 day an' night an' take care uh dem chil'ren like Ah'd do it
2099 course if de Smith's had uh been rich
2100 den maybe Ah woulda
2101 maybe Ah woulda did some'in'

2102 (10 sec pause)

2103 yessah [sir]
2104 Ah'd go out deah an' cut dat grass
2105 cut dat grass
2106 take de lawnmower an' cut dat grass out deah
2107 in de back
2108 on around out deah
2109 sho' would--
2110 Ah did uh w h o l e lot of work fuh dem
2111 dey oughten nevah forget me
(shakes her head)

DEY OUGHTEN NEVAH
'cause Ah s h o' saved dem uh many time
many uh time

(10 sec pause)

WHAT DID THEY DO AFTER YOU STOPPED WORKING FOR THEM?

(looks at me and begins to giggle)

Ah don't know chile
dey had tuh make it Ah guess

THEY DIDN'T HIRE ANYBODY AFTAH YOU?

yeah dey got somebody
dey got somebody tuh work fuh 'em
an' dey didn't
take out de woman's
social security
social security or some'in' or another
an'
Ms. Smith had tuh pay back uh lot uh dat social security

DID THEY HAVE TO TAKE OUT SOCIAL SECURITY ON YOU?

yeah
Ah thank dey did
but
dey didn't take none out on dat woman
so
Ah thank she went tuh go draw huh lil' social security
say

(giggles)
dey hadn't took none out on 'uh
an' see dey got on tuh Ms. Smith nem
(crosses her legs)
an' dey had tuh pay all dat back
had tuh pay dat
had tuh pay it
you know dey s'pose tuh take out social security on yuh
everywhere you work
-dey-didn't-take-it-out-on-'uh
DID THEY PAY YOU WITH A CHECK OR DID THEY GIVE YOU CASH?

dey paid me wit' uh check
sometime dey pay wit' cash/but
most of de time dey pay me wit' uh check

DEY EVER GIVE YOU A BONUS AT CHRISTMAS OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT?

(abruptly)
naw

(She looks at me and sneers and begins to laugh)

what?^^

(more laughter)

what kind uh BONUS?

(turns her head away from me)

no
no bonus
Ah didn't git no bonus--
dis lady up heah
my friend Lonnie
she been workin' fuh dese peoples uh l o n g/time___
now she work--
she go one day
she go half uh day on Monday
'an' she go half uh day on Friday__
an' dat's uh whole day an' dey gives huh fifty dollahs
yeah
'an' she don't do nuthin' only git ovah deah an'--
if dey gone
she'll go ovah deah an' look around de house
'an'
git de paper
'an' take de paper in
'an' mess around
'an' stay ovah deah uh lil' bit
'an' dey--
she'll tell dem tuh leave huh money
'an' dey leave huh money
she have tuh do like dat if you wanna work
Ah tol' Lonnie
Ah say
"Ah don't blame yuh Lonnie"
Ah say
"As long as you can c r a w l"/Ah/said
"You go on tuh work"
(smiles)

Ah said/"You crawl on"

she earn fifty dollars fuh dat one day

she ain't drawin' enough money

she said she don't be able tuh--

(begins to laugh)

but she say she jus' crawl on an' do it

jus' crawl on

an' crawl on

an' den deah at Chris'mas time dey gives huh uh big bonus

yeah dey's give huh uh bonus

hep/uh/out
Ain't Worth It

HOW MUCH IS THIS MAN PAYING YOU THAT YOU WORK FOR ONCE A WEEK?

dat man ovah deah?
(she looks at me and bursts out in laughter)
twelve dollars

AINT WORTH
AIN'T WORTH GOIN'/BUT AH SAY AH'LL GO AN' GIT ME SOME BREAD AN' MILK

(we both laugh for about 10 seconds)

if it was uh whole lot uh hard work Ah wouldn't go
now if hit was hard work Ah couldn't/Ah wouldn't
Ah wouldn't uh had
but
he'll come an' git me an' take me
Ah go deah an' do two or three lil' thangs
an' rake

(we laugh again)
(5 sec pause)

now you know dey could pay yuh 'bout sixteen or seventeen dollars
or fifteen dollars
yeah dey could
Ah'll go when Ah want to
ef Ah don't Ah don't do it
Ah said de other day
Ah said Ah'm too ti'ed
but Ah'll go ovah deah an' do uh lil' some'in'--
when his wife was deah
Ah'd go two or three HOURS
get home 'fo dark
an' uh
when she come out de hospital
Ah went ovah deah an' stayed
three days

yeah
de lady came out de hospital
an' wa'n't nobody ovah deah wit'/'uh
an she gave me uh hunerd dollars--

back then Ah reckon dey didn't have no money much

see she knowed what work--
what
she knowed what work--
all of 'em know what work was
how high everythang is/you can't
git nuthin'
git nuthin' fuh nuthin'--
now some of dese peoples 'round heah git ten dollars worth of food stamps
now what can yuh git wit' ten dollars^^
now what can yuh git?^^
CHAPTER FOUR
PERFORMING DOMESTIC LABOR: "MAKING DO" AND RE-MAKING

In this chapter, I draw on Mary Rhyne's narrative to identify how she views, constructs and performs the role of a domestic laborer. I compare and contrast her perspective with that of other fictional and nonfictional texts concerned with the African American female laborer in the United States in the twentieth century. In addition to analyzing the narrated events that Mary recounts, I frequently address how Mary performs her labor history in the "present," in the narrative situation. Whereas in the past events, Mary frequently constructs a persona who "makes do" within the site, and in light of the rules of her employer's home, it is by means of her present performance that Mary re-makes her, or the, identity of the domestic laborer. If for no other reason than that Mary speaks--speaks to and about her experiences as a domestic laborer--performance becomes a site where a typically silent, or silenced, part of our history is given voice.

As articulated by my grandmother in her narrative, four key characteristics of her domestic labor experience stand out. First, the work was physically demanding and the pay was low. Second, in lieu of sufficient monetary compensation for the work that she performed, non-monetary forms of "compensation" became part of the employer-employee contract. In addition to receiving material goods (i.e., hand-me-downs), Mary felt that because the Smiths were "very nice people" (line 1106) who treated her with respect, the job was worth keeping. As I discuss below, this exchange of physical labor for "nice" treatment presupposed that Mary would also be "nice" to the Smith family. Based on the experiences that my grandmother recounts, I interpret the term "nice" to reflect a
mutual understanding between the Smiths and my grandmother concerning her position within the home and her relationship to the family. In brief, she was an "outsider-within" (Collins 11). On one level, she was treated as and she claimed the authority (and responsibilities) due an adult member of the family. On another level, her "familial" position and authority was constantly qualified by the fact that she was a paid employee, and she was black. She was clearly not a member of the family and any claim to authority was in deference to that of her employers.

Third, my grandmother took pride in her work. In her narrative, she explicitly highlights her culinary talents and skills. She implies that her knowledge and experience in raising children is and was superior to that of Mrs. Smith. And she boasts of her honesty. According to Mary, because she was "a l w a y s honest," she "COULD A L W A Y S G E T U H J O B" (line 1783).

Lastly, my grandmother's narrative demonstrates how her experiences as a domestic influence her present life and relationships at Tate Terrace. In particular, she identifies herself as part of the "sick group" and yet also as one of its caretakers.

Before I discuss these four characteristics of domestic labor as articulated by and emphasized in Mary's narrative, two points that Mary does not explicitly address warrant attention. The first point is, I think, implied in her narrative. The second point directs attention toward an interpretative perspective that has significantly influenced how I analyze my grandmother's narrative in the chapter.

In general terms, a number of contemporary theories concerned with race, gender, age and class systems enable me to identify and interpret my grandmother and her experiences in terms of her being a
part of an oppressed and victimized group of people. And, in my analysis, I
do at times claim and specifically pursue this perspective. What my
grandmother says in her narrative, however, contradicts this perspective.
In other words, she does not view herself as oppressed. Or, more
specifically, domestic labor was not, for her, an oppression. It was a job--
work that she did, and did well, in order to support and nurture what was
far more important to her and her identity--i.e., her own life, home and
family.

In so saying, I do not intend to inscribe my grandmother as
“unique” within the domestic labor force nor as an icon of motherly
sacrifice. Rather, I intend to point out that my grandmother did not, and
does not, identify herself and what she values solely in terms of domestic
work in terms of a white family and its world view. Indeed, her refusal of
an “oppressed” label suggests a detachment from or an indifference toward
the labor site that may well be more resistant, or resistant in a different
way, than those strategies that grant the “oppressor” the authority she or
he assumes or desires.

In response to the proliferation of “Dinahs,” “Aunt Jemimas,” and
“Mrs. Butterworths” that populate fictional texts and the consumer culture
marketplace, literary and cultural theorists often study and discuss the
domestic worker in terms of the codes and characteristics of the
prototypical “mammy” figure. For instance, in From Mammies to Militants:
Domestics in Black American Literature, Trudier Harris discusses how
African American writers represent the African American domestic
worker. In her analysis, Harris theorizes the complex relationship
between the black domestic and her white employer. In her discussion of
this relationship, Harris directs attention to the many masks worn by the
domestic and the psychological and physical "warfare" that characterizes the employer/employee relationship. And, in *Between Women: Domestics and Their Employers*, Judith Rollins analyzes the employer/employee relationship by means of an ethnographic study in which she hires herself out as a domestic. In her discussion of her experiences in the field and subsequent interviews with other domestics, Rollins foregrounds her study with an historical purview of domestic labor in the United States. Following this discussion, she focuses on the physical, psychological and emotional hardships of domestic labor. Similar to Harris, Rollins also illuminates the multiple and complicated roles performed by both the domestic and her employer. Both Harris and Rollins offer reasons why domestics both claim and disclaim the mammy prototype. In addition to these authors, Patricia Turner offers an historical perspective on the domestic as an icon in popular culture. In *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies*, Turner explains how the mammy figure manifests itself in different forms in consumer culture during specific moments in United States history. The state of race relations within these historical sites, Turner argues, determines and is reflective of the mammy’s cultural value in the consumer marketplace. Given what my grandmother recounts in her narrative, the domestic-as-mammy perspective is an applicable and helpful point of comparison and contrast. At times, what Mary has to say about her experiences as a domestic appears to uphold the surface characteristics common to the "mammy" figure. At other times, however, her performance of the "mammy" appears more complicated. As Franz Fanon might observe, it operates in at least "two dimensions" (17).

Throughout "her" social and cultural history, the domestic-as-mammy has been characterized as a childlike, subservient, promiscuous,
sassy, "handkerchief-head" whose mission in life is to serve her mistress and her mistress' family. According to Patricia Turner, the mammy is happy to make your pancakes and wash your clothes. Her culinary skills are evident in her thick waistline. The mammy figures convey the notion that genuine fulfillment for black women comes not from raising their own children and feeding their own man (black families are rarely featured) but from serving in a white family's kitchen. (25)

The mammy figure referenced by Turner is commonly found in the popular culture marketplace.

The mammy's obliging attitude and behavior are a survivalist strategy and are commonly aligned to the "Uncle Tom" and "Stepin Fetchit" strategies used by slaves to appease the master, used as a way to vent anger in a nonthreatening way, or as a way to disguise an ulterior motive such as escape, murder, or some other form of revenge. The "Stepin Fetchit" persona is characterized by his toothy grin, shuffle and bow and scrape behavior in the presence of whites. His female counterpart is the Aunt Jemima figure who is also characterized by a broad grin and shuffle and who enjoys cooking for the master. Both personas project the image of the "happy-go-lucky" slave content with the status quo. On the other hand, the "Uncle Tom" mammy draws on her Christian-based belief in a better life in the hereafter. She is less overtly affable in the presence of her master/mistress than the "Stepin Fetchit" prototype, but, as Judith Rollins explains, because she acts out her understanding that things aren't fair in an unaggressive manner (i.e., spiritual rather than material based redemption), the mistress/employer does not feel threatened. Judith Rollins writes:

The black who "Uncle Toms" derives pleasure from the performance. This "unaggressive aggressiveness" yields two kinds of psychological rewards: appeasement of guilt and a sense of superiority. If she is a Christian . . . , she believes it is sinful to hate; acting meekly, even lovingly, relieves her of the guilt she feels for
these "conscious and unconscious feelings of hostility and aggression toward white people." Additionally, this role may make the domestic feel superior in these ways: hers will be the final victory in the hereafter; she is demonstrating that she is spiritually superior to her employer; and she enjoys the success of being about to fool whites. (169)

The domestic who embodies the gospel tradition, then, transforms "passive" tenets of Christian faith—e.g., forgiveness and humility—into active forms of resistance.

Similar to slaves who sang spirituals such as "Steal Away," to signal an escape to the North as opposed to a longing for Heaven, domestics also engage in behavior that is duplicitous. Thus their deference to their employer's authority is a performance or, as Harris discusses, a form of mask-wearing:

Mask-wearing as a mode of a survival among Blacks is as old as slavery in this country. A slave who did not tell whites that slavery was enjoyable, Frederick Douglass warned, might find himself sold down the river into the harsh plantations of Alabama or Louisiana. . . . . The professional black domestic, just as she has her heritage of an externally defined sense of place, also has the historical mechanism for dealing with that definition. She can bow and scrape and say "yes'um" until eternity if she separates the circumstances of her existence in the white woman's house from her conception of herself. If she maintains her cultural reference and believes in that reality, then the impositions that are made upon her will have less of a traumatic effect. (16)

The success of the domestic's mask-wearing then, is contingent upon her ability to separate her own concept of herself and her work from the image projected on her.

According to Franz Fanon, these performances or role-playing strategies have always been used by colonized people: "The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question" (17). Fanon further argues that with the mastery of the
oppressor's language the oppressed acquires more power and, in the eyes of the oppressor, more humanity:

Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above the jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (18)

Within the domestic site, the “language” or cultural standards that are elemental to survival are those that commonly characterize the “mammy,” especially an acquiescence toward her employer.

As the domestic's performance becomes more polished, her status within the domestic site rises. Or, in Fanon's terms, as the domestic learns how to play an increasingly more “white-inscribed” role, she acquires more authority, control, and power within the home of the employer. Her performance is, in de Certeau's terms, a “tactic,” whereby she “makes do” within the domestic site:

The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus, it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to keep to itself; at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection; it is a maneuver “within the enemy's field of vision,”... and within enemy territory. ... It operates in isolated actions blow by blow. It takes advantage of “opportunities” and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build its own position, and plan raids. ... It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is guileful ruse. (37; emphasis in original)

Constructed as a “tactic,” the domestic's masking is imposed upon and organized “by the law of a foreign power”—i.e., by the world view that her employer values. Accordingly, in practice, the use of tactics facilitates “opportunities” to temporarily subvert power relations. Because the domestic appears to be abiding by the language and laws of the labor site,
she is permitted, and thereby takes advantage of, more freedom of movement within the site. In short, as she becomes more “white” in appearance, her actions are less monitored.

As Patricia Collins explains, the movement toward and construction of a more “trusting” relationship between the domestic and her employer is frequently satisfying to both parties. On the other hand, because the domestic’s economic livelihood is dependent on her employer’s needs and satisfaction, her position is always subordinate to that of her employer. She is always an “outsider-within.” Collins writes:

Black women’s position in the political economy, particularly ghettoization in domestic work, comprised another contradictory location where economic and political subordination created conditions for black women’s resistance. Domestic work allowed African-American women to see white elites, both actual and aspiring, from perspectives largely obscured from Black men and from these groups themselves. In their white “families,” Black women not only performed domestic duties but frequently formed strong ties with the children they nurtured, and with the employers themselves. On one level this insider relationship was satisfying to all concerned. Accounts of Black domestic workers stress the sense of self-affirmation the women experienced at seeing white power demystified. But on another level these Black women knew that they could never belong to their white “families,” that they were economically exploited workers and thus would remain outsiders. The result was a curious outsider-within stance, a peculiar marginality that stimulated a special Black women’s perspective . . . .

It is this “outsider-within stance,” of course, that allows the domestic the opportunity to say and do things that resist, or temporarily subvert her subordinate position within the household. As de Certeau explains, “[p]ower is bound by its very visibility. In contrast, trickery is possible for the weak” (37). Once the domestic learns the necessary “language” and is a trusted subordinate within her employer’s home, her visibility decreases. Thereby, she is able to covertly insert her own language (e.g., “Signifyin’”) and pursue motives that are not necessarily those of her employer (e.g., acquiring material goods and providing for her own
family). Like the monkey in the “Signifying Monkey” tales, the domestic bides her time until she finds an opportunity to dupe her employer.

This ability to play the “white man’s game” while maintaining and pursuing one’s own “language” or cultural standards and motives, is very like the abilities associated with Esu Elegbara, the Yoruba god of fate who resides at the crossroads.¹ In West African and various African American cultures, Esu is the high priest/priestess of trickery and masking. In the tradition of trickster figures, Esu is a duplicitous boundary-crosser. S/he can talk out of both sides of his/her mouth because s/he has two of them— one on the male side of his head, and the other on the female side of her head. Conceived as an Esu-trickster, the domestic is often a duplicitous, double-mouthed, bi-lingual boundary-crosser as well. To claim and keep her job, she must learn the language and play the role of the “outsider-within” mammy. To maintain her own self-respect, language, and culture, as well as pursue motives that benefit her own material and spiritual life (i.e., her own family, home and values), she frequently, consciously and covertly breaks the rules of the domestic contract. Ella Turner Surry, an informant in John Langston Gwaltney’s collection of African American narratives, Drylongso, reflects on this double-edged game:

I think black people are more reasonable than white people. I don’t know, maybe the word is not “reasonable,” but I think that we are much more clever than they are because we know that we have to play the game. We’ve always had to live two lives—you know, one for them and one for ourselves. Now, the average white person doesn’t know this, but of course, the average black person does. If you sit on any bus coming from the suburbs and hear black people laughing about the fool things they have done at work, you’ll know how many of us are playing this game. (240)

¹ For more on Esu Elegbara, see Gates 3-43.
As Ella Surry's testimony suggests, being a "clever" trickster who can "play the game" is common among domestics, for they see their role-playing as necessary to their survival in the white employer's home.

"Ah Done Ol' An' Broke Down": Physical Hardships and Low Pay of Domestic Work

If nothing else, Mary's narrative defines domestic work as physically and emotionally challenging; hard on the body and the mind. Her tale relates long days of cooking, cleaning the house, washing and ironing clothes, and tending to the children. She also talks about the temporary and long term effects that the labor has had on her body.

In the narrative, grandmother speaks briefly of her chores (lines 73-83; 274-296; 294). She began her workday by preparing breakfast for the Smiths, followed by washing and ironing clothes, cleaning the eight room house, and preparing dinner. In addition to these chores, Mary relates that she was responsible for seeing the children off to school and church (lines 1298-1413). Mary maintained this routine for over 18 years.

The amount and kind of work my grandmother was expected to do in the Smiths' home is characteristic of domestic work in general. In addition, the domestic's daily schedule is frequently filled with more work than can be accomplished in a single day by a single laborer. Washing, ironing and folding a week's laundry for an entire family, preparing three meals, taking care of the children, and completing "special" projects such as cleaning the closets or attic suggests an intense schedule. And, as Mrs. Smith acknowledged in her conversation with me, my grandmother appears to have followed such a schedule: "So, she just got in there and she did the cooking and taking care of the kids and I think running day, morning to night" (Appendix B 255). As a participant in Rollins' study
offers, many women chose to quit rather than meet the demands of the job. Julia Henry recounts:

It was too much work from the beginning. It was two day's work in one. I was washing clothes, ironing. Then I had to do two bathrooms, three bedrooms, vacuum. I'd be so tired. I'd come home. I couldn't go anywhere except to bed. It really wasn't worth it. I told her I couldn't do it all in one day. I finally left. (64)

Although, like Julia Henry, Mary disliked housework that was physically taxing, in “As Long As Ah Stay Black,” she states that she doesn't mind housework “if it ain't lot uh dat ol'/washin' an' ahrnin' (lines 1184-1185). In other words, she did not seem to mind housework, if she did work that was less taxing on her body, or at least did work that she enjoyed such as cooking.

Some of her dislike of housework was due to her having to use poor equipment or, in at least one case, no equipment at all. Rollins confirms in her study that “[d]ilapidated, outdated, or very cheap equipment [forced] the worker to compensate for its ineffectiveness with extra physical effort” (69).

In the episode, “Dey Nevah Was Too Much Trouble,” grandmother contrasts the pleasure she and the Smiths derived from her culinary skills with her displeasure in having to wash all the dishes by hand.

Grandmother says:

dey l o v e d squash casserole
Ah'd fix dat
Ah/was/all/de/time/makin'/som'in'
yeah dey liked what Ah cooked
dey loved mah cookin'--
fo' dey got uh dish washer
Ah washed dishes everyday__--
dey looked
Ms. uh
Ms.
Grandmama say

(in old, decrepit voice)
"Ah 'clare"
say
"one of dese days yuh jus' look out ovah deah"
say
"jus' look in dat windah
she'll be standin' in dat window
washin' dishes" __

(smiles)
Ah thought
not ef dey had uh dishwasher (1533-1554)

While Mrs. Smith's mother, "Ms. Grandmama," romanticizes the image of Mary "standin' in dat window/ washin' dishes," grandmother signifies on the woman by stating "Ah thought/not ef dey had uh dishwasher." Rather than vocalize her dislike of washing dishes by hand to her employers (a complaint for which she might have been reprimanded), she uses indirection (silence) in the narrated event and verbal Signifyin' in the narrative event. Grandmother makes it known, then, that while she enjoyed cooking, the physical labor of having to cook and clean up by hand was not, as "Ms. Grandmama" would like to configure it, an ideal experience. In other words, in her performance of the past events, Mary refuses to adhere to the "Stepin Fetchit"-mammy prototype. She recodes, or clarifies the duplicitous coding of, a happy mammy washing dishes by offering her own contradictory view of the situation.

One aspect of her physical labor that is more difficult for Mary to recode by means of performance is the long term effects that the work has had on her body. Mary's hands are burned and scarred from cooking. She presently experiences severe hip and back pain due to the years that she spent on her feet. In addition, as she explains in the episode, "Oh Dey Nice People," the combined effect of living in a "mill house" and working in the Smiths' house is that she now suffers from arthritis in her legs:
an' de n
an' de n
Ah got
Ah tol' dat Ah had tuh have uh house--
DAT'S/HOW/COME/MY/LEGS/LIKE/DEY/IS
my arthritis
dis is all from de mill houses
dese ain't nuthin' but mill floors
dese ol' cement floors
my legs (837-846)²

Mary's "ol' an broke down" physical condition (line 1060), is not uncommon to domestic workers. Rollins confirms that the older domestics in her study "had various physical ailments associated with their work: lower back problems, varicose veins, and most common, ankle and foot problems" (63).

Until recently, despite her physical condition, Mary continued to do housework for Mrs. Smith and others. Although she contended that she could not do "uh w h o l e lot of hard work," when her "hip [didn't] hurt [her] so bad" (lines 1068-1073) she accommodated the various requests for light housework. The pay she received supplemented her income and, as I discuss later in the chapter, until Mary was physically unable to do so, there appeared to be an implicit assumption on the part of Mrs. Smith that Mary would always be available, and able, to tend to her home. And, although Mary often said it "ain't worth" it (lines 2208), she often chose to fulfill Mrs. Smith's and her other employers' expectations.

One of the most disheartening aspects concerning domestic work is the pay. According to Rollins, between 1960 and 1980, many domestics who worked ten and twelve hour days, were often paid as little as thirty dollars a week. Live-in domestics, who were essentially at work twenty-four hours a

² A mill house is a house made of cinder blocks and usually white washed on the outside. They are called mill houses because they were places where people who worked in cotton and furniture mills lived. There were usually whole communities of mill workers who lived in these kinds of houses.
day, were paid even less (72-79). Marva Woods, a live-in domestic in Rollins' study, tells of how she was paid as little as thirty-seven dollars a week:

I just worked until I got the children to bed. Every Thursday and every other Sunday was off. I got up in the morning, fixed breakfast, got the children ready for school, and carried little John to nursery school. I'd get them all off then start doing my housework: the washing, cleaning up. John would come home about twelve. I'd go and get him and give him his lunch and put him to bed. I would iron or something while he was in bed. When he got up, I'd take him for a walk. Then I'd cook dinner and serve it. After I cleaned up the kitchen and got the children to bed, I was finished. . . . She started me off at thirty-seven dollars a week, then she gave me a raise and I was making fifty-five dollars. (71)

Marva Woods' workday resembles that of Mary's, although Mary did not have fixed days off, and she was paid only twenty-five dollars a week in salary (lines 298-307). Rollins admits that live-in pay is more difficult to measure, due to the non-monetary compensation that the domestic receives, such as meals and a room of her own. Nonetheless, the highest estimates Rollins obtained from agencies in Boston, were one hundred to one hundred seventy-five dollars a week (74-75). Mary also never received monetary benefits, such as vacation pay or bonuses. In fact, when I asked her if she had ever received a bonus, she found my question ridiculous:

DEY EVER GIVE YOU A BONUS AT CHRISTMAS OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT?

(abruptly)

naw

(She looks at me and sneers and begins to laugh)

what?^\^ ^\^ ^\^

(more laughter)

what kind uh BONUS?

(turns her head away from me)
no
no bonus
Ah didn't git no bonus--  (2152-2162)

Although my grandmother did not receive monetary bonuses of any kind, she was and is fortunate that the Smiths deducted social security from her pay. At present, Mary's main source of income is her social security check. According to Mary, the woman who followed her in service at the Smiths' home was not so fortunate:

THEY DIDN'T HIRE ANYBODY AFTAH YOU?

yeah dey got somebody
dey got somebody tuh work fuh 'em
an' dey didn't
take out de woman's
social security
social security or some'in' or another
an'
Ms. Smith had tuh pay back uh lot uh dat social security

... so
Ah thank she went tuh go draw huh lil' social security say

(giggles)
dey hadn't took none out on 'uh
an' see dey got on tuh Ms. Smith nem

(crosses her legs)

an' dey had tuh pay all dat back
had tuh pay dat
had tuh pay it
you know dey s'ppose tuh take out social security on yuh everywhere you work

-dey-didn't-take-it-out-on-'uh  (2121-2129; 2135-2146)

The Smiths' actions are, apparently, commonplace. "In domestic service, non-compliance with Social Security legislation is rampant" Rollins 76).

Throughout her telling of the various stories that dealt with the physical aspects and demands of domestic work, Mary supported her verbal
account with nonverbal performance. Whether by means of closing her eyes, mixing and stirring “imaginary” ingredients, or pointing to parts of her body, Mary uses her body in ways that are discursive, in ways that paint a portrait of her life as a domestic as she sees it. Moreover, her incorporation of the body provides the interpreter of her narrative with images—however fleeting—that facilitate a point of entry into the performance and domestic sites of narration.

Most commonly, she used repetitive and rhythmic physical movements to communicate the work that she did. On the one hand, Mary’s repeating of certain actions served as a metaphor for what she viewed as redundant work. On the other hand, her use of repetition directly denoted, or illustrated, the fact that the work was repetitious. Not only did it effect a repetitive sensation or quality; it was repetitive.

In light of Paul Eckman and Wallace Friesen’s five categories of body movement, in her performance Mary made most use of what the authors term to be “illustrators” and, more specifically, “batons” (68). According to Eckman and Friesen, illustrators “are directly tied to speech, serving to illustrate what is being said verbally” (68). They also “repeat, substitute, contradict or augment the information provided verbally” (69). Batons accent or emphasize a particular word or phrase (68).

3 In their essay, “The Repertoire of Nonverbal Behavior: Categories, Origins, Usage, and Coding,” Paul Eckman and Wallace Friesen present five categories of body movement: emblems, illustrators, affect displays, regulators, and adapters. These nonverbal communication categories all share an interrelationship with verbal communication, but to different degrees. Eckman and Friesen discern six sub-categories of illustrators, all of which serve an iconic function. These include “batons,” which accent or emphasize a particular word or phrase; “deictic movements” which refer to pointing to present objects; “kinetographs,” movements, that depict bodily actions; and “pictographs,” which draw a picture of their referent (68-69).
For example, in “Dey Didn’t Pay Nuthin” (lines 282-289), Mary uses nonverbal batons in repetition to augment or accent her repetitive, verbal listing of the chores. Each time she says “an’ den Ah’d fix,” her hands raise up, and on the word that follows, whether it be “dinnah” or “suppah,” her hands fall and in a prancing motion. The up and down physical movement and accentuation of the words produce, as is characteristic of batons, a “rhythmic-iconic coding” (70). They do not convey word content as much as they convey rhythmic content—i.e., the repetitive rhythm of the work.

Repetition and rhythm are commonplace characteristics of African and African American music and other vernacular forms. They also reflect, as African poet and Négritude scholar Léopold Senghor suggests, an African and African American world view:

What is rhythm? It is the architecture of being, the internal dynamic which confers form, the system of waves given off towards the Other, the pure expression of the life-force. It is the vibrating shock, the power which through the sense seizes at the roots of our being. It finds expression through the most material and sensuous media . . . line, surface, colour, volume in architecture, sculpture and painting, accent in poetry and music, movement in the dance. . . . Rhythm gives it [speech] the fulness of power and transforms it into the Word. This is the Word of God, the rhythmic speech which created the world. (87)

As Senghor describes, rhythm constitutes a world view that affects the artistic expression of people of African descent. In the United States, African American music such as rap, blues, and gospel music, and certain speech practices such as sermons, toasts, and Signifyin’, directly relate to cultural experience. And this experience is or embodies rhythm.

Given that, when my grandmother draws on certain rhythms in her performed narrative, she is drawing on her own experiential knowledge as well as the aesthetic experience of her culture. Her repetitive nonverbals
accent the work and express a deeper rhythm, a rhythm that creates, orders, and transforms her world.

According to Soyini Madison, in the Africanist notion of rhythm, rhythm is a mode of discourse (“Rhythm” 11-12). And, “Just as ‘subjugated knowledge’ operates against and outside any particular discursive formation, there is more than one kind of rhythm—rhythms that discipline, control, reproduce an order, and rhythms that subvert, resist, and enact a different order” (Foucault 223). Viewed as a discourse with varying modalities, my grandmother’s use of repetitive rhythm operates in a bi-directional manner. She physically embodies the “Word” in order to relive her life in performance and to illustrate the nature of her work as a domestic.

In her performance, Mary frequently pointed to her body to emphasize a particular verbal point. In other words, she used “deictic” illustrators to direct attention toward a present “object,” which was, in this case, her corporeal body (Eckman & Friesen 68). In the episode, “Dey Didn’t Pay Nuthin’,” grandmother relates how she received third degree burns on her hand from a grease fire in the Smiths’ kitchen. She recalls:

dey/put/me/in/de/hospital
dey took ca'uh of d a t an'
dem s c a r s deah

(points to her left hand and makes a circling motion)

Ah got all dat burned off
a l l dat deah
all dat was cooked/all dat just cooked
so
it took me uh l o n g time tuh get up
so

dey had tuh take ca'uh of all uh dat (334-344)
By pointing to the scars on her hand, grandmother supports the fact that she was burned. The deictic illustration lends credibility to her verbal account. The scars also mark her body as an historical text, a discursive site where the past experience is retold in and through the present performance. As Stern and Henderson explain, “the body creates language and participates in its performance simultaneously” (321).

In this case, the body language and its performance produces duplicitous meanings. The scars reference the labor site, her work and its damaging effect. The past labor site permanently claims, marks and disfigures the body. Simultaneously, her public display of the scars speaks against, or defiles, the domestic site. In Bakhtin's terms, her “grotesque” body degrades any reading of the past site (and her body) that would tend toward a “high, spiritual, ideal, abstract” conception of them (Rabelais 19). Although “the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation,” according to Bakhtin, degradation “is always conceiving” (19, 21). It works to reposition the high and the ideal in “contact with [the] earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time” (21). As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White remind us: “The grotesque physical body is invoked both defensively and offensively because it is not simply a powerful image but fundamentally constitutive of the categorical sets through which we live and make sense of the world” (23). In this case, grandmother shows her scars to defend her account, as if to say “look what the work did to me.” She took the offense in that her physical display criticizes the past event. By means of performance, then, the performer rewrites her body. She assigns it new or additional meanings. The meanings do not idealize the body. Indeed, it is precisely because the body itself is not idealized that the past (her history as domestic) cannot be
idealized either. Performance permits Mary to show the grotesque body as the "body in the act of becoming." "The grotesque body" continually builds and creates another body" (Rabelais 317).

Authorizing Power: "Like One of the Family"

Although Mary never complained to the Smiths about the low pay that she received for the amount of work that she did, she was well aware of the inequity. She conscious aware of her hard work as well as her indispensability. When I asked her, "What would they have done if you hadn't been there?," she gave the following response:

no
they wouldn't have done
dat's what everybody say--
good Lord
LORD/Ah say
dey oughta have paid me uh thousand dollahs uh week
'cause see Ah stayed--
YOU/HEAH/ME/SAY/AH/STAYED/DEAH/AN'/TOOK/CARE/UH/DEM/CHAPS
an'
an' dey was down yondah in
in SHELBY
an' wouldn't nobody else
nobody else
(fold her arms)

wouldn't nobody else stay deah an--
day an' night an' take care uh dem chil'ren like Ah'd do it

Ah did uh whole lot of work fuh dem
dey oughten nevah forget me

(shakes her head)

DEY OUGHTEN NEVAH
'cause Ah s h o' saved dem uh many time

many uh time (2082-2098; 2110-2115)
In lieu of monetary compensation, Mary expects that "dey oughten nevah forget me . . . DEY OUGHTEN NEVAH." And, in her comments to me, Mrs.
Smith clearly has not forgotten Mary (or as Mrs. Smith refers to her, "Daisy"). Mrs. Smith appears to realize the quality of Mary's service to her when she reflects, "Everybody says, 'Oh we won't have another Daisy. You won't find another Daisy'" (Appendix B 257).

In the present, then, being remembered for her years of service appears important to Mary. In the past, being treated in a "nice" way by her employers appears to compensate for the "hard work" (line 1068). As Rollins confirms, in lieu of monetary compensation, "domestics considered the treatment they received from employers the most important aspect of the work" (132).

In the following section, I discuss the various episodes in Mary's narrative that deal with what appears to me to be a more subjective component of the domestic contract, as compared to the hard work/low pay characteristic. In brief, I discuss the unwritten interpersonal contract that Mary continually alludes to in her narrative. I describe what constitutes this contract and how Mary adhered, or not, to the unstated expectations.

As discussed in the former section, for twenty-five dollars a week Mrs. Smith expected Mary to prepare three meals, clean her eight room home and provide care for the four children. For reasons that seem inadequate, Mrs. Smith offered Mary other non-monetary forms of compensation: gifts and hand-me-downs, her own bedroom, free movement through the house, a place at the dinner table.

When Mrs. Smith cleaned out her closets or garage, my grandmother usually had first choice of the clothes or items she wanted. She would bring these home to her children and grandchildren. Mary received items such as televisions, arm chairs, lamps, coffee tables and clothes. After the
family took what they wanted, my grandmother shared the leftovers with our neighbors. This practice went on for years and saved my mother and her siblings a considerable amount of money. Moreover, it was a way for my grandmother to provide for her family. Though she could not always be there for them physically or emotionally, she was materially and financially supportive of her own children.

Mary was also permitted to move about the Smiths' home as she pleased. Even when the Smiths were home, grandmother had free reign in the house. Another uncommon amenity permitted Mary was her own bedroom, located on the same floor as the children's. And unlike most domestics, she also ate in the dining room with her employers. One of her fondest memories is having Christmas dinner with the Smiths. During that memory, she recalls where everyone sat, including herself:

den
everybody had tuh come in the dining room

(spreads her arms to show the size of the table)

round de big family table
everybody be sittin' deah
'round dat table
so
Dr. Niles

(she points to each place each person would be around the table)

he'd be right heah at dis end
an' Ah'd be right heah
Ms. Smith would be right deah
Mr. Smith would be right deah
an' de othah chil'ren 'round
everybody sittin' 'round dat table
an' Dr. Niles would
would as'

(closes her eyes)

de blessin'
he would as' one of de sweetes' blessin's_
so
everybody would eat

Christmas
an' Ah'd he'p tuh cook (1235-1258)

In relation to other accounts offered in other studies, the image my grandmother paints here is not a common one. For example, most domestics were allowed only to serve food, but never to sit down to eat with their employers. Katzman states that “No black could demand to use the front door or eat with the family; Southern racial etiquette ruled these out as areas of legitimate conflict” (195). Moreover, many domestics are not permitted to move about the house freely and, instead, are relegated to the kitchen. Because the kitchen is where she does much of her work, most domestics spend an inordinate amount of time there and are expected to remain there even when they are not on duty. Relegating servants to the kitchen was common. Harris writes:

A . . . division is apparent within the home of the white woman for whom the black woman works. The most comfortable realm of existence is the kitchen; it becomes the black town, the nigger room of the white house. The black woman cleans the living room or the dining room or the bedroom or the bathroom and retires to the kitchen. She sits in the kitchen when she has time for sitting and there requests that she go to other parts of the house . . . .

Since work must be done, making the kitchen the nigger room is not the ultimate compromise for the white woman. After all, she, her husband, or her children can psychologically reclaim the territory at any moment. When the white woman enters the kitchen and the black woman is present, physical space is dominated by psychological space. The black woman must grovel in her own “house,” or at least recognize that she cannot set the rules even there. (15; emphasis in original)

Thus, generally the kitchen is the designated “place” for domestic workers, where their employers exert physical as well as psychological control.

Another anomalous “perk” permitted grandmother and not most domestics is a “room of her own.” Unlike grandmother's, most live-in domestics' sleeping arrangements range from “a third-story attic filled
with worn out family furniture," to a room "with hardly more space than a closet," to no room at all (Katzman 108).

In my interview with Mrs. Smith, she offers that, prior to Mary's employ, she (Mrs. Smith) was looking for "a good mammy." "I wants me a real mammy," she said (Appendix B 254). And because Mary worked for Mrs. Smith for eighteen years, apparently Mary fulfilled Mrs. Smith's requirements.

In light of what my grandmother recounts, Mrs. Smith expected a "real mammy" to do a large amount of work for little pay. To compensate, Mrs. Smith rewarded "Daisy" with material gifts and hand-me-downs, a nice room, free reign of the house, and a seat at the family dinner table. In other words, for Mrs. Smith, a "real mammy" is or becomes "one of the family." And this interpersonal "reward" appears to be primary to the contract that Mrs. Smith and Mary "negotiated."

In so saying, I do not intend to inscribe Mrs. Smith as a lone agent. Her personalization of the economic (and political) aspects of domestic work was, and is, common to our mass culture. Regardless of race or gender, people who do housework and/or care for children are not paid well. The "domestication" of domestic work functions to contain the labor in the homesite. Thereby, its economic operations are able to be privatized, disassociated from the public marketplace and its regulations. As a result, and throughout our social history, women (and, more recently, men) who work in the home are either not paid or paid very little. As with the contract agreed upon by Mrs. Smith and Mary, personalized forms of compensation are substituted for equitable pay (e.g., "gifts" from the breadwinner, unmonitored time in the home, and the understanding that tending to children is self-fulfilling in itself).
Of course, many domestic workers find non-monetary forms of compensation inadequate. As Odette Harris explains, being told that “you're one of the family” does not actually mean that you're one of the family, nor does it sufficiently compensate for the hard work and low wages. She explains:

They gave you things like clothes and pieces of furniture. They always like to change things in their house so they give the old things to you. But you never think of how many hours of your days are being spent. She [the forty-five-year-old employer] felt if she gave me things, she wouldn't have to pay too much. . . . They give you lots of things. They say you're one of the family and you start believing it. You hear it so much. But inside you, you know there's something missing. She treated me very well, exceptionally well. That's part of the way they keep you. They have no choice because you make life easier for them. They're not losing by giving you “darling” and “sweetheart.” They're not losing anything. (Rollins 174)

According to Rollins, Odette Harris' view exemplifies the ambivalence that many domestics have toward their employers' pleasantries. Rollins contends that the dual “outsider-within” position in which domestics often find themselves is a form of psychological exploitation. She writes:

What might appear to be the basis of a more humane, less alienating work arrangement allows for a level of psychological exploitation unknown in other occupations. The typical employer extracts more than labor. . . . The personality of the worker and the kinds of relationships employers were able to establish with them were as or more important considerations. (156)

According to Rollins, the benefit of such psychological exploitation is that it affords “the employers the self-enhancing satisfaction that emanate from having the presence of an inferior and validating the employers' lifestyle, ideology, and social world, from their familial interrelations to the economically and racially stratified system in which they live” (156).

As regards the interpersonal contract arranged between the employer and employee, Rollins' comments suggest that benevolence (being nice) compensates for low pay, and it is expected to be repaid in that
the domestic is to fulfill the "outsider-within," "family-not family" role as given.

The contradictions inherent to this role were, in the 1960s, apparent on the broader social-cultural level as well. As grandmother relates in lines 2004-2009 of her narrative, she had to ride in the back of the bus when using public transportation and, yet, it was commonplace for her to bathe the Smith children. As the Smiths' maid or nanny, she entered public places that were otherwise barred to her. As Katzman details, the social restrictions on blacks, as compared to blacks-as-servants, was not uncommon in the South—and, I suspect, in other regions of the country as well. Katzman writes:

Black household workers could enter a South forbidden to other blacks or even to them when they were not working. Some Southern parks displayed such signs as "No negroes allowed on these grounds except as servants."

These seemingly contradictory attitudes reflected a basic duality in the Southern white's attitude concerning blacks. White Southerners broadcast their ideas about the inferiority and dependency of blacks, yet they recognized white dependence upon black labor and service. Negro women were called childish and incompetent, yet they reared Southern white children. (188-189)

In response to the "mammy" contract that I have discussed above, grandmother appears to have variously adhered to it. At times, her adherence appears genuine. She played the role in goodwill and/or out of pride in doing "GOOD HONES' HARD WORK" (line 1100). Other times, she "made do." She covertly found a way to trick the contract in order to service her own needs or desires.

In the episode, "Dey Nevah Was Too Much Trouble," Mary conforms to the prototypical mammy figure in that she constructs an image of herself as a caretaker who loved tending to her white charges. She insists that the children were "nevah . . . too much trouble" (line 1306), although elsewhere in the narrative Jimmy appears to have been quite a handful
The youngest child, Carol, is clearly her favorite and, as the following excerpt suggests, leaving Carol was very difficult for Mary:

Ca'uh was uh different story/she was so sweet

(closes her eyes)

Ah jus'
Lord Ah jus' love dat lil' ol' youngin' tuh death
Ah hated tuh leave--
Ah had tuh cry one day
Ah/jus'/hated/tuh/leave/Ca'uh
Ah jus' had got attached tuh Ca'uh 'cause she was jus' uh sweet lil' ol' youngin' (1317-1325)

Mary's seeming adoration of Carol and her general coddling attitude toward the other children are not uncommon to domestics, real or fictional. In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, for example, the character Pauline Breedlove dotes on her employer's little girl very like Mary fawns over Carol when Carol wears the hat "wit' one of dem lil' ribbons in it" to church (lines 1404-1407). Morrison writes:

When [Pauline] bathed the little Fisher girl, it was in a porcelain tub with silvery taps running infinite quantities of hot, clear water. She dried her in fluffy white towels and put her in cuddly night clothes. Then she brushed the yellow hair, enjoying the roll and slip of it between her fingers. No zinc tub, no buckets of stove-heated water, no flaky, stiff, grayish towels washed in a kitchen sink, dried in a dusty backyard, no tangled black puffs of rough wool to comb. (100-101)

Pauline's love and affection for her employer's child, however, is often to the neglect and ill-treatment of her own children. In one scene, Pauline's children visit her at her employer's home. Rather than embrace them, she treats them as if they were strangers and makes them wait at the kitchen door while she gathers the day's wash. While she is away, the children enter the kitchen and mistakenly drop a pie on the floor. When Pauline returns and sees the mess, she physically punishes her daughter Pecola,
and pampers her employer's child whose “little pink dress” got spotted when the pie dropped:

In one gallop she was on Pecola, and with the back of her hand knocked her to the floor. Pecola slid in the pie juice, one leg folding under her. Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me [Claudia] by implication

“Crazy fool . . . my floor, mess . . . look what you . . . work . . . get out now that . . . crazy . . . my floor, my floor . . . my floor.” . . .

The little girl in pink started to cry. Mrs. Breedlove turned to her. “Hush, baby, hush. Come here. Oh, Lord, look at your dress. Don't cry no more. Polly will change it.” She went to the sink and turned the tap water on a fresh towel. Over her shoulder she spit out words to us like rotten pieces of apple. “Pick up that wash and get on out of here, so I can get this mess cleaned up.” (86-87)

Concerned more with the floor and the little white girl, Pauline ignores the burns on her own child and hurts her even more by slapping her. In doing so, Pauline perpetuates the stereotype of the overprotective mammy whose primary concern is the welfare of her white employer's children. As Harris observes, Pauline “becomes another example of the maid who cannot effect an acceptable compromise between the kind of work she does and the person she is” (Harris 62).

Although grandmother pampered the Smith children and was unable to spend the amount of time she would have liked with her own children, she did not to my knowledge physically abuse her children. Rather, to compensate for the lack of time she made sure that they were provided for in other ways. She used her leverage with the Smiths to make her children's lives more comfortable. One way that she did this was by accepting the “gifts,” or hand-me-downs, that her employers gave her.

Although gift-giving was and is a common practice among employers, many domestics resent receiving their employers' leftovers. A domestic interviewed in Rollins' study stated:

This woman was always giving me her old size five-and-a-half shoes. I wear an eight! But my mother always said, and she did domestic
work for years, she said, "No matter what they give you, you take it
because one day they're going to give you something worth having." And I dragged those damned five-and-a-half double A shoes home! I'd give them to somebody else or throw them away. (190; emphasis in original)

My grandmother's view toward the Smiths' hand-me-downs was similar to that of the speaker's mother in the above quote.

Although due in part to my grandmother's belief in the Biblical saying, "Waste not, want not," grandmother's acceptance of the Smiths' leftovers speaks to her need to, in some way, substantiate her income. To do so, she played the "outsider-within" role as contracted: she gratefully accepted the "gifts" from her employers. Then, when with her own family, she would turn her attention to what to do with what were, in actuality, "leftovers."

For instance, I recall that my first "London Fog" jacket was a discard from Eddie, the Smiths' oldest son. Although I accepted the jacket, I felt uncomfortable wearing it because his name, "Eddie," was monogrammed in the inside. To appease both me and "waste not," my mother blotted out the name with a black marker. The jacket became "mine" and I wore it with pride.

In the episode, "Dat's Uh Nice Piece Uh Furniture," my grandmother relates how my mother, in this case, received a broken-down television from one of her old employers. Despite my brother's protestations, and admonishments to "set/it/on/out/deah/on/de/road" (line 1721), my mother and my grandmother felt that the television was salvageable. Even if the television was too expensive to be repaired, both my grandmother and mother contended that it would make a "nice piece uh furniture," which it indeed became (lines 1728-1736).
In another episode, "Oh Dey Nice People" (lines 836-903), grandmother explains how she informed the Smiths that if she could not find a house with wood floors, she could not work for them any longer. Her rationale was that the apartment in which she lived had cement floors which hurt her legs. In this case, grandmother's explanation disguised an additional motive. Namely, at the time, she had two sons who lived in poor housing conditions and were struggling with rent. They needed a better and cheaper place to live. Grandmother was aware that the Smiths were real estate agents who owned several houses in the poor black neighborhood where she and mother lived. Behind my mother's apartment was a small white house with wood floors that the Smiths owned. So, my grandmother prodded the Smiths into giving her the house for herself which she, in turn, shared with her sons. By means of indirectness, then, my grandmother got her wood floors; my uncles, a better place to live; and, the Smiths held on to their "Daisy" by helping her out.

Although these gifts may inscribe the dominant/subordinate relationship between the employer and her employee in terms of the gift-giving being a "statement to the servant of what kinds of material goods the employer considers appropriate for her" (Rollins 193), therein also lies the potential for the recipient to reassign meaning to the gifts, and motive to their acceptance. As de Certeau might observe, domestics "have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations" (18). To survive in their employer's household, they have to accept the gifts and act grateful. It is part of the established "performance" (Rollins 194). And yet, as is the case with most bricoleurs, there is "a pleasure in getting around the rules of constraining space" (de Certeau 18)—in reshaping the leftovers into something new and for a different purpose.
Another aspect of "making do" within the constraining space of the "mammy" contract surfaces in Mary's narrative when she relates occurrences where she chose to defer, or not, to authority. As Erving Goffman defines it, deference is ceremonious attitude "which functions as a symbolic means by which appreciation is regularly conveyed to the recipient" ("Nature" 473). But between those in an unequal relationship, it is considered "as something a subordinate owes to his superordinate" ("Nature" 479). The consequence of deferential treatment in unequal relationships is that the behavior affirms the inequality between the superordinate and the subordinate. According to Goffman, deferential behavior appears in various forms such as linguistic and gestural expressions, spatial relations, task-embeddedness, avoidance and presentational rituals ("Nature" 477, 481). Rollins observes:

Gestural and task-embedded deference, in the case of domestic servants, may be found in the subservient demeanor and attitude toward tasks. . . . . [The domestic] is further asked to convey a certain attitude toward the work: that she is more than willing to undertake assigned tasks and she takes pleasure in serving. Employers not only want work done efficiently, they want domestics to project a particular attitude toward them (the employers) and the work. (167-168)

Linguistic deference and avoidance rituals are often related in that to avoid showing displeasure a domestic will often choose not to speak—e.g., Mary contends that she and the Smiths "nevah had uh cross word" (line 392). "Keeping quiet," however is a part of the "mammy" prototype. Katzman observes:

[the mammy is] invisible and silent, responsive to demands but deaf to gossip, household chatter, and conflicts, attentive to the needs of mistress and master but blind to their faults, sensitive to the moods and whims of those around [her] but undemanding of family warmth, love, or security. (188)

On the other hand, some domestics, like the fictional character, Mildred, in Alice Childress' Like One of the Family, do not defer to their
employers by remaining silent. In the title story, "Like One of the Family,"
Mildred's employer, Mrs. C, tells a visitor that Mildred is like one of the
family. Mildred hears her remark and after the visitor leaves, Mildred
"speaks up," and directly to her employer:

"In the first place, you do not love me; you may be fond of me, but
that is all. . . . In the second place, I am not just like one of the
family at all! The family eats in the dining room and I eat in the
kitchen. Your mama borrows your lace tablecloth for her company
and your son entertains his friends in your parlor, your daughter
takes her afternoon nap on the living room couch and the puppy
sleeps on your satin spread . . . and whenever your husband gets
tired of something you are talkin' about he says, 'Oh, for Pete's sake,
forget it. . . .' So you can see I am not just like one of the family.
"Now for another thing, I do not just adore your little Carol. I
think she is a likable child, but she is also fresh and sassy. I know
you call it "uninhibited" and that is the way you want your child to
be, but luckily my mother taught me some inhibitions or else I would
smack little Carol once in a while when she's talkin' to you like
you're a dog, but as it is I just laugh it off the way you do because she
is your child and I am not like one of the family. (2; emphasis in
original)

In this case, Mildred refuses to play the role of the docile mammy who
speaks only when spoken to. And yet, Mildred's claim to authority is
temporary and sporadic. She finds she cannot discipline the children
because the children expect her to defer to Mrs. C and, because Mrs. C
rarely disciplines the children, Mildred finds herself in a catch-22. So it
appears, Mildred is able to authorize her own image, but not use that image
(regardless of her responsibilities) to exert control over others.

Even though grandmother had some of the privileges denied
Mildred, she too recognized the paradox of being granted such privileges in
terms of who maintained social and economic power in the relationship.
And though it is true that she rarely "had uh cross word" with the Smiths,
there were several instances when she did act as if she were like one of the
family.
The episode "Y'all Ain't Havin' No Party," is an example of how my grandmother establishes her authority in the past narrated event as well as the narrative site, but it is also an example of the contradictions of her self-representation. Her performance of this particular story both affirms and subverts her own authority as she concedes near the end of the episode that it is the Smiths who actually have the final word when it comes to disciplining their children. But there is also irony in my grandmother's concession in that even though she feels that the Smiths have the ultimate authority in their children's lives, it is actually my grandmother to whom the children respond and for whom they have more respect.

WELL
dey wanted tuh have uh
party
dis night
Saturday night--
mother/nem/wa'n't/neah--
dey git so mad at me til dey didn't know what tuh do/wanted tuh have
uh p a r t y
Ah said
"Y'all ain't havin' no party heah."
Ah said
"Your mother an' daddy tol' me tuh stay heah an' take ca'uh uh y'all
an' take care of dis house."/an'
Ah said
"I'm gonna do it."

(In a whiny voice)
"You can go tuhnite."
Ah said
"Ah ain't goin' nowhere!"--

(shakes her head)
Ah said
"Ah ain't goin' nowhere."
Oh dey'd get so mad at me dey didn't know what tuh do/Ah said
"Ah ain't goin' nowhere"/an' Ah said
"An' y'all ain't havin' no party in heah either."

(emphatically)
Ah said
"Y'all ain't havin' no party."
Dey'd get so mad at me dey'd didn't know what tuh do__. 

(15 sec pause)
(abruptly in whiny voice)

"Daisy won't let us do nuthin""
"Don't want us tuh do nuthin""
Ah said
"YOU AIN'T GONNA DO IT WHILE AH'M HEAH.
wait til' your mama an' daddy come home."— (190-225)

As this excerpt demonstrates, Mary both disclaims and defers her authority in the past narrated event. On the one hand, she claims authority by stating that “YOU AIN'T GONNA DO WHILE AH'M HEAH.” On the other hand, she undermines her authority when she tells them to “wait til' your mama an' daddy come home.” Thus her claim to authority vacillates between claiming and deferring. Like that of a trickster, Mary's verbal "play" in the past events “makes fun of people, things, ideas, ideologies, institutions, and structures; it is partly a mocker as well as mimic and a tease, arousing hope, desire, or curiosity without always giving satisfaction” (Turner, Anthropology 168). Thereby, Mary fashions herself as a trickster or joker whose authority is, in Turner’s words, “recalcitrant to localization, to placement, to fixation” (Anthropology 168). According to Turner, the "elusive" nature of verbal play is what gives it subversive potential, for verbal plays can “deceive, betray, beguile, delude . . ., dupe, hoodwink, bamboozle, and gull” (Anthropology 169). Grandmother's deliberate gaming in the past event, then, is but one way that she establishes her authority in the present performance event.

In the above excerpt and, in addition to verbal gaming, Mary calls upon aesthetic modes of communication such as placing emphasis on certain words, repeating a particular phrase, and attributing different voices to the Smith children to claim her authority in the present
performance event. Grandmother repeats the phrase, "Dey'd git so mad at me til dey didn't know what tuh to do," three times in this passage, emphasizing that the children had no choice but to obey her, despite how angry they were with her. Moreover, I observed the satisfaction she seemed to get from knowing that the children were under her control, for when she repeated this line, she would smirk or grin at the memory. Later, she combines repetition with the stress of certain words to show her impudence and unwillingness to change her mind with regard to the party, as in the lines: "An' y'all ain't havin' no party in heah either" and "Y'all ain't havin' no party." Finally, grandmother constructs voices of the children that undermine their rationale for having a party. On the other hand, her strong, emphatic, and authoritative voice substantiates and confirms her authority and control. Grandmother contrasts the children's whiny, aggravating voices in the lines “Daisy won't let us do nuthin'”/"Don't want us tuh do nuthin'," with her own emphatic voice: "YOU AIN'T GONNA DO IT WHILE AH'M HEAH." She increases her volume in order to construct herself as even more authoritative.

Mary's use of different voices is an instance of "reported speech." In other words, when a person "speaks" the discourse attributed to someone else, the discourse no longer "belongs" to the original speaker. In the deepest sense, the words have ceased to be those of the speaker to whom they are attributed, having been appropriated by the speaker who is speaking them (Tannen 101). My grandmother's appropriation of the words and voices of the children allows her more freedom to manipulate their discourse. Whether or not her voice was authoritative and the children's voices whiny and annoying in the original incident,
grandmother devises a performance strategy in the telling of the narrative
that redeems her power in the present performance site.

In another episode having to deal with disciplining the children,
Mary again claims and disclaims her authority. The event she relates
concerns Jimmy, the youngest son, who has been out at night riding his
motorcycle, apparently in a reckless manner:

so
de police brought Jimmy in
an' heah come Jimmy
an' he started cryin'__

(closes her eyes and shakes her head)

he started cryin'__
Ah said
"Jimmy^"
Ah said
"Now Ah tol' you not to go out uh dis yard."
Ah said
"Now you been WAY OVAH YONDAH ON DE HIGHWAY WIT DAT
MOTORBIKE."
Ah said
"Now you know bettah than th a t."
he was just uh cryin'__/he just cried__
so
de police brought 'im on
an' Ah said,
"Your/mothah/an'/fathah'/gwoin/git/you/boy"__
dat was tuh scare 'im up (184-188)

In her performance, Mary recreates how complex her position as an
authority figure was in this family. To establish her authority in the past
event, she sits erect and increases her volume when she scolds, "Now you
been WAY OVAH YONDAH ON DE HIGHWAY WIT DAT MOTORBIKE."
Then, to
appeal to Jimmy's sense of right and wrong, she decreases her volume and
draws out the last word of the line, "'Now you know bettah than th a t.'"
After she recreates the incident and dialogue, she comments on how "he
was just uh cryin'/he just cried__," which indicates, to her and to her
audience, that her scolding was effective. Nevertheless, Mary undercuts
her own authority and reinforces the Smiths' when she warns Jimmy, "Your/mothah/an'/fathah/gwoin/git/you/boy'," after which she evaluates, "dat was tuh scare 'im up." Her commentary indicates that, for her, the Smiths are the final authority. But Mary's actions here are double-edged. On the one hand, we may view what she says as deference. On the other, however, we may view it as a tactic in that she obeys the rules of authority in the household and, thereby, dismisses herself as the parental figure. She is not the parent, and therefore refuses to bear the burden of ultimate responsibility by deferring and referring it to the "real" parents.

At the very end of this episode, grandmother's performance style shifts from enthusiasm to despondency. After I ask the question, "Did they listen to you pretty well?," my grandmother responds nonverbally with a head nod (line 249) and then with a faint whisper, "yeah" (line 250). It is at this point that Mary concedes that the only reason the children listened to her was because "dey mutha' an' dey fatha' allowed 'em to" (line 253). In other words, she feels that if the Smiths had not made sure that the children listened to her, the children would have done as they pleased. She even points out that perhaps the Smiths instructed the children to obey her only until they were of a certain age, for "uh-numbah-uh-yeahs" (line 255). She mumbles this statement and does not elaborate on its meaning, but the subtext suggests that she lost control of the children at one time or another.

This particular episode reveals the ambiguities inherent in the role Mary was expected to play as regards caring for the children. In brief, she was and was not authorized to be the authority figure. The episode also reveals contradictory shifts in the performer's attitude toward the event.
she tells. At first, her performance is lively and energetic as she constructs herself as a powerful person to whom the children listen and over whom she asserts control. Near the end of the episode however, she is reserved as she recognizes the limits of her authority within the domestic site.

Harris writes:

Any black woman who works as a maid . . . probably understands the social, psychological, and historical forces which shape a reaction to her. She understands how she must maneuver in the home of the white family in order to salvage what portion of dignity she can, to resist depersonalization and dehumanization, and to exert a small amount of control within the confined space. To survive with dignity, she must learn that, although they may be constrained, her responses need not be pedestrian. (13-14)

Harris' point relates specifically to the story Mary recounts regarding Mr. Smith leaving his family. In "We Just All One Family," grandmother recalls a time when a drunken Mr. Smith threatens to leave his wife and children. According to Mary, it is she who takes charge of the situation and persuades Mr. Smith to stay. In so doing, Mary's responses are not in the least "pedestrian." In this particular instance, she chooses not to defer to the standard code of conduct as regards authority. Too, she appears to remove the "mammy" mask completely. She does not play the mammy's prototypical exterior qualities nor does she appear to have a covert agenda or ulterior motive. In this case, she constructs herself as an authority figure, whose agenda seems to be to help the Smith family through a serious crisis. Mary recalls:

he came in deah drankin' one time an' said he was gwoin leave
he went in neah an' got de suitcases
(point to the floor)

an' he was gonna leave/dem little youngins just uh hoozin' an' uh hollerin'

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
an' uh screamin' an' uh holdin' de do'
got on mah nerves so bad/Ah went in neah/Ah tol' 'em
Ah said
"Now
what in de world do you mean?"
Ah said
"Dese lil' chil' ren is jus' hollerin' an'
an' goin' on hear"
Ah said
"PUT DEM SUITCASES DOWN!
SET DEM SUITCASES BACK DOWN"
Ah de chil'ren/a 1 1
fo' of 'em
just whoopin' an' hollerin'
"d a d d v don't leave/d a d d v don't leave/d a d d v don't leave"
Ah didn' wanna git in to it/but Ah had tuh git in to it dat time

WHAT DID MS. SMITH SAY?
(emphatically, jerking her head to the right)

NOTHIN'
just

(She begins to giggle.)

NOTHIN'
'cause see him an' huh had been into it
she wa'n't doing nu'in' but just stan'in' neah

(stiffens her body)

Ah went in neah/Oh Lord Ah was jus'/dis/upset me so bad
Ah didn't know what tuh do___
Ah jus' got all ovah Mr. Smith
he come brought the suitcase in neah an' sat it down
an' dem chil'ren

(makes pulling motion)

dey just pullin'
dey was pullin' de suitcase
some at de do'
holdin' de do'

so he couldn't go out de do' (399-439)

During this family crisis, Mary refuses to play the docile servant whose
membership in the family is qualified by her status. Although Mary knows
that she is expected to stay in her place when she states, "Ah didn't wanna
git in to it," she opts to "break the rules" instead: "but Ah had tuh git into it dat time." According to Harris, interference such as this is not common to domestics nor is it commonly accepted by the superordinate:

To [the employer's family], a maid in her role of invisibility is certainly not someone who would make trouble, who would upset the status quo. And to a large extent they are right. Maids, historically, have not been a source of disturbance as far as race relations or employer/employee relations are concerned. (12)

In this case, however, Mary removes the mammy mask, speaks up and moves to action. She becomes the superordinate when she gets "all ovah Mr. Smith" and demands that he "PUT DEM SUITCASES DOWN." And, it is Mrs. Smith who assumes the role of silence and docility while Mary takes charge. Significant to this case, Mary does not "trick" within the confining space of the home and its "status quo" rules of conduct. She temporarily changes the rules to redress the family crisis.

In the same episode, grandmother positions herself as a mediator between Mr. Smith and his wife and the children when he threatens to leave. This episode is an example of what Victor Turner calls a "social drama." Because human interaction informs and, therefore, bears a resemblance to theatrical forms, Victor Turner calls on dramaturgical terms and forms to explain how societies, in general, handle crisis:

For me the dramaturgical phase begins when crisis arises in the daily flow of social interaction. Thus, if daily living is a kind of theater, social drama is a kind of meta-theater, that is, a dramaturgical language about the language of ordinary role-playing and status-maintenance which constitutes communication in the quotidian social process. (Anthropology 76; emphasis in original)

Turner identifies the "meta-theater" of social interaction as a four phase process that develops from "aharmonic" moments that disrupt daily living. The four phases are breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration/irreparable schism.
A breach occurs when there is a violation of social norms “regarded as binding and as sustaining key relationships between persons or sub-groups in a more or less bounded community . . .” (Ritual 108).

If the breach is not ignored, forgotten or quickly healed, the conflict escalates to the second stage of crisis. In this phase the various factions, groups or individuals become antagonists in open conflict. The public conflict “takes up its menacing stance in the forum itself and, as it were, dares the representative of order to grapple with it. It cannot be ignored or wished away” (Dramas 39). In this stage, “people take sides, supporting either the rule-breaker or the target of his action” (Ritual 108). If the crisis begins to threaten social stability, then certain “mechanisms” are put into play by “representative members of the disturbed social order” (Dramas 39). These actions constitute the redressive phase.

According to Turner, the mediating devices used to redress the conflict vary in type and form depending on such contingencies as the nature of the breach, the social system in which it occurred, and the significance of the breach to the wider social group (Dramas 39). Examples of redressive mechanisms include the judicial system, an impartial mediator, personal advice, and public ritual. According to Turner, it is also in the redressive stage that the social group becomes most self-reflexive. Indeed, this is a liminal stage which “furnishes a distanced replication and critique of the events leading up to and composing the ‘crisis’” (Dramas 41). In the liminal stage a community often draws on ritual and ritualized behavior, and it develops “new” performances to redress the conflict.

If the redressive measures in the third phase fail, the drama returns to crisis. On the other hand, if the redressive measures prove effective, the social group moves toward the reintegration or permanent schism. In the
former, the parties involved are reintegrated into the social order, but with changes: "Oppositions may be found to have become alliances and vice versa. High status will have become low status and vice versa. Asymmetric relations may have become egalitarian ones" and so on (Dramas 42). In the latter, the parties separate from the social system or establish their own.

In my grandmother's story, breach occurs when Mr. Smith arrives home drunk. Although my grandmother implies that Mr. Smith "use tuh drink" (line 397), it is clear that drinking to the point of intoxication is not acceptable in the Smith household. Therefore, he breaks the established norms of their home. The drama moves to the stage of crisis when Mr. Smith makes his drunkenness public and threatens to leave. At this point, the stability of the Smith home is threatened. In the third stage, Mary takes redressive action when she claims the mediator role and demands that Mr. Smith "PUT DEM SUITCASES DOWN" and stay with the family. In the final stage, Mr. Smith decides to stay and is reintegrated back into the family structure.

On another level, Mary breaks, or breaches, the normative rules of the domestic contract by taking charge; by, in effect, telling her employers how they should behave. In sum, she conceives of and directs the participants in a set of new roles which effects a redressive performance that resolves the conflict and, also, offers reflexive commentary concerning the normative family structure, authority, and Mary's relation to both.

Also, in the present tense narrative situation, Mary uses performance to redress a personal-as-social conflict that exists between her and the role she played for so many years. By means of storytelling, she claims authority over and against silence.
As Richard Schechner suggests, the most significant aspect of a social drama is that it provides “a place for, and means of, transformation. Rituals carry participants across limens, transforming them into different persons” (171). As regards my grandmother, storytelling is the ritual vehicle that transforms her. By analyzing the story about Mr. Smith’s leaving as a social drama, we may better understand how my grandmother participates in a transformative ritual process in which she redresses the social conflict incited by the “mammy” myth. In this case, she refuses it in the past and by speaking in the present. Thereby, she claims authority over her self-representation in the past and the present. Barbara Myerhoff writes:

As heroes in our own dramas, we are made self-aware, conscious of our consciousness. At once actor and audience, we may then come into fullness of our human capability—and perhaps human desire—to watch ourselves and enjoy knowing that we know. All this requires skill, craft, a coherent, consensually validated set of symbols, and social arenas for appearing. . . . Socially marginal people, disdained, ignored groups . . . regularly seek opportunities to appear before others in the light of their own internally provided interpretation. (105)

The artificiality and constructed nature of the performance event provided a safe space for my grandmother to perform this story. Within the narrative site she could reconstruct her life in affirming and empowering ways without fear or retaliation from her employers. Grandmother took advantage of this site, her homeplace, to present herself as a powerful figure in this incident and, thereby, in the eyes of her audience.

When writing about the elderly of a Jewish community center, Myerhoff notes:

Surviving and Survivor’s Guilt, then, can serve as transformative agents, taking the base materials of ordinary existence and disaster and working the alchemical miracle upon them until they result in consciousness. The consequence is a development of the capacity to lead an examined life. This includes the construction of an
explicable, even moral universe despite crushing external evidence to the contrary. (107)

Similarly, my grandmother's performance of her oral history takes the harsh realities of her life as a domestic and the present conditions of her life as an elderly, poor, black southern woman and, "despite crushing external evidence to the contrary," transforms the world of that life into a "moral universe" where she is treated and she treats herself with respect and dignity. Therefore, her performance served as an agent of transformation, and healing. It is in the performance site, then, where the cognitive dissonance between life as lived and life as imagined is less conflictual. Mary's ordinary and marginalized existence as a elderly, poor, black woman became secondary in the narrative event. The paradoxical relationship between memory and "rememory" in performance is what gives oral personal narratives subversive potential. In particular, the narratives of members of marginalized groups have subversive potential, whether marginalized because of race, class, gender, age, sexual identity, or ethnicity.

In most instances, Mary does not defer to the Smiths' authority over the children in terms of disciplining them the way she sees fit. She refuses to let the children have a party in the house (lines 190-224) and chastises Jimmy at every possible moment (lines 150-189 and 1326-1341). More importantly, she does not defer authority over the children in the presence of their parents. Even Mrs. Smith notes that "She'd [grandmother] tell Jimmy if he didn't stay in that house she was gonna whip his butt" (Appendix B 255). Thus grandmother asserted her authority over the children in the presence of the Smiths like a grandmother, aunt, or other

---

4 See Langellier 266-272.
older family member would, legitimizing her role as a real family member. Grandmother’s response to Mr. Smith and her assertion of authority over the children were both instances where she “salvages” her dignity and reclaims her humanity.

“Proud Mary”: The Valuing of Domestic Work

In her story, “As Long As Ah Stay Black,” Mary expresses contempt for factory work. She vows, "as long as Ah stay black/Ah'll nevah have another production job" (lines 1133-1134). The job to which Mary refers is one that she held in a shirt factory immediately following her employment at the Smiths'. For three years, Mary collected, stacked, and ironed thirty dozen, or three hundred and sixty, shirts in each eight hour day. At age sixty-two, Mary was dismissed from her job.

Recalling the difficulty of factory work, grandmother says that she prefers housework. Although both types of work involve repetition, physical labor, and require that the worker spend long hours on her feet, the production job did not allow her as much control over her work. As opposed to domestic work, the factory job places time restrictions on the laborer, monitors how she does her job, and provides no variance in the tasks to be performed. Therefore, despite the hard work, low pay and complicated relationship with her employers, Mary speaks with pride about her work. In general, it was “GOOD HONES' HARD WORK” (line 1100). And in particular, her descriptions of her cooking, her housekeeping, and her skills as a care provider for the Smith children illustrate her pride in her work.

As illustrated throughout her narrative, Mary was and is fond of the Smith children. And, despite “dat Jimmy” (line 1341), she enjoyed caring for them. She also contends that “wouldn't nobody else stay deah an--/day
an' night an' take care dem chil'ren like Ah'd do it" (line 2098). Indeed, when she recounts various stories about the children, she implies that she was good at childrearing and that others in the Smiths' neighborhood recognized her for it. At one point she recalls a neighbor who says, "'Ah 'clare Daisy'/ . . ./ 'You do es such uh good job" (lines 1397-1399). And as exemplified in the following excerpt, Mary implies she does a better job of raising the children than Mrs. Smith. In particular, she quickly moves in her narrative from discussing her housework to discussing childcare and in turn, Signifyin' on Mrs. Smith. For instance, when I asked her about the work she did at the house she abruptly responds, "Oh Ah cleaned house."

She continues:

```
did all de washin'/an' Ms. Smith didn't know nothin' 'bout  
what de chil'ren need  
they clothes/an' when dey git out uh clothes/when dey needed  
somethin'  
AH had tuh  
tell/uh  
what the chil'ren need-- 
dresses.  
panties/whatever/dey/need/Ah/had/tuh/tell/uh  
she didn't know dat stuff 'cause see  
she/wa'n't/deah.  
wit' de chil'ren. (40-50)
```

Although Mary's performance style is not animated, there is an implicit pride that resonates from the passage. Elemental to her pride is her understanding that Mrs. Smith "didn't know nothin' bout what de chil'ren need," whereas she did.

Because Mrs. Smith was gone, Mary makes decisions regarding what the children need. In effect, she decides what needs to be bought for the children. In the line, "Ah had tuh tell/uh," Mary emphasizes "Ah" to indicate that she alone is responsible for the care of the children. She reinforces her point when she says, "she [Mrs. Smith] didn't know that

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
stuff.” The “stuff” to which my grandmother refers is not only the material goods that the children need, but also the attention, nurturing, and love that my grandmother provided when Mrs. Smith “wa’n’t deah wit de chil’ren.”

When I asked my grandmother, “DID THEY LIKE YOUR COOKING?” grandmother immediately cut me off and declared “L O R D yes/dey liked mah cookin’” (lines 1504-1507). Grandmother became much more animated when she talked about the foods she prepared for the Smith family. In fact, she was so excited that she frequently mimed how she prepared the dishes. In the episode, “Dey Nevah Was Too Much Trouble,” grandmother reflects, “Ah/was/all/de/time/makin’/som’in’” (line 1535). Although it is not clear from this statement whether Mary enjoyed “makin’ som’in’” all the time or if she “was all de time makin’ som’in’” because she had to, based on what she relates elsewhere in the narrative cooking was more than just a chore, it was also an act of creative expression.

Grandmother’s pride in her cooking abilities is epitomized when she performed the following story from the episode “Dey Nevah Was Too Much Trouble.” In the process of telling how to make sauerkraut dumplings, grandmother creates an inviting metaworld by means of her verbal and nonverbal aesthetic choices. She verbally details the process with vivid images of the ingredients that appeal to the listener’s sense of smell and taste. And, like an expert on a cooking show, she supplements her speech with a nonverbal “demonstration.” She mimes mixing the dumplings and spooning them into the pot. Later in the same episode, she mimes cutting thin slices of cabbage for coleslaw. Mary recalls:

Ah’d fix sauerkraut dumplin’s
Ah’d fix
Ah’d put mah--
Ah’d open mah kraut

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
(make mixing motion with her right hand)

mix mah kraut
an' then
Ah would put
jus' uh taste
you take you uh
cup uh flour
self-rising flour
put/jus'/uh/lil'/touch/of/baking/powder/in/dat
an'
an' uh
egg
an' beat it up
an' let yuh
kraut cook
let yuh kraut cook--
an' Bell
she tol' meh de othah day when she called meh/she say
"Ah thought you was gonna come up heah"
say
"An' Ah was gonna make us some kraut dumplin's"--
an' so
ef yuh want som'in' good
have uh lil' bit uh
uh
pork
lil' bit uh pork
an' cook/it
put dat pork in deah
de pork in deah
an' den put yuh kraut in deah
an' cook it in de pork grease
an' den put yuh
fix yuh dumplin's

(spoons out dumplings)

spoon/'em
spoon/'em
an' den put de led [lid] on dat
right ovah dat
an' when hit gits done/you know/it jus'
get tuh where it
you can jus' take you uh spoon an' jus'
dip dat up
an' put you uh lil' of dat kraut juice in it
an' dat stuff is de li c i o u s (1443-1491)
As evidenced in the above excerpt, Mary demonstrates her cooking expertise by the way she physically embodies the cooking process. While mixing and spooning the ingredients, Mary uses commands—e.g., “put/jus'/uh/lil'/touch/of/baking/powder/in dat,” “an' let yuh/kraut cook,” and “put dat pork in deah”—that confirm that she has prepared this dish many times and, thereby, that she is an expert. Like a TV chef, grandmother carefully and methodically takes the listener through each step of cooking the sauerkraut dumplings. And, in the midst of her demonstration, she offers an entertaining anecdote. When the dish is “done,” she places her personal signature on the performance when she emphatically states, “an' dat stuff is de 1 i c i o u s.”

On the surface, Mary's pride and interest in cooking appear to uphold the mammy prototype. The stereotypical mammy is invincible: she never gets tired of cooking, cleaning, and nurturing. But, unlike the popular mythic figure, this particular woman is not invincible. After years of cooking, cleaning, tending to the children and managing the kitchen, Mary is tired. In addition to her age, her health is failing. Her muscles ache, her bones are worn out. Indeed, she “done ol' an broke down” (line 1060). Mary sadly notes:

(puts her hand on her heart)

when Ah use tuh/Ah/done/done/dat/sorta/cookin'/ Ah/can't/do/now it jus' done it jus' done left meh Ah done done mah part of it-- (1265-1271)

According to Mary, her honesty and trustworthiness is “DE EXACT REASON AH COULD A L W A Y S GET UH JOB” (line 1783). In other words, the fact that Mary did not steal from her employers guaranteed that she could
always find domestic employment. According to Harris, Mary's perception of the situation is, in general, accurate. Harris observes:

The stereotypical notion that black domestics will steal is pervasive among white mistresses. Many are the tales, for example, of black domestics whose honesty has been tested by the white mistress who leaves bills and coins where the black woman must clean. (18)

Mary's comments concerning this issue suggest that she is and was aware of the preconceptions that many employers hold toward the domestic when she is first hired and, in many cases, throughout her employment.

Grandmother states:

so
you know
now Ah stayed
as long as Ah s t a y e d at dey
at dat house__
long as Ah stayed deah
Ah nevah
rambled
in dey stuff

(opens imaginary drawers)

in dey d r a w' s
in dey stuff
Ah didn't know bit mo' dan some of de thangs on de--only
foldin' de chil' ren's clothes
but like RAMBLIN' IN EVERYTHANG/SEE
Ah didn't do that
Ah didn't do that
Ah nevah did--
when dey come back everythang was jus' like dey left/it
Ah didn't ramble in dey stuff
Ah'd fol' de chil' ren's c l o t h e s
Ah'd fol' 'em
de chil' ren's clothes

DID SOME PEOPLE DO THAT?

yeah
some people stayin' de house
dey ramble thu' thangs
you know
ramble an'
tamper

(10 sec pause)
SOME MAIDS TALK ABOUT HOW THEY USED TO STEAL STUFF AND TAKE THINGS

(cutting me off)

n o
DAT'S DE EXACTLY REASON AH COULD A L W A Y S GET UH JOB/'CAUSE peoples k n o w

(spreads her hands)

when Ah went tuh dey house
Ah didn't bother nuthin'
everythang was jus' like dey left it
Ah didn't bother dey stuff--
an' people s t e a l--/dey/can't/git/no/job
yuh heah me^^
dey/can't/git/no/job
an' peoples ain't wantin' nobody in dey house dat steal

(emphatically)

an' Ah don't blame 'em

(15 sec pause)

THEY'D TAKE STUFF?

UH HUH
dey take it
Ah jus' nevah did do that
Ah nevah did do that
Ah was always
a l w a y s honest
Ah didn't want nuthin' Ah didn't work fuh
if dey give me some'in' Ah'd take it
if she didn't
if she didn't give it Ah didn't git it__
Ah nevah did
an' Ah nevah would
take de chile's stuff--
an' dat's de reason NOW
people's uh
uh suffer
wantin' help
but
you know
you can't trust peoples in yuh house like you--
dey'll steal
dey'll steal
short'nin' out uh biscuit now
an' people jus' rather
Grandmother's responses to my questions exemplify the pride that she has in living her life in terms of values such as honesty, integrity, and Christian beliefs. Indeed, her pride kept her from taking things that she did not work for: "if dey give me some'in' Ah'd take it/if she didn't/if she didn't give it Ah didn't git it__.

Mary recognizes that some white employers assume that, until proven otherwise, all domestics will "ramble an' tamper" and "steal" when she euphemistically exclaims that "peoples know." Mary's statement reveals another "clause" in the unwritten agreement between the domestic and her employer. From Mary's point of view, "thou shall not steal" because the employer is watching and will monitor your actions. And, as Jacqueline Jones observes, the assumption that the domestic will steal affects the monetary aspects of the contract:

White women justified the low wages paid to domestics by arguing that "theft," as an institutionalized part of the job and extension of the legitimate service pan, entailed considerable loss of food and clothing. Most had no choice but to consider it "a kind of underhand commutation of wages," a price they paid for any service at all. (132)

As is the case with assuming that the domestic wants to be a "part of the family," the assumed "fact" of thievery on the part of the employer functions to legitimize low wages, personalize the service, and perpetuate racist views.

Mary appears to perpetuate these views herself when she comments that she understands why employers will not hire blacks because "dey'll steal/dey'll steal/short'nin' out uh biscuit now." Although some domestics do steal, Mary's comments reflect internalized racism. Similar to the perceptions of many employers, grandmother projects "dishonesty" on to
the domestic as if it were an innate quality. She also appears to not recognize (at least in her statements) that if a domestic steals it may be the domestic's way of compensating for low wages—a way to "make do" within the confining space of the highly personalized (i.e., "subjective") domestic contract.

In addition, when Mary observes, "peoples uh/uh suffer/wantin' help," she is, it appears, conforming to the view that domestics exist to ease the suffering of those more fragile, less hearty white women. In other words, Mary perpetuates the black woman (and/or domestic)-as-mule myth. The mule is to sacrifice a legitimate business contract in order to help out those in need. In light of this perception—this myth of the self-sacrificing mule—the economic aspects of the contract are viewed as equitable by the white employer. Grandmother's comments assume that the social conditions under which we live are such that the white employer and the black domestic's social statuses are equitable. Given the current economic and social status of many African Americans, however, these assumptions are false.

In both historical studies and slave narratives, stealing arises as a strategy used by slaves to compensate for poor living conditions and little food. This practice extended into domestic work. According to historian Lawrence Levine, however, "Not only did . . . masters deny [slaves] the fruits of their labors but the whites themselves practiced theft far more serious than that of blacks" (123). And, yet, as Katzman observes, "Whites denigrated blacks in part because what a white Southerner might tolerate among whites became reprehensible when practiced by Negroes" (193). Perceived as racially and morally superior to blacks, whites projected onto blacks a stereotypical behavior in which they themselves participated. On
the other hand, blacks did steal, in order to survive, and, as a consequence, they also helped to perpetuate the stealing stereotype.

Similar to slaves, domestics also stole to compensate for low pay. Katzman contends that between 1870 and 1920, “black servants ran the kitchen virtually without supervision, only their own judgment limited the amount of the food carried home after work” (197). In addition to food, domestics also took articles of clothing, silverware, shoes and whatever else they needed or wanted. From the domestic’s perspective, the employer would not miss the food or clothing, and the theft legitimized the low pay that she received. From the perspective of the employer, the theft confirmed her “belief that blacks could not control their tendency to commit petty theft” (Katzman 198). Stealing was viewed as an innate characteristic of blacks and black domestics.

When I interviewed Mrs. Smith, my grandmother was present and, at one point, she and Mrs. Smith discussed the subject of trust. Mrs. Smith explained that she is, at present, afraid to hire a domestic because she does not feel that she can trust them. And, in turn, grandmother echoed her sentiments:

PJ: Did you have anybody to come work for you after [Mary]?

Mrs. Smith: No, cause I couldn’t ever trust nobody. That’s why I make her [grandmother] come up here now. I told somebody the other day. I said I wouldn’t have one of those girls down there at the college or one of those guys come over here and work for me cause they might break in . . .

Mary: [interrupting] Ah tell de chil’ren now, Ah say well Lord de reason why peoples can’t get jobs anymore is because dey do nothin’ but steal, steal, steal. And take things that don’t belong tuh ’em.

Mrs. Smith: And it was this lady over here—over there—who works at the library at the college. She was over there helping her. She was getting ready to leave and Roxy said, “I just tell you, you never know with people. Trust ’em and everything.” Said this lady worked for [unintelligible] and she asked me if I needed some help. She was gonna help me out twice a week. I said, “That’s the way I am about
Daisy." I said, "I'm not gonna get no one I don't know to come in." And it's just me and I just wait till Daisy comes up here. (Appendix B 256-257)

In the above passage, when Mrs. Smith projects the stereotype of the stealing domestic, grandmother confirms it. Mrs. Smith then uses her fear and distrust of strangers to justify her reclamation of the old domestic contract between her and "Daisy." As I discussed above, personal reasons are used by Mrs. Smith to construct and maintain the contract. The agreement appears to be that Mary should continue to work for Mrs. Smith, otherwise Mrs. Smith will "suffer." The present understanding between Mrs. Smith and Mary is based, then, on a complex interweaving of race and class stereotypes, the personalization of the domestic contract (i.e., economics), Mrs. Smith's trust in Mary, Mary's pride in being trustworthy, and also their shared past and current status as senior citizens.

"Homeplace": After Domestic Work

The years Mary spent at the Smith home affect how Mary interacts with the residents of Tate Terrace. The authority and control Mary exhibits at certain moments in the domestic site are carried over into her homesite. At Tate Terrace, Mary constructs herself as a self-determined individual, as an authority figure from whom others seek advice, and as a care provider.

Because Tate Terrace, specifically Mary's home, was the storytelling context, it affected the telling of the narrative. It affirmed how she at times claimed authority in the telling of her past domestic experiences because her sense of self-authorization is so strong at Tate Terrace.

5 Up until December 1993, Mary and Mrs. Smith maintained a "visit"-to-work relationship. Apparently, when Mary came to Hickory to see her children, Mrs. Smith would ask Mary to "visit." The "visit" was actually a euphemism for "work." While on many occasions Mary obliged Mrs. Smith's request, at other times she avoided contact with Mrs. Smith. Grandmother details her present relationship with Mrs. Smith in the narrative (lines 521-549).
In the few stories that grandmother relates in her narrative concerning the people of Tate Terrace, grandmother's performance style is lively and energetic. It is clear that she feels more comfortable talking about her current community and lifestyle more than her experiences at the Smiths'.

At Tate Terrace, Mary positions herself as a care provider. In the episode, "Ain't Nuthin' But Uh Sick Group," for instance, Mary says that all of the residents of Tate Terrace are physically disabled and basically helpless, including herself. Yet, in the same episode she contends: "Ah check 'em--/not all of 'em but/Ah check on 'em--" (lines 2051-2052), suggesting that even though she is a member of the "sick group," she still looks after most of the other residents in the community. Similar to the ways in which she took care of the Smith children, she takes care of the residents at Tate Terrace. In the episode, "Ain't Nuthin' But Uh Sick Group," grandmother relates how all of the people who live in Tate Terrace are unable to care for themselves because they are elderly:

everybody down heah ain't able tuh pull one anothah out de FIRE
dey ain't able tuh do nuthin'__
NANNA
see
she's about dead__
an' Ms. Johnson
she ain't able tuh do nuthin'__
Madeline ain't able tuh do nuthin'__
Mr. Bullock ain't able tuh do nuthin'__
Mr. Littlejohn ain't able tuh do nuthin'__
an' Ah'm not able tuh do nuthin'__

(snears up her nose)

Claudine ain't able tuh do nuthin'__
dat ol' man is seventy-fo'
he ain't able tuh do nuthin'__
an'
Glenn an' his wife ain't able tuh do nuthin'__
an' Pauline is sick__
an' Ruby's sick__
an' dat othah one on de othah end/she ain't able tuh do nuthin'__
(giggle)

dis heah's uh
uh sick group down heah
ain't nuthin' but uh

sick group (2017-2041)

As discussed earlier, Mary incorporates repetition and rhythm in the above excerpt to affect the listener's view of the Tate Terrace residents and to encourage her or his participation in her narration. Her narrative rhythm, for example, encouraged my involvement in the narrative event as I leaned forward and listened more intently, following along mentally as she moved from one apartment to the next. Also, this rhythm is enhanced through the emphatic intonation placed on each of the resident's names at the beginning of each poetic line. My grandmother's message about this community being a "sick group" is highlighted through her utilization of repetition and rhythm so that her audience is persuaded by her statement.

Mary's use of repetition and rhythm also reflects the indigenous musical and vernacular traditions of African Americans. Through storytelling, she draws upon her cultural and experiential knowledge of these traditions and internally dialogizes them. This segment of grandmother's narrative, for instance, is comparable to rap, spiritual, gospel and blues musical traditions as well as to folk preaching, and toast vernacular traditions found in African American culture. These musical forms incorporate repetition through what is known as a "vamp." A vamp "sustains the focus of the central idea with subtle, unanticipated, yet imminent shifts in the voicing, thereby intensifying the relentless power of the beat and revealing nuances that enliven the experience with a sense of renewal" (Harrison xxvii). The repetition found in my grandmother's
narrative functions the same as the vamp in rap, blues and gospel musical traditions. The vamp in the excerpt above sustains the focus on the central idea that the residents of Tate Terrace "ain't able tuh do nuthin__," while at the same time it incorporates subtle shifts in voicing and words as in, "an’ Pauline is sick___/an’ Ruby’s sick___," before it returns to the original pattern of "ain't able tuh do nuthin'" near the end the passage. The use of repetition to focus attention on a central idea within African American musical traditions encourages emotional engagement on the part of the audience as well as intensifies the emotional engagement of the performer. This active participation occurs through a call-and-response dynamic whereby the rhythm created by the repetitive force effects active participation on the part of the audience and "emotionally and cognitively galvanizes the spirit toward a highly intuitive sense of creation" (Harrison xxv). Thus rhythm established through repetition becomes a generative force which heightens emotions and serves as an "opportunity to revitalize a shared cosmogony through social and sacred rituals" (Harrison xxvi). Grandmother’s use of repetition and rhythm within the "sick group" episode reflects the creative and revitalizing forces found in African American cultural rituals, for the effect of their use is to generate an emotional response from her audience.

Mary’s repetitive and rhythmic speech also resembles that found in folk preaching. In the folk preaching tradition, for instance, repetition and rhythm are integral to the preacher's performance style. When describing the effect of the folk preacher's performance style, literary and cultural critic Hortense Spillers notes that:

The thrust of the sermon is passional, repeating essentially the rhythms of plot, complication, climax, resolution. The sermon is an oral poetry—not simply an exegetical, theological presentation, but a complete expression of a gamut of emotions whose central form is
the narrative and whose end is cathartic release. In that regard the sermon is an instrument of a collective catharsis, binding once again the isolated members of community. (4)

The notion that the folk sermon is oral poetry, that it evokes catharsis and that it binds members of a community is reflected in the Reverend Jesse Jackson's speech delivered at the 1988 National Democratic Convention.

Throughout his speech Jackson draws upon the folk preacher oral traditions of repetition, rhythm, and metaphor to bring the factions of the Democratic party together. Transforming his grandmother's quilt into a metaphor for the Democratic party, Jackson says:

Now, Democrats, we must build such a quilt. Farmers, you seek fair prices and you are right, but you cannot stand alone. Your patch is not big enough. Workers, you fight for fair wages. You are right, but your patch labor is not big enough. Women, you seek comparable worth and pay equity. You are right. But your patch is not big enough. Women, mothers, who seek head start, and day care and pre-natal care, on the front side of life, rather than jail care and welfare on the back side of life, you're right, but your patch is not big enough. Students, you seek scholarships. You're right, but your patch is not big enough.

. . . But don't despair, be as wise as my grandmama. Pull the patches and the pieces together, bound by a common thread. When we form a great quilt of unity, and common ground, we'll have the power to bring health care and housing and jobs and education and hope to our nation. (qtd. in Tannen 188-189)

The repetition and variations of the phrase, "You're right, but your patch is not big enough," creates a rhythmic force that, like the passage, "... ain't able tuh do nuthin'," in my grandmother's narrative, draws the listener into the speech by creating suspense as to whom Jackson will refer next. By including representatives from all the Democratic party's constituency, Jackson works toward "binding" those "isolated members of the community." The collective catharsis comes at the end of this excerpt when Jackson summarizes all the goals the different factions cannot achieve alone, such as health care, housing and jobs. In doing so, he appeals to their sense of "common ground." Rather than a quilt, my
grandmother uses a fire as the framing metaphor in her narrative. The fire becomes the symbolic image against which the residents of Tate Terrace "ain't able to do nuthin'."

While grandmother's use of rhythm and repetition functions in the same way as it does in the Jackson text, the effect is different because of the differences between the two audiences. Jackson's rhetorical strategy is similar to that of most folk preachers in that his goal is to literally galvanize his audience and create a sense of shared community. Because I serve as the only audience for my grandmother during her performance, grandmother's goal is to symbolically bind the people of Tate Terrace into a collective whole. Rather than summarize what the residents cannot achieve if isolated one from the other, at the end of her testimony grandmother binds the community together by emphasizing what they are together: a sick group. She achieves cathartic release by, near the end of the passage, giggling. The giggle is cathartic because it functions to alter and "mend" the effect of helplessness that the preceding imagery has created. By giggling, grandmother mocks or pokes fun at the group, herself and the imagery that her verbal repetition has created. Her reflexive giggle tells the listener that if the image is accurate, she knows about it and, therefore, the listener should feel no pity or sympathy for her and her collective. They may be sick but they are not inept nor are they without humor.

Because Mary uses repetition and rhythm to affect organization, Mary's "sick group" narrative also resembles the folk sermon. Gerald L. Davis writes:

In sermon performance, the African-American preacher is principally concerned with the organization and the language of his sermon. The notion of meter in the sense of a rhythmic, mnemonic environment for the logical, pragmatic development of ideas, is not
To support his argument, Davis provides an excerpt from a sermon by Bishop Cleveland entitled, “He Wants Your Life: The Search for the Religion of Christ”:

God is studying your tongue
God is studying your aspirations
God ain’t studying your manipulations
God ain’t studying your demonstrations
God ain’t studying your words and your wisdom
God don’t want your delay
God wants your life (51-52).

In this passage, Cleveland uses a generative formula (“God is studying”) to structure and organize his ideas. The formula also serves as a mnemonic device. Further, rhythm and meter are not sacrificed for structure. Indeed, as Davis contends, the two are concurrent. In grandmother’s narrative, the formulaic expression, “ain’t able to do nuthin’,” occurs at the end of each poetic line rather than at the beginning and the variation, of name, occurs at the beginning of each line. Still, grandmother’s use of the repetitive formula permits her to structure and organize her ideas. It also enhances the “mnemonic environment” of the narrative event as she mentally travels from one resident’s apartment to the next. Also, as in Cleveland’s text, grandmother does not sacrifice the rhythm to its form. Repetition, rhythm, and structure are complementary.

The last segment of grandmother’s “sick group” narrative also functions in the same way as does the “evaluation formula” in the folk sermon. Commonly, the evaluation formula in the folk sermon is used near the end of the sermon to explicate the moral or point of the sermon (Davis 92-93). As regards personal experience narratives, William Labov and
Joshua Waletzky observe that narrative evaluation is "that part of the narrative which reveals the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative by emphasizing the relative importance of some narrative units as compared to others" (27). Grandmother's conclusion, "dis heah's uh/uh sick group down heah/ain't nuthin' but uh/sick group," reveals her evaluative feelings toward the residents of Tate Terrace. In her opinion, she and the residents "ain't able tuh do nuthin', as a consequence of being aged, fragile, and helpless.

By drawing on these various indigenous oral traditions to narrate her story, Mary affirms an African American cultural identity. The significance of this cultural identity is that Mary constructs it within the narrative site of Tate Terrace, a predominately European American neighborhood. Although she is a minority in this community, she resists being marginalized as such. Rather, she "speaks" her culture as much as it "speaks" her in order to forge a space for herself at Tate Terrace. At the same time, she is able to transcend issues of race and form relationships with the other residents who live there. Thereby, she inhabits a "liminal" space, betwixt-and-between social and cultural boundaries where she "draws [her] materials from all aspects of [her] experience, both from [her] interior milieu and [her] external environment" (Turner, Anthropology 169).

While Mary drew on her own self-affirming cultural identity in many of the events about which she spoke, it is most prevalent in the narrative site or, Mary's homeplace. Outside the confines of the domestic site and within her homeplace, Mary makes life happen according to her own cultural codes. It is within her homeplace, then, that Mary constructs herself as a subject rather than as an object, as one who reacts rather than

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
as one who is manipulated. And, as I discuss in detail in Chapter Five, Mary's homeplace is also a site of resistance.

In recounting her life experiences as a domestic, Mary chooses to focus on four defining features of domestic work. According to my grandmother, the work was hard and the wages were low. In particular, she stresses the tremendous work load of her day. She cleaned, cooked and reared four children by herself for eighteen years. Thus, she exclaims that the Smiths "oughten nevah forget meh" (line 2111). Grandmother concretizes her statements concerning hard work by means of performance. Through repetitive and rhythmic verbal activity, she directs our attention to the redundancy of the work. Her performance also references the toll that the work has had on her body, such as scars from cooking, sore legs and scarred knees.

Mary's construction of domestic labor also confirms that the dynamics between the employer and employee, the employee and her attitude toward her work, and the employee and her own family, are complex. In Mary's narrative construction, she portrays these relationships as ever-evolving and unstable. Indeed, Mary's account of domestic labor draws attention to the "outsider-within" dynamic implicit in the domestic contract and maintained by the employer and the employee. Her account reveals how she "made do" within the confining space of the domestic contract. In many instances, Mary covertly resisted as was the case when she reappropriated her employers' hand-me-downs and used them to benefit herself and her own family. In addition, by manipulating discourse in her performance, Mary further alters and destabilizes the codes that appear to govern the contract.
Despite the hard work, low pay, and personalized contract (employer/employee relationship), Mary states that she was and is proud of the work that she did for the Smiths. She contends that, for her, domestic work allowed her more freedom and was more satisfying than the work she did in the factory. Her performance of cooking sauerkraut dumplings, for instance, suggests that cooking was an activity she enjoyed doing and a skill in which she was an expert. Because she genuinely liked the Smith children, Mary also flaunts her childrearing skills and suggests that she provided better care for the children than their biological mother.

In her construction of her life at Tate Terrace, grandmother characterizes herself in ways similar to those in the domestic site. However, she uses the context of her home and her present community to garner more control over her self-construction. She draws upon her "homeplace" to resist certain images projected upon her, to establish her African American cultural identity, and to create a sense of community among the residents.

In my analysis of Mary's narrative, I drew on historical and fictional accounts of domestic labor to complement Mary's domestic labor history. These studies highlighted similarities as well as irregularities between my grandmother's construction of domestic labor and the accounts offered in other nonfictional and fictional texts.

In brief, these studies contend that the racial and social stratification that defined relationships between slaves and their masters also defines relationships between domestic workers and their employers. In addition to hard work, domestics also contend with the mammy stereotype associated with African American women in general and domestics in particular. African American women respond to this image in
complicated ways. In some instances they clearly reject the image. They do so by verbalizing their rejection, as does the character Mildred, or by claiming power when they are expected to remain docile, as does my grandmother in the "Mr. Smith" incident. At other times, however, the domestic affirms the stereotype by shuffling and bowing before, stealing from, and lying to, their employer. The reasons that domestics conform to the mammy stereotype are complicated. Some do so because they lose sight of their own sense of worth and cultural identity as does Mrs. Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye*. For others, their participation in self-degradation is a survivalist strategy used to insure their ongoing employment. And, by means of "making do," some domestics strive to subvert conventional power relations. Although they outwardly defer to their employers, these women use masks to help them maintain their self-worth, dignity, and humanity. In her narrative, my grandmother exhibits both deference to and claiming of authority.

According to Harris:

That some of these notions contradict others does not affect the mistress or maid, although the maid may certainly see some points of irony: .... Such contradictions are the way things are. The pattern is handed down from slavery and the majority of mistresses and maids are not inclined to alter it. But there have been a few iconoclasts, in art as in life. (20-21)

Such complications mark the relationship between the domestic and her employer. Implicit in the relationships is a domestic contract that is privatized and personalized by the location and nature of the work. Depending on the terms negotiated, both the domestic and her employer engage in seemingly contradictory behavior as regards "normative" employer/employee relations.
In the narrative, grandmother never discusses why she left the Smiths. Although Mary remains silent about the subject, Mrs. Smith describes the circumstances under which my grandmother left her employ in the following way:

Mrs. Smith: And then, Carol... she was gettin' married. And your mother [my grandmother's daughter] -- Jimmy said Sarah had been here. And I had to work at the sale that day. Said that your grandmother was going to Washington to see her brother--real bad off. And of course I told her all the time that she would have to come down the aisle right after me when Carol and Patty got married and sit down there with me. Cause she raised those kids. So Daisy went up there to her brother that was so bad off. She went up there and she didn't come home.

Mary: Didn't I come back?

Mrs. Smith: NOOOOOOOO. You finally got up the nerve to call Tanya H. Told Tanya to tell me that you was gonna stay up there, cause he was real sick and you weren't coming back.

She was with us 18 years. (Appendix B 255)

It is Mrs. Smith's belief then, that after eighteen years of service, my grandmother quit her job in order to take care of her sick brother. It is odd that Mary never mentions the story about her sick brother in Washington, D. C. In fact, her only reference to leaving the Smiths is found in her cursory remark: "Ah got ti'ed/an' den Ah left/an moved/back tuh Kings Mountain" (lines 908-912).

Because grandmother never mentioned a "sick brother," I went to my mother for more information. At first, my mother confirmed Mrs. Smith's story but after some prodding, offered an alternative version. She told me that instead of going to Washington, D. C., Mary returned home to Kings Mountain. Mother said that it was a culmination of Mary's being tired of housework, being away from her children, and being away from her siblings that led to Mary's decision to leave the Smiths' employ. In
addition, mother told me the other reason grandmother left the Smiths is because of Carol's wedding. According to mother, grandmother's fictional trip to Washington to visit her "sick" brother occurred a week before Carol, the Smiths' youngest daughter for whom my grandmother had such great affection, was to be married. Mrs. Smith wanted my grandmother to walk down the aisle and sit with her at the wedding. In other words, she wanted to make a public display of my grandmother as the ultimate display of possession and mammydom. Although Mrs. Smith aptly contends that grandmother "raised those kids" (Appendix B 255), I recognized the irony of Mary's sitting in a public space as "mother" of the bride, whereas all in attendance would still see her as mammy. She had too much pride and dignity to allow herself to participate in such a spectacle. In this instance, Mary refused to embody the mammy prototype and quit the job altogether.

Like the able-minded trickster, grandmother used indirection and trickery to refuse the mammy role and to quit her job. Instead of telling the Smiths outright that she did not want to participate in the wedding and that she no longer wanted to work for them, she fabricated the story about her brother. She even got her own daughter to corroborate the story. Moreover, after the wedding she did not talk to Mrs. Smith directly. She called a neighbor, Tanya H., to tell Mrs. Smith that she was not coming back. Like the monkey who scurries back up the tree after he has duped the lion, grandmother sat contentedly in Kings Mountain during the wedding ceremony while the Smiths thought she was visiting her brother.

The question remains as to why grandmother has kept her leaving a secret for all of these years. I believe there are two possible reasons. Because Carol and grandmother had a very close relationship, grandmother might not want to hurt Carol's feelings with the truth. Too, she might not
want to tarnish the Smiths' trusting image of her by revealing that she was dishonest with them. Whatever the case, her "guileful ruse" was successful. By procuring and maintaining the lie, she simultaneously sustains a benevolent relationship with the Smiths. In addition, the lie saved her from compromising her dignity and self-respect.

My grandmother's silence is a form of covert resistance, a form of nonviolent self-preservation. Like so many domestics, she never raised her voice when dissatisfied with her conditions. She contends that if she did not like something, she "nevah did say nothin'," for "saying something" might have cost her her job or caused unnecessary tension in the home. Instead, she was silent. She firmly held her mask in place until she had the opportunity to score a victory—however fleeting. She "made do." But when the mask began to give way, when she could no longer devise tactics in the domestic space, she transformed her silence into a discourse of resistance. Silence removed her from the oppressive space of her employer. Silence saved her from being put on public display as the domestic mammy.
CHAPTER FIVE

FEMINIST TRICKSTERS AND MARY'S MONSTER DISCOURSE

Feminist Spaces: Mother's Kitchen and Grandmother's Garden

Until I went to college, I had never heard of "feminism." It was not a word used in my home nor by the many women and men who frequented our house. When my mother's girlfriends came over to help her cook or to get their hair pressed, I often sat and listened to their conversations. Not once do I remember their discussing "women's liberation," or "the feminist movement." It was during my freshman year of college that I learned the basic tenets of feminism, and it was then that I began to realize that although the women in my family never referred to themselves as "feminists," they embodied many feminist characteristics. Reflecting back, I realized my mother's kitchen provided a space for women to build community. Through their rituals of cooking, pressing hair and gossiping, they validated their lives in a society that frequently inscribed them as mammys, jezebels, whores, bitches, sluts and aunt jemimas.

As I mentioned in Chapter One, it also was not until college that I understood my grandmother's stories. And, like the stories I overheard in my mother's kitchen, I realize now that my grandmother's stories are feminist. Her stories offer me a philosophy of life from the perspective of a poor black woman. One aspect of her philosophy is rooted in her garden.

Every spring, grandmother transforms the barren piece of yard in front of her home into a small herb garden. Mint, thyme, basil and oregano are interspersed with tomato plants. Despite her age, she gets on her knees and nurtures her garden to life, pulling up weeds and plucking bugs from the leaves of each plant. While on her knees, and as if in prayer, she sings an old Negro spiritual: "Come to Jesus. Come to Jesus."
Just now. Just now. Come to Jesus. Come to Jesus. Just now.” Swaying from side to side on her brittle knees, grandmother calls upon her faith to help her conjure her garden into existence. But the garden is not just for show. When the tomatoes are big yet still green, she picks a few from the vine, slices them, dips them in a cornmeal mixture and fries them in hot oil in a cast iron skillet. Every time my grandmother prepares fried green tomatoes for me, I think of her tending her garden and realize that she is a feminist.

This chapter focuses on the feminist implications of my grandmother’s oral history. In the first section of the chapter, I recount how women of both African and European descent have worked together to address gender inequalities in the US. I then examine how race and class effected the inscription of African American women. In my discussion, I draw on a metaphor from Zora Neale Hurston’s novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, to describe the effects of racism, sexism, and classism on African American women. As “de mule of de world,” black women are expected to bear everyone’s burdens. Based on her race, class, and gender, the black woman experiences social and economic exploitation and is positioned as a “beast of burden.” Thereby, she is often objectified and silenced.

In the next section of the chapter, I discuss how the experiences of white women employers and black domestics affect their discourse. I contend that African American women, in general, and particularly domestic workers, theorize their lives based on their experiences as marginalized women. Drawing on Cherrie Maraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of “theory in the flesh,” I argue that my grandmother’s oral
narrative is an act of "self-theorizing" that she embodies and communicates by means of performance.

At the end of the chapter, I focus on the nature and meaning of my grandmother's performance of her theory. I discuss how Mary's performance can be characterized as a site of "homeplace." I argue that Mary's locates her homeplace at various sites (e.g., her body, her oral traditions, her home at Tate Terrace, and the Tate Terrace community itself). Her claiming of these homeplace sites is an act of resistance.

Because I view Mary's homeplace as a site of resistance, I argue that her theory in the flesh is also a feminist theory. I focus on the ways in which her theory subverts racist, classist, and gender biased constructions of her identity. And, because her discourse is expressed in silence and is double-voiced, elusive, ambiguous, covert and indeterminate when voiced, her narrative is a "trickster" discourse that engenders creativity and artistry.

"Ain't I A Woman?": Mules, Mammies, and Matriarchs

Women, in general, are common foes of sex and gender oppression. They must constantly fight for economic equality and reproductive rights, and against hostile work environments and sexist representations of women in the popular culture marketplace. Historically, white and black women have often formed a united front to combat the oppositional forces facing them. As early as 1920, for example, white Southern women "began to understand what many of their peers in other parts of the country had not: the need to ally with Black women activists on issues of common concern" (Giddings 171). According to Paula Giddings, one of the sites where black and white women forged common ground was in their religious beliefs: "It was a prayer session that provided the bridge across a
centuries-old racial gap . . ." (173). The historic event to which Giddings refers took place at the biannual meeting of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) held at the Tuskegee Institute in July 1920. For the first time in the South, black and white women came together to share their experiences and to speak out against their collective oppression. Giddings writes that one of the white women in attendance, Carrie Parks Johnson, better comprehended the plight of black women when she realized that she saw in "the hearts of those Negro women . . . all the aspirations for their homes and their children that [she had for hers]" (173).

Similar to the ways in which the women who attended the NACW meeting in 1920, the women who live at Tate Terrace have forged a sisterhood based on their common experiences. And as poor, elderly women, they confront class and age discrimination. Although our society accommodates the elderly who are wealthy, it is less concerned with those who are unable to afford the services being marketed for the growing senior population. Too old or physically challenged to work, the women who live at Tate Terrace have to survive on the money they draw from Social Security, which, in my grandmother's case, is approximately two-hundred and fifty dollars a month.

Despite their age, various illnesses, income level and gender, these women are survivors. They are survivors because they depend on one another for emotional, social and sometimes financial support. Their "sisterhood," then, is evidenced in several ways.

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, while I was at my grandmother's house, it was not uncommon for her women friends to come to her for advice, or to borrow food or money. While my grandmother never
borrowed money (at least not in my presence), she too felt free to borrow food from the other women. In addition, the only person at Tate Terrace who still drives, Mrs. Johnson, has made it her responsibility to take the other women to bank their checks at the beginning of each month, to buy their medicine, and to shop at the grocery store. When one of them is sick, the other women tend to her needs. For example, when grandmother's neighbor, Claudine, had surgery, grandmother prepared Claudine's meals, bathed her, and saw that she took her medicine. And, when my grandmother leaves town to visit her children, the other women "keep an eye out" for strangers who might burglarize grandmother's apartment.

Too, Claudine, Nanna and grandmother often gather on Claudine's porch and catch up on the latest gossip about the other residents. In sum, these women come together to form bonds across lines of race. Because they live in a society that overvalues youth, health, and the workplace, they are positioned as social misfits. Despite and in response to their social position, these women create a space of shared community and sisterhood.

While grandmother's experiences at Tate Terrace reflect a cooperative and sisterly understanding among women across racial lines, her experience outside this community was quite different. Indeed, during her years as a domestic, grandmother could not have lived in the same neighborhood as the women to whom she now offers advice and lends food. Therefore, while all women experience oppression, it is problematic to essentialize what oppression is and means to women, for women of color have had to deal with other forms of oppression such as racism.

In her famous address to the Women Rights convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, Sojourner Truth debunks the myth that black women's history and oppression is identical to that of white women. Truth remarks:
Dat man ober dar say dat woman needs to be lifted ober ditches, and
to have de best place every whar. Nobody eber helped me into
carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gives me any best place and ain't I
a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed, and planted,
and gathered into barns, and no man could head me--and ain't I a
woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man (when I
could get it), and bear de lash as well--and ain't I a woman? I have
borne thirteen chilern and seen em mos' all sold off into slavery,
and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard--
and ain't I a woman? (133-134)

Revealing the irony that although considered a member of the "weaker"
sex, she is able to plow and plant better than most men, Truth also points
out that unlike her white counterpart, she and other black women did not
speak from a place of privilege. She is not afforded a pedestal status—a
"best place" where food, shelter, and clothing is proffered as well as the
security of knowing that her children will not be taken away from her.
While Truth understood and sympathized with the plight of all women and
the women's rights movement of the time, she could not overlook the fact
that white women were treated better than black women in the North, as
well as in the South. Confused as to why she and other black women could
not enjoy the same privileges as others, she punctuated her wonderment in
the resonant phrase, "and ain't I a woman?"

Black women have asked this question before and since the
antebellum period, as they have been the victims of rape, murder, verbal
and physical abuse, and numerous other oppressions such as chattel
slavery and entrapment in domestic service. While white American women
have also experienced some of these oppressions, African American women
in particular have combated these and other oppressions to an extreme. In
the slave community, for instance, African American women were
frequently subject to beatings, rape, or both on a daily basis. Historian
Deborah Gray White states: "Black in a white society, slave in a free
society, woman in a society ruled by men, female slaves had the least
formal power and were perhaps the most vulnerable group of antebellum Americans" (15). The degree to which black women were “vulnerable,” then, differentiated their experience and oppression from that of white women.

Although, prior to the Civil War, there were many white women abolitionists, a good many white women perpetuated the commonplace sexist and racist perspective and treatment of black women. Eleanor Smith suggests slave-owning women were, in some instances, equally as cruel as their husbands, fathers, uncles and sons:

Most white mistresses did not identify with Black women as mothers, wives, or females. They not only took slave children away from their mothers to live in the Big House, but they sold them to other planters to be taken miles away from their parents. ... The verbal abuse and use of the whip by white women further demonstrated their cruelty, attitude of superiority, and lack of mutual feminine concern, to say nothing of a common identity based on womanhood and oppression. The slave narratives of Black women make it apparent that most white women felt Black women were made to meet the needs of whites and certainly felt no human bond based on the commonality of womanhood. (583)

Smith’s commentary reveals the extent to which many white women distanced themselves from African American women by aligning themselves with the degrading and dehumanizing practices of the male slave owner. Indeed, “White women saw Black woman as a labor force to do their bidding. Whether working in the field, splitting rails or picking up after them, it was apparent that white women did not view Black women with any type of consideration or identify them as members of their sex” (Smith 586). From their privileged position in a racist society, white women maintained their racial superiority over black women, which allowed them to ignore the sexism they both experienced.

Remarking on the double oppression of black women in America, Deborah Gray White explains how the black woman is unable to “escape”
racist and/or sexist mythologies. Unlike the black man or white woman, a black woman is left with no "free" space given the complicity of prototypical race and gender inscriptions. White explains:

The black woman's position at the nexus of America's sex and race mythology has made it most difficult for her to escape the mythology. Black men can be rescued from the myth of the Negro. . . . They can be identified with things masculine, with things aggressive, with things dominant. White women, as part of the dominant racial group, have to defy the myth of woman, a difficult, though not impossible task. The impossible task confronts the black woman. If she is rescued from the myth of the Negro, the myth of woman traps her. If she escapes the myth of woman, the myth of Negro still ensnares her. Since the myth of woman and the myth of Negro are so similar, to extract her from one gives the appearance of freeing her from both. She thus gains none of the deference and approbation that accrue from being perceived as weak and submissive, and she gains none of the advantages that come with being a white male. To be so "free," in fact, has at times made her appear to be a superwoman, and she has attracted the envy of black males and white females. Being thus exposed to their envy she has often become their victim. (28)

The mythic pathology of black women can be traced from the days of chattel slavery through the present, especially as regards the treatment that many African American domestics experience in the homes of employers. As inscribed by the myth, the black superwoman is by nature, a nurturing, obedient and loyal mammy as well as a lascivious and promiscuous jezebel. The myth also inscribes the black woman as, innately, physically stronger than her white counterparts. In turn, these inscriptions of the "superwoman" myth promote the view of white women as more feminine, more "womanly," more sexually desirable (although simultaneously chaste and pure), and, above all, too delicate for menial labor because "white women saw such tasks as beneath them" (Smith 586). As a result, African American women have often been called "the mules of the world."

In Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, Nanny warns her granddaughter of the animal status of black women. Hoping that her
granddaughter's experiences will be different from her own, Nanny testifies:

Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have tuh, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule of de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' fuh it tuh be different wid you.

Lawd, Lawd, Lawd! (29)

For Nanny, being treated as a mule lies at the heart of black women's oppression. Alice Walker's commentary on the black woman as "the mule of the world" directs our attention to the position of the African American domestic worker. Walker writes:

Black women are called, in the folklore that so aptly identifies one's status in society, "the mule of the world," because we have been handed down the burdens that everyone else--everyone else--refused to carry. We have also been called "Matriarchs," "Superwomen," and "Mean and Evil Bitches." Not to mention "Castraters" and "Sapphire's Mama." When we have pleaded for understanding, our character has been distorted; when we have asked for simple caring, we have been given children. In short, even our plainer gifts, our labors of fidelity and love, have been knocked down our throats. (237; emphasis in original)

Faced with the daily tasks of washing, cleaning, cooking and taking care of children, the African American domestic worker is "the mule of the world." Try as the domestic might to free herself from her entrapment in domestic labor, she still has to work to survive. As Hannah Nelson, an African American domestic worker in Gwaltney's study comments: "Since I have to work, I don't really have to worry about most of the things that most white women I have worked for are worrying about. And if these women did their own work, they would think just like I do--about this, anyway" (4). According to Hannah, because her employer has a maid to clean, cook, and tend to the children, the employer can concern herself with other "things." The employer's other concerns most likely have little
to do with her survival as do the concerns upon which Hannah must focus. Hannah's work, then, does not afford her the same privileges as her white employer.

There are instances in my grandmother's narrative and in the narrative of her employer that reflect the privileged position and perspective of the white employer. Indicative of her privileged position is her admission to wanting a "real mammy." Because Mary was "running day, morning to night" (Appendix B 255) in the house, Mrs. Smith was able to pursue a more lucrative career than that afforded domestic work. By choosing to help her husband run and manage the hotel in Shelby and their real estate business in Hickory, Mrs. Smith upholds societal norms that value and privilege white collar business pursuits over, in this case, tending to a home and raising children. Further, because of race, Mrs. Smith was able to pursue the more lucrative career more easily than could Mary.

Perhaps the most revealing story my grandmother told is that of her friend Lonnie, an African American domestic who lives in Kings Mountain. In the episode "Ah'd Cut de Grass," grandmother explains how Lonnie is fortunate in that her employers pay her decent wages—fifty dollars for a days work. By revealing the economic, social, and racist oppression of the domestic, the story also underscores the construction of African American women as mules. Mary tells the story of Lonnie:

```
dis lady up heah
my friend Lonnie
she been workin' fuh dese peoples uh l o n g/time__
now she work--
she go one day
she go half uh day on Monday
an' she go half uh day on Friday__
an' dat's uh whole day an' dey gives huh fifty dollahs
yeah
```
an' she don't do nuthin' only git ovah deah an'—
if dey gone
she'll go ovah deah an' look around de house
an'
git de paper
an' take de paper in
an' mess around
an' stay ovah deah uh lil' bit
an' dey--
she'll tell dem tuh leave huh money
an' dey leave huh money
she have tuh do like dat if you wanna work
Ah tol' Lonnie
Ah say
"Ah don't blame yuh Lonnie"
Ah say
"As long as you can crawl l"/Ah/said
"You go on tuh work"

(smiles)

Ah said/"You crawl on"
she earn fifty dollars fuh dat one day
she ain't drawin' enough money
she said she don't be able tuh--

(begins to laugh)

but she say she jus' crawl on an' do it
jus' crawl on^ an'
crawl on^ an' den deah at Chris'mas time dey gives huh uh big bonus^
yeah dey's give huh uh bonus
hep/uh/out (2163-2202)

Grandmother paints her friend as a kind of trickster when she describes how Lonnie requests that her employers “leave huh money” “if dey gone” —if they plan to be out of town when Lonnie cleans their home. If her employers are gone, Lonnie “look[s] around de house,” “git[s] de paper,” and “stay[s] ovah deah uh lil' bit.” It might appear that this arrangement benefits Lonnie more so than her employers, for, after all, she receives fifty dollars for two half-days of work, and the work is, as I understand, minimal. When I met Lonnie, however, my understanding of the arrangement altered as I realized what my grandmother meant by “crawl
Lonnie is a small-framed, sixty-five year old woman who has dark spots on her knees, from her years of scrubbing floors. She suffers from chronic back pain and has trouble walking. And yet, despite her physical disabilities, Lonnie "crawl[s] on an' crawl[s] on" because "she ain't drawin' enough money." Although the fifty dollars and the Christmas bonus supplement Lonnie's social security income, she is unable to pay all her bills. And, her income is, finally, little compensation for the physical toll that years of domestic work have exacted on Lonnie's body. When grandmother laughs, then, she laughs with Lonnie, in recognition of her own need to "crawl on" for little money and despite physical aches and pains. Like Nanny in Hurston's novel, Lonnie and Mary cultivate a survivor's spirit that is based in their religious faith, a sense of humor, and an understanding that resistance can be enacted verbally by means of telling stories, and in covert acts of "mess[ing] around."

Although African American women have, in recent years, been successful in pursuing more lucrative careers, "a large portion are still employed in the service areas" (Smith 587). Domestic work continues to be one of the main areas of employment for African American women, especially in the South. According to Smith:

Many of these Black women who are still entering the back doors of "Miss Ann's" kitchen find few expressions of commonality. These Black women are called by their first names regardless of their age and they must address their employer by Miss. They move heavy furniture, clean, cook, sew, and run errands while receiving minimum wages, if they are fortunate. (587)

The result of African American women's entrapment in domestic labor and middle-class white women's position of privilege is that the way both groups of women speak about their experiences diverge along the lines of race and class. Specifically, as Barbara Christian observes, "people of color ... theorize" their lives differently ("Race" 56). Christian writes:
... I am inclined to say that our theorizing... is often in narrative forms, in the play with language. ... How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness that assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity? And women, at least the women I grew up around, continuously speculated about the nature of life through pithy language that unmasked the power relations of their world. ("Race" 56)

This less abstract language conjoins experience and theory to form what Patricia Collins calls "specialized knowledge" (22). According to Collins, afrocentric feminist theories and black women's consciousness reflect black women's experiences in a racist and sexist society. These experiences lead to thought and thought leads to action. The dynamics among experience, thought and action, Collins believes, creates a dialectic peculiar to African American women:

... by espousing a both/and orientation that views thought and action as part of the same process, possibilities for new relationships between thought and action emerge. That Black women should embrace a both/and conceptual orientation grows from Black women's experiences living as both African-Americans and women and, in many cases, in poverty. (29)

African American women's "special knowledge," then, is a theorizing based on everyday experience that is articulated by means of indigenous, culture-specific forms of expression and practice. Indeed, it is an experiential based discourse. As an unlettered, aged woman, Mary uses the oral traditions and other "expressive" traditions of her culture to define, explain, theorize her life.

**Mary Speaks: Language As Feminist Action**

Mary uses the oral traditions of her culture to theorize her life. In other words, by means of testifying and telling stories, Mary performs her theory. Using performance to make sense of one's life, particularly one's life as an African American woman suggests a "theory in the flesh."

Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa define theory in the flesh as "one
where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (23). My grandmother’s stories bear out her “theory in the flesh” as she remembers her life as a domestic. Whether informed by her experiences in the Smiths' home or at Tate Terrace, the cultural underpinnings of such theories stem from life as lived. In turn, experience is (re)embodied in performance.

Concomitantly, performance as a site of theory in the flesh can be characterized as, in bell hooks’ term, a “homeplace” (Yearning 22). Grandmother’s “homeplace,” as bell hooks suggests, influences her world view (Yearning 41–42). Mary articulates her homeplace at varying sites. Specifically, she locates her body as homeplace to her present and past experiences. In this instance, she uses her body to recreate and mime events of the past in the present. At another level, her body is also homeplace to the physical realities of her experience. In other words, her scars, sore legs, and stained knees are visual evidence of how domestic work literally inscribed her body. By means of performance, Mary cites these inscriptions. Mary’s oral traditions also reflect her homeplace. The culture-specific vernacular she incorporates in her performance draw upon her “local knowledge” (Geertz, Local 167) of the African American community to which she belongs. Also, grandmother’s different “homes” of the past constitute cultural sites that inform the cultural/female identity that she authorizes/embodies in her performance. In addition, her homeplace is her present home at Tate Terrace, where she performs. Her home provides the specific context of her performance of her theory and, thereby, “it forms a prime location for resisting objectification as the Other” (Collins 95).
Claiming homeplace permits resistance. Because Mary's oral narrative recounts her life history as a marginalized human being, it "does something in the social world" (Langellier 261; emphasis in original). She uses the art of story to theorize about her life, but she also uses it as a form of political praxis. Her discourse evolves from a "structure of power relations" and thus holds the potential to legitimize or delegitimize that structure (Langellier 267). Indeed, Mary's narrative is

an art of storytelling like the one Homer and the Greeks practiced and the con artists of today continue to perfect. It is a way of operating within a system of power which allows the "weak" to seize victories over the "strong" by employing "tactics" known to the Greeks as metis. It is a form of intelligence and savoir faire, a resourcefulness and an opportunism that is the hallmark of those who will never be the masters of the terrain on which their daily struggles are fought but who develop in practice multiple polyvalent means of survival that allow them to elude that power system successfully. (Lionnet 165)

Performing her narrative provides grandmother a way to proclaim her existence; to communicate a theory in the flesh that is the experience of telling and testifying her past (and present) life experiences as a woman on the margins and that draws on indigenous cultural practices found there. Consequently, Mary performs a theory that is and uses a trickster discourse. Similar to the trickster-like qualities of her actions discussed in Chapter Four, so too is her discourse in the narrative event. In other words, how she constitutes herself as a woman is trickster-like. Like the Signifyin' signifier, the monkey, Mary's skill as a storyteller is a part of her "making do" in the world in which she lives. As with any trickster figure, her stories are

sometimes myths, sometimes legends, sometimes connected with ritual, sometimes not. They can be entertainment, education, a form of humorous rebellion. They can evaluate, explain, and reflect upon realities, thereby making those realities clearer and more profound to the people who tell and hear the tales. (Vecsey 106)
In all of its various masks and roles, her discourse suggests that at the level of "theory," margins and centers are ideological constructs—indeed, transmutable—so that discourses from the margin may intervene at the center, intrude upon that privileged space and throw doubt on the very concept of "truth." A trickster discourse, then, sometimes subverts, upholds, and/or questions other theories. As Victor Turner suggests, trickster discourses are "essentially interstitial, betwixt-and-between all standard taxonomic nodes, essentially 'elusive'" (Anthropology 168). Therein lies the subversive potential of Mary's discourse. Its evasiveness and elusiveness provide her with an alternative way to become empowered.

Mary's theory in the flesh, homeplace(s), and trickster resistance are all based in African American culture. Specifically, African American cultural practices such as the Signifyin' and gospel performance traditions inform and are informed by Mary's discourse. According to Madison, it is through the vernacular traditions of blues, gospel, and Signifyin' that a "theory of the flesh" may be found. It is in the African American vernacular tradition where . . . there is inscribed the black tradition's "own theories of its nature and function within elaborate hermeneutical and rhetorical systems." ("Ethnography" 297)

For instance, grandmother incorporates Signifyin' over "deconstruction"; "testifying" over philosophy; gospel faith over Marxism; the blues over psychoanalysis; and "mother wit" over feminism. As regards the latter analogy, for instance, when I asked her if she had heard about the women's liberation movement, she replied "yes," but contended that women also had to take responsibility for their actions, especially as regards money:

HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT WOMEN'S LIB AND ABOUT THE WOMEN NOT MAKING AS MUCH AS THE MEN?

yeah
Ah heard 'em talkin' 'bout it
DO YOU THINK IT'S TRUE?

yeah
some of 'em do make more
but women make good though
some of these women make more than de men
some of 'em do
some make more
dey jus' don't know how tuh spend
don't know how tuh spend dey money
don't know how tuh
MANAGE

(points at me)

dey's more in managin' dan dey is in money
ef yuh don't know how tuh manage den yuh in bad shape—
jus' buy everythang yuh see (lines 1650-1667)

Rather than focus on how much money women earn, grandmother chooses to focus on how women “manage” the money that they make. As a person who has had to “manage” her money in order to survive, grandmother values common sense and frugality over waste and extravagance. She has never been afforded the privilege of wastefulness and therefore her value system is different from that of women who have.

Therefore, in general, verbal dexterity, duping, wisdom and spirituality, derived from experience, subversive resistance and body sensuality, are aspects of how she defines herself and her world view--i.e., what she values in herself as an African American woman.

Mary’s discourse ingests vernacular traditions such as Signifyin’ to trick, dupe, and con her employer in the narrated events and her audience in the narrative events. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. suggests about Signifyin(g)¹ in the black literary tradition, Mary’s discourse is “black double-voicedness; because it always entails formal revision and an

¹ Gates terms his literary theory with the “g” in parentheses to differentiate it from other definitions of signifying or signifyin'.
intertextual relation . . . " (51). Bakhtin calls this kind of discourse
“narrative parody." He writes:

\[
\ldots \text{as stylization, the author employs the speech of another, but, in}
\text{contradistinction to stylization, he introduces into that speech an}
\text{intention which is directly opposed to the original one. The second}
\text{voice, having lodged in the other speech, clashes antagonistically}
\text{with the original, host voice and forces it to serve directly opposite}
\text{aims. Speech becomes a battlefield for opposing intentions.}
\text{("Discourse" 185)}
\]

Accordingly, Mary, as narrator, revises the events of the past through a
double-voiced form of expression: she uses another's speech for her own
purposes.

In the episode, “We Were De Best of Friends,” Mary’s voice, as
narrator, is “lodged in” the voice of her friend Bell Frederick, a domestic
who worked in the same neighborhood as Mary and someone with whom
she still keeps in touch. In the episode, Mary recalls how Bell came over to
the Smiths’ to visit and to bake cakes with her. Grandmother establishes
that she and Bell were the “best of friends” (line 708), so that, it appears,
anything that grandmother says or implies about Bell later will not be
“mis”-interpreted as a negative evaluation of her “best” friend. Having
done so, grandmother seizes the opportunity to signify on her friend by
recalling their cake baking ritual:

\[
\text{Bell}
\text{she'd come ovah deah}
\text{an' we'd make--}
\text{Ah would}
\text{Ah would make }\text{custards}
\text{an'}
\text{cakes}
\text{well she say}
\text{(in whiny voice)}
\text{"Ah, Ms. Daisy/you/sho'Il/do/make/uh/good/cake"}
\text{shit}
\text{she was in de cake 'fo you even cut it}
\]
The first time grandmother signifies on Bell is when she changes the pronoun "we," in the line three of the excerpt, to "Ah," in line four. The clue that she is Signifyin' is found in the emphasis that she places on "Ah" when she verbalizes the correction. Her word substitution implies that Bell either was not deft at cooking or was too lazy. In the reported dialogue that occurs a few sentences later, grandmother performs Bell with the whiny voice she so often uses when depicting someone who, in her opinion, is annoying, obnoxious or silly. Her reason for attributing this voice to Bell is two-fold. On one level she wants to portray Bell as annoying. On another level she wants to signal that Bell was trying to signify on her by offering her a backhanded compliment on her cake. The compliment was both sincere and cutting, undertoned with jealousy. In her performance of the dialogue, grandmother calls attention to Bell's attempt at Signifyin' by attributing a whiny voice to the original speaker. This is grandmother's way of letting the audience know that she realized Bell's disguised intent. In other words, in order to diffuse Bell's attempt at Signifyin', grandmother pokes fun at her by using the whiny voice. Then, to enforce her narrative parody of Bell, grandmother parodically defiles Bell's sentiments with an evaluative "shit." In the narrative event, Bell is further duped when grandmother comments that Bell "was in de cake 'fo you even cut it." Grandmother's gossip functions to align Bell to a child who cannot wait for a cake to cool before digging into it.
At the end of the narrative, grandmother uses this same strategy of narrative parody to signify on Bell's daughter:

when Ah go home sometime Ah call Bell--
dat lil' gal is som' in"

(in whiny voice)

"How you Ms. D a i s y"^^
SHE SAY “AH’IM BELL’S DAUGHTER”/AH/SAY/“AH/KNOW”

(laughs at the recollection)

Ah say Ah know you Bell’s daughter (735-741)

Once again, grandmother uses a whiny voice to, in this case, portray Bell’s daughter as silly for stating the obvious. In grandmother’s view, it is unnecessary for the daughter to identify herself given that grandmother has known Bell all of her life and, therefore, Bell’s daughter’s as well. Grandmother then caps her Signifyin’ with laughter.

As regards how Mary uses Signifyin’ as the embodiment of feminist agency and as a theory in the flesh, I find the theories of post-colonial feminist critics Françoise Lionnet and Trinh T. Minh-Ha useful. Both critics ask, “what languages, what linguistic and syntactic spaces, are open to those without access to dominant discourses?” (Hamera 235). And both theorists try to answer this question by locating these “spaces” in the oral traditions of women of color

Lionnet’s theoretical base is in the concept of “métissage,” which she defines as “the site of undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages” (6). Moreover, métissage is the “braiding . . . of cultural forms through the simultaneous revalorization of oral traditions and reevaluation of Western concepts . . .” (4). Lionnet sees métissage as a
site of resistance against essentialist generalizations, as well as a site that can potentially unify women.

Minh-Ha’s project is similar to Lionnet’s in that she theorizes the ways in which women, particularly women of color, draw upon experiential theories to speak their lives which, in turn, question essentialist and hegemonic “truthful” discourses. Minh-Ha also focuses on the “performance” of story and, in particular, how performed stories decenter “notions of truth and authenticity” (Hamera 240). Minh-Ha problematizes words like “truth,” “lies,” and “purity” by reconceptualizing them in the theoretical framework of deconstruction.

Both Lionnet’s concept of métissage and Minh-Ha’s perspective on the performance of story apply to my grandmother’s narrative. Métissage, for instance, explains the indeterminacy, or trickery of grandmother’s narrative. As a dual-voiced narrator, grandmother often appears to contradict herself, speak out of both sides of her mouth and wear multiple masks in order to gain authority. In “Dey Nevah Was Too Much Trouble,” for example, Mary revises the narrated events in order to subvert “Ms. Grandmama’s” idealization of her as the prototypical, placid mammy:

Ah washed dishes everyday—
dey looked
Ms. uh
Ms.
Grandmama say

(in old, decrepit voice)

"Ah 'clare"
say
"one of dese days yuh jus' look out ovah deah"
say
"jus' look in dat windah
she'll be standin' in dat window
washin' dishes"

(smiles)
Ah thought
not ef dey had uh dishwasher (1539-1554)

Mary's use of the old, fragile voice to characterize Ms. Grandmama functions to subvert Ms. Grandmama's characterization of Mary as the happy servant who enjoys washing dishes. In the narrative event, Mary alters her voice to parody Ms. Grandmama's view. She further defiles that view by relating what she, in the past, was thinking. Thereby, Mary signals that, in the past, she was an adept, but covert, critic of those who would idealize her identity. In the present narrative situation, Mary solidifies her (past) political critique by performing it and, more specifically, by drawing on her oral cultural traditions to do so.

Mary's "trickery" in the narrative corroborates Minh-Ha's suggestion that storytelling is no less "truer" than history, for "each society has its own politics of truth" (121). Mary's "politics of truth" is manifest in the ritual of storytelling, where "[she] is neither what [she] has been nor what [she] will be" (Turner, Ritual 113). Mary's awareness of these varying "politics of truth" is concretized in her performance. For example, Mary is aware of her "double audience" when she refuses to curse during the interview. In this case, Mary's double-voiced practices function in two ways. As discussed in Chapter Two, she gains authority by "giving up" her own vernacular, thereby Signifyin' on the "other" audience she imagines --i.e., the academy. Thus on one hand, grandmother purges her own language to "trick," in this case, the implied audience. On the other hand, her Signifyin' was also directed at me as another audience, but with different intentions. Because I am familiar with her everyday speech, Mary knew that I would see through her ruse and therefore decode her Signifyin'. Gary Morson explains this phenomenon:
The audience of a double-voiced word is... meant to hear both a version of the original utterance as the embodiment of its speaker's point of view... and the second speaker's evaluation of that utterance from a different point of view. I find it helpful to picture a double-voiced word as a special sort of palimpsest in which the upper-most inscription is a commentary on the one beneath it, which the reader (or audience) can know only by reading through the commentary that obscures in the very process of evaluating. (Morson 108; emphasis in original)

Like Maya Angelou in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Mary is aware of her “double audience”:

[Angelou's] narrator alternates between a constative and a performative use of language, simultaneously addressing a white and a black audience, “image making” and instructing, using allegory to talk about history and myths to refer to reality, thus undermining the institutions that generate this alienated form of consciousness. (Lionnet 131-132)

Similar to Angelou's narrator, Mary uses a performative use of language to address both me and the academy as audience. Indeed, she masquerades as different selves to protect and control her image, as well as accommodate the “other” (the academy). Mary's troping or “braiding of cultures” reflects the indeterminate, unfixed quality of trickster discourse.

As a double-voiced discourse, one of Mary's “voices” is sometimes that of silence and, frequently, her silence is a form of feminist resistance. As revealed in Chapter Four, Mrs. Smith asked Mary to walk down the aisle of the church and sit beside Mrs. Smith in the “mother's” row at Mrs. Smith's daughter's wedding. Rather than conform to the role of the “public” mammy, Mary constructed a fictitious story in which she told the Smiths that she had to leave in order to visit her ill brother in Washington, D.C. Mary has remained silent about her lie and her reasons for telling it. In this case, her silence is used to “con.” Lionnet writes: “For the con artist, the aim is to spin a tale—*parole feinte* [feigned speech]—with the express purpose of swindling the mark and profiting by it” (164). Mary's “tale” coupled with her silence saves her from having to explain to Mrs.
Smith why she did not, in fact, go to the wedding and why she did not return to her job. The “profit” she attains from her “con” is controlling and empowering her own identity and the image people have of her or, as Collins might suggest, Mary proffers a “self-defined Black women’s consciousness” (92).

Mary’s silence is also double-voiced. On the one hand, she is literally silent about why she left her job. On the other hand, her silence “speaks” her self-determination and resistance to others’ definitions of her. Mary refused to play the role of mammy in public. And, quitting her job also allowed Mary to spend more time with her own family. As her daughter reveals, grandmother’s actions defy the stereotypical notion that domestics love their employer’s family more than their own.

Her silence also embodies the gospel tradition. Humility, temperance, and faith are all defining qualities of God’s disciples. Therefore, those in the gospel tradition “wait on the Lord” to lighten their burdens and to do their bidding. Rather than enact revenge, they believe that doers of evil will “reap what they sew.” In times of adversity and conflict, then, those in the gospel tradition “turn the other cheek” or remain silent. Performers of the gospel tradition embody the spirituality of their African and African American progenitors, who not only used silence as a expression of reverence and praise, but also as resistance. Similarly, my grandmother knows that sometimes

You must sit quietly without a chirp. Not sodden—and weighted as if your feet cast in the iron of your soul. Not wasting strength in enervating gestures as if two hundred years of bonds and whips had really tricked you into nervous uncertainty. But quiet; quiet. Like Buddha—who brown like I am—sat entirely at ease, entirely sure of himself; motionless and knowing . . . Motionless on the outside. But inside? (Bonner 7)
"Inside," grandmother "stands still and knows" that her silence rejects rather than corroborates Mrs. Smith's construction of her as the dutiful mammy.

The phrase, "stand still and know" is often used by grandmother and personifies silence as agency. Seeming inactivity ("standing still") represents symbolic action that is transformative. And, as this phrase reflects the mythos of the gospel tradition, its transformative power is enacted through performance (Bruner 25). Conquergood observes that "It is through the liminal and transformative act of performance that myth and reality dissolve into a molten power that charges life with meaning and purpose" ("Performed Myth" 2).

Through her performance of silence, grandmother transformed her subordinate position to one of equality. Her performance stood counter to the ritual performed by the Smiths--i.e., the wedding. By means of silence, then, Mary "stands her ground in the face of this performance [the wedding] that mocks and undermines her identity" (Conquergood, "Performed Myth" 7). Ultimately, Mary, "in a moment of crisis, summoned forth and performed a myth from her cultural heritage that emancipated and empowered her to transform a degrading situation" (Conquergood, "Performed Myth" 9).

Grandmother's use of silence subverts those discourses that seek to silence her. As a savvy trickster, grandmother reappropriates silence to her own advantage. She knows when to speak and when to remain silent. In addition, grandmother also knows how to express herself in other creative, yet silent ways. For Alice Walker's mother, it is her garden--a "wordless" discourse:

... my mother adorned with flowers whatever shabby house we were forced to live in. And not just your typical straggly country
stand of zinnias, either. She planted ambitious gardens—and still
does—with over fifty different varieties of plants that bloom
profusely from early March until late November.
Whatever she planted grew as if by magic, and her fame as a
grower of flowers spread over three counties. Because of her
creativity with flowers, even my memories of poverty are seen
through a screen of blooms—sunflowers, petunias, roses, dahlias,
forsythia, spirea, delphiniums, verbena . . . and on and on. (241)

As with Ms. Walker's garden, my grandmother's storytelling is her form of
artistry and creativity, for “Telling stories and watering morning glories
both function to the same effect” (Minh-Ha 136).

Women like my grandmother who engender theories in the flesh,
use the oral tradition and other discursive practices to articulate and
express their “indigenous” feminism. Lacking the education, social and
economic status, and age advantage of those feminists who typically
identify and theorize “feminism” for us in our mass and academic culture,
grandmother and other women like her offer a grammar of feminist
knowledge, expression and practice that is grounded in the “flesh”—in
their experiences and “homeplace(s).” My grandmother draws on her
experiences as a domestic and her Tate Terrace sisterhood, her cooking and
mothering skills, her quilting and gardening to speak, sing, signify,
testify, tell stories that focus our attention on the realities of her life as a
poor, elderly African American woman. By means of performance, we are
made aware of the oppressive reality that constitutes a good part of Mary's
experiences, and we also are made aware of how she has and continues to
resist that oppression. In sum, she used/uses performance—her theory in
the flesh—to survive, to construct and to celebrate her life.

Because of her experiences, Mary's theory of feminism often
manifests itself in trickster-like practices and expressions. Sometimes
contradictory, often ambivalent and constantly duplicitous, these practices
and expressions function to work to her advantage. She uses them as
covert resistance especially in the confining space of the "other," such as when she reassigns value to "second-hand" clothes and prods her employers into giving her a house. These trickster-like practices are more overtly expressed in her present "homeplace" performance particularly by means of her use of language.

Using language as action and, creating "sound out of silence" (Madison, *Woman*) 1, Mary Rhyne's oral history blurs distinctions between margin and center, agency and passivity, the mundane and unique. It is a "liminal" discourse where "ambiguity and inconsistency of meaning" are performed by a "monstrous figure" who represents within herself "ambiguities and inconsistencies" (Turner, *Ritual* 113). As a monstrous figure, Mary complicates the myth of the "old black mammy." She also complicates the ease with which we would like to deconstruct the myth. As Christopher Vecsey writes:

> By breaking the patterns of a culture the trickster helps define those patterns. By acting irresponsibly he helps define responsibility. He threatens, yet he teaches, too. He throws doubt on realities but helps concentrate attention on realities. He crosses supposedly unbreakable boundaries between culture and nature, life and death, and thereby draws attention to those boundaries. (106)

Mary's feminism urges us to see how she both is and is not the myth; how she both adheres to and breaks its rules. In so doing, Mary helps us better understand the social and cultural codes and patterns that have affected the way she chooses to perform.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: DOMESTIC-FEMINIST THEORY AS PRACTICED AND PERFORMED

The questions that guide this study focus on the relationships between performance, personal and cultural identity, womanhood, domestic work, and feminism as they are influenced by race, class, and gender: What are the social and political implications of bringing this woman's oral history from the margin to center? What is unique about the relationship between domestic work, performance, and feminism as constructed in this oral history? What does this relationship, in terms of theory, have to offer the fields of Performance Studies and feminism?

Maya Angelou writes:

Called Matriarch, Emasculator and Hot Momma. Sometimes Sister, Pretty Baby, Auntie, Mammy and Girl. Called Unwed Mother, Welfare Recipient and Inner City Consumer. The Black American Woman has had to admit that while nobody knew the troubles she saw, everybody, his brother and his dog, felt qualified to explain her, even to herself. (qtd. in Harris 4)

In this study, I have attempted to let my grandmother speak for herself, to let her describe, interpret, evaluate, and theorize about her own life through performance. My goal was to let her explain herself so that we might answer some of the questions raised above. In the process, grandmother “made herself up.” She performed a tale of joy and laughter, pain and sorrow, full of contradictions and ambiguities.

Grandmother’s oral history was identified as performance because, in her telling of it, an event was created that was set apart from “the ordinary course of events” (Hymes, “Breakthrough” 13). Mary’s cross-cultural and culture-specific performance expressions and practices framed her telling as an aesthetic mode of communication and as a performance event. As Trinh Minh-Ha observes, performances such as
Mary's effect an experiential and embodied epistemology—for the performer, her audience and, potentially, for the performer's society and culture:

The world's earliest archives or libraries were the memories of women. Patiently transmitted from mouth to ear, body to body, hand to hand. In the process of storytelling, speaking and listening refer to realities that do not involve just the imagination. The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched. It destroys, brings into life, nurtures. Every woman partakes in the chain of guardianship and of transmission. In Africa it is said that every griotte who dies is a whole library that burns down . . . . (123)

Minh-Ha gives primacy to the phenomenological realities of storytelling by focusing on the sensual characteristics of the body in performance. In addition, she draws our attention to the body as a reservoir in which “libraries” of cultural knowledge are “shelved.” By means of performance, then, Mary draws on her cultural knowledge to construct her domestic labor history. Her performance draws attention to how the interstices of life histories, culture, and identity create a site of social agency. Indeed, grandmother’s “presentation of self” proclaims her existence in the world as she orders, makes sense of, and reflects on her world view. As Victor Turner explains:

If man is a sapient animal, a toolmaking animal, a self-making animal, a symbol-using animal, he is, no less a performing animal, but in the sense that man is a self-performing animal--his performances are, in a way, reflexive; in performing he reveals himself to himself. (Bush 187)

The self-reflexive potential of performance suggests that an oral history, such as Mary's, is polyvalent in that it ingests, constructs, and "throws off" meanings. Therefore, it accentuates culture as a processual and dynamic activity more so than a fixed and stable idea or ideal. My grandmother's performance illustrates the ways in which she moves upon the field of her own self-representation and how that representation reflects not only her
cultural values, attitude, and traditions, but their construction as well. As the constructing agent of her life, grandmother uses performance "to manipulate social reality. Storytellers recreate and revise themselves in stories, and they recreate and revise others. Stories are, among other things, tools for the perpetuation of the social status quo, and for social change" (Johnstone 130). In her oral history, grandmother variously fashions herself as "mammy," "elder," "mule," gossip, friend, disciple, trickster and, occasionally, superordinate--a role that contradicts her "real" social status. Victor Turner writes:

... performances are not simple reflectors or expressions of culture or even of changing culture but may themselves be active agencies of change, representing the eye by which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more apt or interesting "designs for living." ... Performative reflexivity is a condition in which a sociocultural group, or its most perceptive members acting representively, turn, bend or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other sociocultural components which make up their public "selves." (Anthropology 24)

Given the social ramifications of performance, grandmother's oral history illustrates how a "creative actor" may cross social and cultural boundaries and thereby realize, and teach us to realize, that "Borders bleed, as much as they contain" (Conquergood, "Rethinking" 9).

To collect Mary's narrative I engaged in a dialogic and performative ethnographic process. Toward that aim, Mary and I collaborated on the "fragile fiction" created in the ethnographic site. Both of us were vulnerable as we engaged in conversation and tried to recount her life history as a domestic worker. As Conquergood observes, "Talking to and with others, conversation, enables understanding and demands copresence. Talking about others, explanation, particularly in their absence, is a form of gossip ("Rethinking" 8). The dialogic performance ethnography asks
me, then, to perform with, against and in response to my grandmother. In so doing, I learned how “the deeply different can be deeply known without becoming any less different; the enormously distant enormously close without becoming any less far away” (Geertz, Local 48).

Although the performance was a collaborative effort, I am accountable here for my representation and interpretation of the performance. As Marcus and Cushman point out:

> Ethnographic description is by no means the straightforward, unproblematic task it is thought to be in the social sciences, but a complex effect, achieved through writing and dependent upon the strategic choice and construction of available detail. (29)

My “strategic choice and construction of available detail” reflects what I feel Mary emphasized in her telling, and my own interests in how performance, cultural identity, feminist practice, and domestic work, specifically Mary’s experiences, intersect. The study reflects my understanding that self- and cultural reflexivity work in two directions: “Authentic fieldwork depends on acknowledgment of its mutual construction through performance, fiction, [and] intersubjective dialogue between Self and Other” (Conquergood, “Performing” 61).

In Chapter Four of the study, I interacted with Mary’s narrative by examining how her construction of herself as a domestic worker compared to the social construction of the mammy figure. In my analysis I focused on how the mammy prototype is an inscribed social and cultural code that African American women internalize, adhere to, and subvert.

Identifying the mammy as one of four “controlling images” of African American women, Patricia Collins suggests that “the mammy image represents the normative yardstick used to evaluate all Black women’s behavior” (71). In addition, K. Sue Jewell writes: “The image of mammy is so deeply rooted in American culture that it can be found in virtually every
form of print and visual media" (37). In her narrative, my grandmother constructed images of herself that conformed to those of a self-sacrificing, happy-go-lucky, and obedient mammy—e.g., her contention that her employers were “very nice people” (line 807), although “dey didn’t pay nuthin’” (line 300); and, the fact that she “nevah did . . . ramble an’ tamper” (lines 1766, 1777-1778) with her employers’ things. On the one hand, Mary’s confirmation of the mammy myth can be viewed as an “effective [conduit] for perpetuating racial oppression” (Collins 72). On the other hand, grandmother frequently showed how the “mammy” is a constructed role that can, therefore, be altered to serve motives, needs and desires other than those of the employer—e.g., when she “got all ovah Mr. Smith” (line 431) to keep him from leaving his family or when she took second-hand items in order to provide for her family. Barbara Christian explains:

... unlike the white southern image of mammy, [mammy] is cunning, prone to poisoning her master, and not at all content with her lot. ... Mammies kicked, fought, connived, plotted, most often covertly, to throw off the chains of bondage. Mammy saw herself as a mother, but to her that role embodied a certain dignity and responsibility, rather than a physical debasement, doubtless a carry-over from the African view that every mother is a symbol of the marvelous creativity of the earth. Mammy is an important figure in the mythology of Africa. The way in which this theme of African culture is distorted by the white southern perspective testifies to its inability to relate femaleness and femininity, as countless southern belles in antebellum American movies illustrate. (Black Feminist 5)

Although she did not poison her employers, grandmother did find ways to subvert, and reject, the mammy image. She strategized a way to get a new house for her children, intervened in family matters when she was expected to stay in her place, and refused to participate in Carol’s wedding as a mother/mammy.
In Chapter Five, I focused on the feminist implications of Mary’s performance by examining how she performed and what she said about her experience as domestic worker. What Mary had to say provided me an alternative way to view cultural and feminist theories. She taught me that what some academicians deem as “common,” “mundane” and “unimportant” may have much to offer in terms of theory in practice. Indeed, it is the taken-for-grantedness of our everyday lives that has the potential for spawning new ideas and theories about the world in which we live. In essence, by bringing the world of the mundane from the margins, we may yet be able to comprehend more of the totality of human experience.

Illiterate and outside the “academy,” my grandmother draws upon the oral tradition to theorize her life as a female domestic. In her appropriation of indigenous African American vernacular traditions, grandmother’s performance reflects the material conditions under which she narrates her life. Whether in the Smiths’ kitchen or in her home at Tate Terrace, her narrative reflects life as lived. Mary’s performance shows that women who “create sound out of silence” (Madison, Woman 1), and who draw upon their theories in the flesh to articulate the circumstances of their lives enact a theory of resistance. For these women, as Audre Lorde reminds us, “poetry is not a luxury”; it is a necessity:

[Poetry] forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives. (“Poetry” 37)

My grandmother’s “poetry” is also not a luxury. “Carved from the rock experiences of [her] daily life,” grandmother’s oral narrative functions as her form of “tangible action,” as her form of feminist resistance.
Although all people use the materials available to them to articulate their lives, those available to Mary and her use of them function as a discourse of agency. Mary uses quilting, storytelling, gardening, singing and cooking to create a discourse that is not only “feminist,” but a trickster discourse as well. As a “trickster” narrative, grandmother’s performance opens up infinite possibilities for play, subversion, ambiguities, affirmations, and contradictions. Anne Doueihi writes:

Instead of having one meaning, the text opens onto a plurality of meanings, none of which is exclusively “correct,” because as narrative develops in the trickster stories, the conventional level of meaning ceases to be appropriate. . . . In this game played with and through signifiers, meaning is made possible by the space opened between signifiers. It is in the reversals and discontinuities in language, in the narrative, that meaning is produced—not one meaning, but the possibility of meaningfulness. (199)

Given the infinite possibilities provided in the “reversals and discontinuities” of a trickster’s language, grandmother fashions herself as a trickster who temporarily eludes the social constraints placed upon her. The trickster-like qualities of grandmother’s discourse are what qualify it as unfixed in that it raises its “ugly head” where it would otherwise be absent; it is absent where it would otherwise be seen; and, it resides at the center when it is expected to be located at the margins.

Performance is the key to understanding grandmother’s trickster discourse, for it is through performance that she concretizes her theory in the flesh. Mary’s theory in the flesh is “one where the physical realities of [her life]—[her] skin color, the land or concrete [she] grew up on . . . all fuse to create a politic born of necessity” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 24). This “politic born of necessity” functions to redress the social inequities of her life. Thereby, Mary “bridges” the gaps between margin and center by “naming [herself] and by telling [her] stories in her [own] words” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 24).
In sum, by means of performance, Mary constructs her cultural autobiography. She names for her audience and for herself, the events of her life that she deems important and that reflect the cultural traditions to which she belongs. Specifically, Mary appears to emphasize the self-sacrificing aspects of her life. According to her narrative, Mary's sacrificing was key to supporting her family. Similarly, Bernice Johnson Reagon captures the self-sacrificing nature of her “mothers” work in her own “cultural autobiography.” Reagon writes:

*My mothers.*

My mother was born in Worth County
Her mother was a seamstress
Words from my mother about her mother were like
“I never knew when she went to bed”
She was a farmer
When she got home from working the farm
my grandmother would do her work as a seamstress
To my mother she was always a seamstress
Even while she picked cotton or pulled corn or cooked peas and rice
My mother's mother's mother was very heavy
When my mother talks about her,
(who she did not know) she says
“They said that because of her--”
(Her husband was a scholar—he reads books—and he would sit down and talk to you about books)
“Because of her--”
My mother's mother's mother took on the practical existence of her family
“Because of her—
they owned a plantation”
When she died the plantation fell apart
To talk about this lady's strength and talent is to talk of tenaciousness
I don't say nothing negative about Jordan Hill (her husband)
because if you do—
you have to fight everybody in the family.
“Because of her—”
Because of Hannah Hill
all of the children went to school
At least up until she died
We're talking about the 1890's, 1900, Worth County, Georgia
There were no Black schools in Worth County, Georgia
She had to earn money to send them off to school (83-84; emphasis in original)
Similar to Reagon's foremothers, my grandmother also worked hard and made sacrifices in order to provide a better life for her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. "Because of" Mary Rhyne, her sons had a place to live. "Because of her," her oldest daughter clothed her children and furnished her home. "Because of her," my days in college were made a little easier by her care packages of homemade jams, jellies, preserves, one hundred dollar bills wrapped in tissue, and "tack blankets" (quilts) stitched by hand. "Because of her," all of her children and grandchildren made it a little closer to the "crystal stair" upon which she never climbed.

This study has raised as many questions as it has answered. Therefore, this dissertation is a foundation upon which to further theorize. Toward that aim, I suggest that areas for further research that were beyond the scope of this study are: (1) narrative theory; (2) ethnographies of domestics and employers; and, (3) performance of domestic worker narratives. Pursuits in these, and other, areas may provide insights into the connection between performance, cultural identity, and domestic work.

While I drew on narrative theory in my study to explicate how Mary's narrative internally dialogizes other discourses, my focus was oriented toward the social and cultural implications of narrating one's life. Directing more attention toward how oral narratives use aesthetic forms and modes of narrative communication might help us better understand how these forms and modes effect and reveal the narrator's perspective and motives. As was helpful with this study, Bakhtin's notions of "dialogism" and "heteroglossia" might be useful to interpret personal narratives because these concepts direct our attention to the various and contingent sites that inform and are informed by narrative performance.
Endemic to this application are the politics of using narrative theory to explicate oral narrative performance, for appropriating and applying any theory has social and political consequences.

One question raised by this discussion is what are the politics involved in choosing a narrative theory? Is a theorist, for example, obligated to use a narrative theory that is indigenous to the culture of the performer? As regards this study, I believe that more research concerning “theories in the flesh” will tell us more about the ways in which oral narrators make sense of and order their lives. And too, such research might make room for more “indigenous” theories to be incorporated into the academic “dialogue.”

Yet, as Harold Scheub suggests, claiming “one-to-one relationships” between a performer and her culture is a theoretically slippery practice:

A performer of oral narratives utilizes the materials of his or her culture much as a painter uses color. The analyst must therefore not mistake the cultural elements found in such narratives for reflections of the culture itself. There are no one-to-one relationships between the events in the performance and the artist’s society. If the narrative tradition does mirror culture, it does so only in intricate, aesthetically perceived forms, which ultimately have the same effect on an audience as art and music do. (345)

Scheub’s argument challenges ethnographers of oral narrative performance to engage a “postmodern” methodology. That is, scholars should be aware of the indeterminacy and instability “inhabiting the space between” (Doueihi 191) a narrator and her culture. Scheub’s perspective not withstanding, the narrative theory espoused by Bakhtin and others calls attention to the instability of language and therefore culture. And, when these theories are applied to oral narrative performance, they proffer multivocal rather than reductive, univocal meaning.

In addition to narrative theory, performance-centered rather than text-centered ethnographies of domestic and employer narratives might
tell us more about the ways in which both groups of women construct their lives. In this study, for instance, I placed the two women’s discourses against one another to compare and contrast how each woman constructed the past. Mrs. Smith stated that she wanted a real good mammy and while Mary, at times, adhered to the prototype, she also subverted it. As I interpreted her speech acts, Mrs. Smith also chose to romanticize my grandmother’s years in her employ as evidenced by such statements as “Oh we won’t have another Daisy. You won’t find another Daisy” (Appendix B 257). According to Susan Tucker, the revisions that occur in how white women employers and black women employees remember the past has to do with the psychological needs of each woman. “For white women, the choice to remember ‘good’ over the ‘bad’ often led to the protest that ‘whites did give a lot to these black women,’ and other protests that the paternalistic system had worked well” (4; emphasis in original). For black women, however,

...revision made possible the discussion of ‘bad times’—injustices and even cruelties—with a spirit of strength. Revision allowed the recollection of sadness and hurt feelings with dignity, so that they, too, might align themselves with life today and their present self image. (Tucker 4)

Grandmother expressed the “bad times” through silence. Her silence reflects her “spirit of strength” because silence became her form of resistance. Still, at other times, her revisions allowed her to portray herself as a strong, dignified authority figure rather than a submissive, docile mammy. Tucker writes:

...both black and white women seemed to achieve feelings of reconciliation with their past lives. The telling of their stories allowed them to re-create emotions and thoughts that previously had been unarticulated, to one degree or another. In speaking anew or for the first time of these memories, they reconstructed the past. The telling of their stories, then, seemed to become an act that changed the past. (4)
Although my study engaged a "dialogue" between Mrs. Smith and my grandmother, I privileged my grandmother's narrative performance over her employer's. In so doing, I devalued, to a certain extent, Mrs. Smith's participation in the construction of my grandmother's domestic labor history. Although I justified my choice by admitting that my primary focus was to interpret my grandmother's experience and the way she constructs it, my devaluing of Mrs. Smith's narrative (i.e., not doing a poetic transcription of her narrative and placing her narrative in an appendix), potentially positions Mrs. Smith as a fixed subject. In other words, her views and construction of the past and present are secondary to mine and my grandmother's. A study that privileged a more genuine dialogue, however, might give equal weight to both voices.

A consideration of performance at both narrative sites (i.e., my grandmother's and Mrs. Smith's) might have added another level to my research. Doing an ethnography of performed oral histories of these women, for example, would reveal more about the experiential realities of these women's lives. Such research would represent a more complex "dialogue" among researcher and researched and would reveal more about the complex relationships between employers and their employees. Moreover, a performance ethnography of both employer and employee narratives would "be an antidote to the atemporal, decontextualized, flattening approach of text-positivism" (Conquergood, "Rethinking" 19). In other words, attending to dual narrative sites would illuminate the context and setting of the narrative event, the cultural codes, rules, and signs that govern and mark narrative performance across cultures, and the aesthetic qualities of performance. According to Turner, cultural performances
should not be seen merely as scripts, scenarios, scores, stage
directions, or other modes of blueprinting, diagramming, or guiding.
Their full meaning emerges from the union of script with actors and
audience at a given moment in a group’s ongoing social process.  
(Anthropology 24)

Thus text-bound ethnographies delimit performer agency, because
performers make meaning with the body, in a particular setting, during a
particular time, and for different people. An ethnography of performed
narratives of white women employers and their African American
domestics would prove fruitful for those who want to enrich their
understanding of the complex relationships developed and maintained
between these women, the power relations involved, the cultures that
inform how and why these women remember the past in the manner that
they do, and how the present-tense tellings contradict and affirm each
other and the past told events. This research would complement current
studies on domestic service such as those by Rollins, Katzman, and Tucker,
and it would provide us with greater insight into the matrix of
performance, cultural identity, and domestic work.

Along the same lines, a study that focused on the narratives of the
children raised by domestic workers would be interesting. Having the
benefit of living in “two worlds,” the narratives of these children might
provide insight as to how they felt about being raised by two “mothers.”
Their narratives might also reveal their own ambivalent feelings for their
domestic caregivers. Some children might project the stereotypical
mammy image on to their maids while others might express more respect
for their maids than for their biological parents. A dialogue between the
children of the employer and the children of the domestic would offer even
more insight into the effects of the social institution of domestic work.
The provocative questions raised and answered from this polyphony of voices would contribute to the body of knowledge already available on domestic work. Both studies would be interdisciplinary research projects, combining theories across the humanities and social sciences including sociology, folklore, anthropology, linguistics, African American studies, literary studies, and cultural studies. But most importantly, the use of performance theory as methodology might facilitate the joining together of these disciplines, decentering rather than displacing the textual paradigm, opening up more space for "research and writing practices that are performance-sensitive" (Conquergood, "Rethinking" 22).

A final area for further research might focus on the doing of performance. That is to say, I feel that it is important that I perform my grandmother's narrative. Undoubtedly, the performance of my grandmother's stories "is an ethical concern no less than a performance problem" (Bacon 95), as well as it is a "moral act" (Conquergood, "Moral Act" 1). The work of Dwight Conquergood has been instrumental in outlining the problematic as well as the ideal model for performing the "other."

For Conquergood, the morally problematic stances of performance ethnography fall into four categories: "The Custodian's Rip-Off," "The Enthusiast's Infatuation," "The Curator's Exhibitionism," and "The Skeptic's Cop Out" ("Moral Act" 5). Within each of these stances exists an ethically insensitive approach to the other. For example, the custodian's rip-off reflects a selfish approach to the other. This kind of ethnographer views the sacred rituals, ceremonies, and/or stories, that make up the cosmology of the culture under study, as "trinkets" to be sold and exchanged "in the name of preserving 'dying cultures'" (5). In contrast, there is the
enthusiast who too easily identifies with the other and who fails to make critical distinctions between the other and himself: "This performative stance is unethical because it trivializes the other. The distinctiveness of the other is glossed over by a glaze of generalities" (6). At the other end of this moral dilemma is the exhibitionist who stresses difference to the point of romanticization. "The manifest sin of this quadrant is Sensationalism, and it is an immoral stance because it dehumanizes the other" (7). The final pitfall Conquergood outlines is the skeptic. Pessimism, detachment, and paralysis mark the sentiments of this approach. Conquergood writes: "In my view, 'The Skeptic's Cop-Out' is the most morally reprehensible corner of the map because it forecloses dialogue" (8).

At the center of this quadrant, however, lies the dialogic approach. This approach to ethnographic research resists the trappings of those previously outlined. Conquergood formulates the dialogic approach in the following way:

The aim of dialogic performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another. It is a kind of performance that resists conclusions, it is intensely committed to keeping the dialogue of performer and text [researcher and researched] open and ongoing. . . . More than a definite position, the dialogical stance is situated in the space between competing ideologies. It brings self and other together even while it holds them apart. It is more like a hyphen than a period. ("Moral Act" 9; emphasis in original)

Thus, the dialogic approach to the other demands first, a recognition of the complexity of the researcher's position betwixt and between competing ideological trappings and second, a commitment to engaging the other through shared talk, stories, songs, laughter, fights, and disputes. What follows from such a stance is a process that "resists closure and totalizing domination of a single viewpoint, unitary system of thought." Moreover, "The dialogical project counters the normative with the performative, the
canonical with the carnivalesque, Appollonian rationality with Dionysian disorder" (Conquergood, “Between Experience and Meaning” 47).

As her grandson, I feel that my grandmother’s stories speak me as much as they speak her. That is not to say that her life history is synonymous with my own. On the contrary, her oral history speaks of her own personal life experiences. More so, my life is affected by her stories:

For the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships. The possession of an historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide. . . . the self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities such as those of the family, the neighborhood, the city, and the tribe . . . . (MacIntyre 221)

I cannot escape the fact that because I am Mary’s grandson, my life has been influenced by her life and her stories. But in order for me to discern my relationship with those stories, I must engage them in conversation, rather than fall into the “moral morass and ethical minefield of performative plunder, superficial silliness, curiosity-seeking, and nihilism” (Conquergood, “Moral Act” 9). I understand that performing the other has moral consequences, but I also understand that performing the other has the potential to bring not only self and other together, but also the potential to “pull an audience into a sense of the other in a rhetorically compelling way” (Conquergood, “Moral Act” 3). For me, the rewards of performing grandmother’s stories outweigh the potential pitfalls of such practice.

As a teacher of African American literature, I teach my students, who comprise different races, ethnic backgrounds, social classes, and genders, that they cannot fully understand African American texts unless they embody them in performance. Many of these students feel paralyzed by the thought of performing the “other,” while other students recognize
the potential benefits of such performances. Responding to the exam question, “How is performance an epistemology,” the answer given by one of my students demonstrates how performing the other increases our understanding and appreciation:

On the first day of class I asked myself whether I would be accepted as a Mexican performing African American literature. How could I understand and internalize the identity of a black without being one? Performing was the answer. Regardless of the part, if I were in touch with the character or the scene, then I would be in touch with that world, that culture. Kristen, in her public performance of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, provided a good example of this. Her character Janie [the protagonist of the novel] was a black woman with attitude. Kristen played her part well; no one thought, “Wow, that’s a white girl trying to be black!” Instead the audience responded with a, “You go, sister.” The issue was not about whether Kristen was white, rather that Kristen was Janie. Through performance she procured the knowledge of Janie’s world and Janie’s culture, which included Janie’s race. Had Kristen not performed this character, she may not have understood why Janie felt and responded the way she did to those around her. Kristen became a friend of Janie’s in a way that never would have transpired without her performance. (Reyes-Hailey 2)

This student came to realize, like many ethnographers of performance, that performing the other teaches us something about the other, while at the same time, it teaches us something about ourselves.

The preceding areas for further research that I have discussed are those that this study could not encompass, but in which I continue to be interested. Undoubtedly, there are other ideas, questions, and issues that this dissertation raises. This fact emphasizes the importance of and need for more research questions that complement and expand the contested concept of performance.

Writing this dissertation has been a tenuous journey. There have been triumphs, setbacks, disappointments, and frustrations. But no one said that the journey would be easy. As Conquergood reminds us, “Opening and interpreting lives is very different from opening and closing books”
I discovered this truth once I "opened and interpreted" my grandmother's personal narrative. I discovered through her the meaning of patience, dignity, sacrifice, and self-preservation, as well as how we live out the contradictions of our lives. When I thought I could not respect her more, her narrative proved me wrong. In the following excerpt from Maya Angelou's poem, "Our Grandmothers," the speaker captures the essence of my grandmother:

```
Centered on the world's stage,
she sings to her loves and beloveds,
to her foes and detractors:
However I am perceived and deceived,
however my ignorance and conceits,
lay aside your fears that I will be undone,

for I shall not be moved. (263)
```

Grandmother's resilience shines on.
WORKS CITED


APPENDIX A

THE PERFORMANCE SYMBOLS

1. The end of a poetic line represents a half second pause.
2. A period (.) represents at least a two second pause.
3. A slant (/) between words with no space represents words spoken so rapidly together that they are all pronounced as one word. Example: to/do; I/don't/like/it; go/way
4. Capital letters represent an increase in volume.
5. A middle line (—) represents an abrupt shift or change in theme.
6. Spacing between letters in a word represents a deliberate slowing down to emphasize each sound in the word for effect. Example: He needs p l e n t y help.
7. An arrow head going up (^) represents a rise in the voice pitch after each word. Two arrows or more represent an increase in higher pitch.
8. A line at the bottom of a word (so what...) represents a lowering in the voice pitch. Two lines or more represent an increase in lower pitch.
9. Angle brackets (<>) between words, phrases, and lines represent the voice whispering. Four or more represent a quieter whisper. Example: on the road it was <dark>.
10. An underlined word represents an emotional emphasis, an intensity in breath and sound, not volume. Example: I sacrificed all my life.
11. Three periods (...) represent a pause while thinking, or contemplating what has just been said.
APPENDIX B
SUPPLEMENTAL INTERVIEW WITH MRS. SMITH

PJ: Did you have other domestics to work for you before grandmama?

Mrs. Smith: Yeah. Had Shirley. She worked a couple days a week. And then I had Carolyn Rinehart work for me til your grandmother came. See, every time I got pregnant she got pregnant. Now I said, "Carolyn. Now, here you are expecting and you're not gonna be able to come over and take care of two kids. I want you to find me a good mammy. I wants me a real mammy." Well, she said, "I'll find you one." Well, I'll never will forget the day when your grandmother called. She just called and she talked so dignified. She talked so big and everything and she'd love to come and work for me. Didn't know that she'd be working next door. My mother had Charlie [unintelligible] house. She said oh she would love to come. She could take care of children. So she started out working each day and we'd take her home—about five in the afternoon. Then in 1966 my father and my husband, they went to Shelby to see about this hotel down there and it was for sale at auction. And my daddy just lucked up and told him what he'd give for it. And they went down and got it. And first thing he did, he got a call from Shelby that the sons wanted to sell it. They were gonna sell it at auction. So, they went on and had the sale and everything and this uh, I forget this guy's name from Shelby, but he bidded it off at the sale but did not make [unintelligible] and he died of a heart attack that Saturday night. So he came back to my father and said, "Well. We're just gonna take you up on what you said you'd give." So we split it up. Daddy says, "I get a—they get a third. Mama a third. And I'll take a third." So that was it. We had went up there and [unintelligible] the hotel. They just
started fussing, so Gene and I had to go up there. So that meant that your grandmother and my family would come down every weekend. She would come down on Friday. I'd have to come to Hickory to get her. They'd come down and then my family would come down on Sunday and they'd take her back. So Gene and I was staying over there at the house. She got to where she was scared over there by herself and everything. And we had gotten her a house. And she just decided she couldn't stay over there. She was having problems with the house. So, she just got in there and she did the cooking and taking care of the kids and I think running day, morning to night. She'd tell Jimmy if he didn't stay in that house she was gonna whip his butt.

And then. Carol, Patty, she was gettin' married. And your mother—Jimmy said Sarah had been here. And I had to work at the sale that day. Said that your grandmother was going to Washington to see her brother—real bad off. And of course I told her all the time that she would have to come down the aisle right after me when Carol and Patty got married and sit down there with me. Cause she raised those kids. So Daisy went up there to her brother that was so bad off. She went up there and she didn't come home.

Mary: Didn't I come back?

Mrs. Smith: NOOOOOOOO. You finally got up the nerve to call Tanya H.. Told Tanya to tell me that you was gonna stay up there, cause he was real sick and you weren't coming back.

She was with us 18 years. You were with me... She even been down to down to Jacksonville, Florida, to Atlanta. You always went down with me to see Carol. Remember that we was going down there to Florida and the
police stopped me. [laughter] Daisy just sat there like this [stiffens her body], you know.

Mary: [laughter] I never will forget that.

Mrs. Smith.: I had my red suit on and I said, "Oh I'm just so sorry. We on our way to see my daughter and her little baby but I just had to stop at the university to see my youngest daughter and she's gonna have to go to class and I didn't mean to be speeding." And he was so nice. He said, "I'll just give you a warning ticket." Oh Daisy just said, "Shew." And I guess after they all left home, that's when you went back to Kings Mountain.

PJ: Did you have anybody to come work for you after that?

Mrs. Smith: No, cause I couldn't ever trust nobody. That's why I make her come up here now. I told somebody the other day. I said I wouldn't have one of those girls down there at the college or one of those guys come over here and work for me cause they might break in . . .

Mary: [interrupting] Ah tell de chil'ren now, Ah say well Lord de reason why peoples can't get jobs anymore is because dey do nothin' but steal, steal, steal. And take things that don't belong tuh 'em.

Mrs. Smith: That's right. Yeah we were talking about it day before yesterday. See Roxy Rich, her husband died about a year ago and she got arthritis in her legs and her hands, and elbows. Well her elbows, that bone stick way out like that. [demonstrates] And she went about her feet and they had to operate on her. That one and they were gonna do the other one in six months. And it was something to do with that bone. Took the bone off or something and she had to stay in a cast for six months.

Mary: Oh my God.

Mrs. Smith: And it was this lady over here--over there--who works at the Library at the college. She was over there helping her. She was
getting ready to leave and Roxy said, "I just tell you, you never know with people. Trust 'em and everything." Said this lady worked for [unintelligible] and she asked me if I needed some help. She was gonna help me out twice a week. I said, "That's the way I am about Daisy." I said, "I'm not gonna get no one I don't know to come in." And it's just me and I just wait till Daisy comes up here. Everybody says, "Oh we won't have another Daisy. You won't find another Daisy."
VITA

Elondust Patrick Johnson was born in Hickory, North Carolina, on March 1, 1967. The youngest of seven children, Patrick was characterized as a "curious" child by his mother. To satisfy his curiosity, he attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he received his BA and MA degrees, before moving to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to attend LSU for the Ph.D. After eleven years of "higher learning," however, he has decided, in the words of his grandmother, "it ain't worth it." In the near future, he hopes to open his own restaurant and performance club, where he intends to feed customers fattening desserts and then dazzle them with his campy renditions of Broadway tunes. Patrick teaches African-American literature and performance at Amherst College and lives in Amherst, Massachusetts, with his dog, Chica.
Candidate: Elondust Patrick Johnson

Major Field: Speech Communication

Title of Dissertation: Performance, Cultural Identity, and Feminist Practice in the Oral History of an African American Domestic Worker

Approved:

[Signature]

Major Professor and Chairman

[Signature]

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination: February 16, 1996