

“...A Bolshevik, a Negro and a Gun”

by

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Abstract

This thesis reveals how a system of changing social positions structured in various private and public spaces provides a social arena for authors, Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*, Wilkie Collins in *The Moonstone*, Ida B. Wells in *A Red Record* and Claude McKay in his poem “If We Must Die,” to frame the racial struggles of their particular culture and time. These cross-cultural resources establish a wider, contextual stage from which to understand the complex atmosphere of race and violence out of which the transatlantic racial riots of 1919 emerged. Few scholars engage in such comparative analyses. “A Bolshevik, a Negro and a Gun” symbolizes crucial elements with which imperialist and supremacist ideology shield reality: they manipulate the historical memory of society. This study situates these literary works within a Marxist theoretical framework to demonstrate how classic texts should be read as significant cultural artifacts bestowed with elements of symbolic oppression.

“...A Bolshevist, a Negro and a Gun”

Introduction: The “Other”

In his acclaimed text, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Karl Marx asserts, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary their social being that determines their consciousness” (Richter 410). Here, Marx contends that society and its culture are dependent on the sensitivities and sensibilities of spirited critical thinkers who have the ability to consider certain ideas outside the accepted social framework. Their intellectual consciousness, inspired by contradictions in material conditions in which they live, raises the curtain on the abhorrent actualities of a warped social and economic system. The “Red Summer” of 1919 illustrates society’s distorted view towards blacks as heinous acts of violence swept across the “Black Atlantic.” “If We Must Die” by Claude McKay is a direct response to Chicago’s “Red Summer” riot in July 1919. It stood amidst sensationalist white press releases and local administrative reports which falsely attributed the riots to Bolsheviks, Negros and Guns (Voogd 119). McKay played a pivotal role in exposing these distorted and dominant white ideologies. This thesis shows how the issue of race and violence was raised by British and American authors in the mid and latter part of the nineteenth century, and explains how McKay’s response to the bloody events of 1919 emerged out of this literary context.

Why 1919? The “Red Summer” riots embodied widespread bloody violence towards blacks. The crimes reverberated across twenty five cities in the United States and nine seaports in Great Britain. This raging tyranny towards blacks, often committed in plain daylight, accentuated a peak in society’s racial divide. I chose 1919, because it is a focal point from which past historical and literary circumstance, social hypocrisy and racial disunity can easily be compared and measured.

My thesis examines transformative ideas of race in multiple literary texts preceding the events of 1919. I examine the idea of the dark “other” as perceived within the private space of the Victorian country estate in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, and later, in Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone*. Their ideas represent a shift towards an unambiguous representation of white fear towards blacks. I also examine the public space utilized by Ida B. Wells in her pamphlet, *A Red Record*. Brontë’s, Collins’s and Wells’s varied responses to the “other” are rooted in obvious cultural differences, but each is affected by their nation’s growing industrialization, expansion and the development of an urban proletariat. Each text ends with the desire to restore social harmony, but each of their representations of the dark “other” leaves illuminating shadows upon their narratives. The dark “other’s” stereotypical image remains a pervasive, misunderstood force within a prejudicial society. However, in each case, the author’s configuration of the dark “other” prepares the way forward towards increasing white fear and a rising black resistance, which reaches its height in 1919.

This thesis has five chapters. The first focuses on the historical events of 1919 in the United States and Great Britain. 1919 was supposed to be a time of promise, peace and participation as black and white soldiers returned home from World War I. This

chapter explains the defensive, racial dialogue which boiled into the “Red Summer,” as black rioters chose to defend their rights and challenge public assumptions. Being American or British could no longer be equated with whiteness, despite contrary assertions from governments, newspapers and law enforcers.

Chapter Two takes a step back in literary history by examining Charlotte Brontë’s signification of “shared oppression” rather than “shared inferiority” between women and blacks in her novel, *Jane Eyre*, published in 1848 (Meyer 251). In this *Bildungsroman*, Brontë utilizes darkness as a symbolic liberating tool to question the Victorian woman’s inequality and discrimination within a conventional patriarchal society. Darkness highlights Jane’s sense of injustice but her suffering cannot be compared to the imprisoned existence of the dark “other” portrayed by Bertha Mason Rochester.

According to Susan L. Meyer, whose article “Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of *Jane Eyre*” plays an influential role upon my notions of the “other,” the imprisonment of Bertha, Rochester’s mad Jamaican wife, alludes to Britain’s “marriage” to the colonies (256). Bertha’s insanity sensationalizes her darkness as she is described as, “cunning as a witch...roaming about the house, doing any wild mischief that came into her head” (Brontë 364). Meyer suggests that Bertha’s vengeful actions are analogous to slave insurrections in the British West Indies. Just as the white colonizers feared slave revolts and their fires of destruction, Thornfield Hall lives in fear of Bertha’s rebellious and fiery assaults. This anxiety is clearly indicated by Jane, when she asks herself, “What crime was this, that lived incarnate in this sequestered mansion, and could neither be expelled nor subdued by the own? -- what mystery, that broke out, now in fire and now in blood, at the deadest hours of the night?” (Meyer 254). Meyer clearly reveals how

blackness highlights Jane's sense of injustice. It was her revelation that enabled me to examine how Brontë's text inhibits the discovery of black injustice and perversity.

At a time when a female protagonist's encounter with hostile forces was considered unusual, Brontë's novel steps cautiously into a racial discourse. While she portrays her dark "other" as female, the image remains conventionally dehumanized and barbaric. Bertha is bestowed with darkened, swollen lips and rolling, drunken eyes, alienated by madness and refused a language. Despite their double sided character associations, Brontë never allows the dark "other" and Jane's paths of suffering to cross.

Meyer asserts that Brontë's racial "other" not only signifies the oppressed, but the oppressor, the sympathizer and the racist as well (249). By referring to these stereotypical oppositions, Meyer suggests that Brontë does not clearly define her thoughts on the nation's participation in the practice of slavery. By the end of the novel, "the blackened ruin" of Thornfield estate, Bertha's death and Rochester's mutilation may, at first glance, suggest an atmosphere purified from oppression and ill-gotten colonial wealth (Brontë 361). Upon further examination, however, these vestiges of ruin and death echo imperial crimes enacted upon an oppressed race.

The author's apprehension to erase the "other" from her text is made clear by the decaying description of the manor house of Ferndean (Brontë 366). This dark and dank scene indicates that Victorian society remained largely unconscious to the oppressive conditions enforced upon half its subjects. Despite the ambiguities in her representation of racial difference, Charlotte Brontë's novel illuminates the willingness of society to view race with negativity and disdain, and its increasing ability to exhibit fear in the wake of ignorance. In 1848, when Brontë published *Jane Eyre*, the repressive existence of the

dark “other” remains hidden and unresolved behind the ruinous walls of Rochester’s Thornfield Hall estate.

Chapter Three refers to Wilkie Collins’s novel, *The Moonstone* (published in 1868), to examine the representation of the colonial “other” as characterized by Ezra Jennings. The repercussions of the Indian Mutiny in 1857 inspired the author to question the righteousness of British imperialism and its supposed fight against the “uncivilized” and “savage” Indian. In his text, Collins unconventionally highlights and dismantles the divisions between dominant imperial ideology and domestic crime, between the colonial “other” and the English upper class gentleman, and between ignorance and reality. The character of Franklin Blake, like Brontë’s Jane Eyre, draws the reader’s attention to these divisive forces embedded within British society when he declares, “Look at the household now! Scattered, disunited-- the very air of the place poisoned with mystery and suspicion” (Collins 188).

Collins utilizes the power of the Indian Moonstone to symbolize these disunities and underlying hypocrisies. Its curse predicts disaster to befall any individual who happens to steal the diamond. This curse is symbolic of historic, white fear of a rising, riotous and monstrous colonial “other.” While Collins still infuses his colonial “other” with grotesque dimensions, his black and white facial contours, blended with a female disposition, draw an outline of the horrors of racial segregation and oppression that existed in late nineteenth century England.

In *The Moonstone*, Collins uproots the conventional imperialist narrative in the associations between two men, Ezra Jennings, the man of mixed race and Franklin Blake, the English aristocrat; they comprehend each other’s *difference*. In blurring the

boundaries between the “exotic” and the “domestic,” Collins observes that the futures of the colonized and the colonizer are at stake. When Jennings discovers the motive behind the Moonstone conspiracy, he proves Blake’s innocence as well as his own. He is not the disturbing and insane force that imperialist society prescribes him to be, nor is he a murderous cut throat, who attacks families and instigates fiery revolts. He is a superior physician, responsible for saving lives and resolving what are considered unsolvable truths.

The racial environment within *Jane Eyre* and *The Moonstone* are not only shaped by narrative demands, restrictions and differences, but also by commonalities in culture. While Brontë designs an imprisoned space in which oppression is voiced from an English woman’s perspective, Collins creates a social space in which the imperialist and the “other” are awarded a voice. Unconventionally, the latter is permitted to voice his opinion upon the prejudicial norms associated with dominant upper class ideology. He describes the pain and suffering experienced from society’s exclusion and hatred. Sadly his *difference*, his death and his unmarked grave signify the colonial “other’s” inability to defend his name or manhood from imperialism’s negative onslaught. Until the “other” can form a united defense against society’s irrational and violent fears, the “other’s” reputation will remain an “uncleansed” entity; a target of discrimination and violent oppression.

Collins’s novel anticipates the horrific racial disunity that occurs in America and Britain in 1919. His novel suggests how Great Britain’s policy of alienation towards people of color actually defined it as a nation. It represents an unconventional shift away from the superiority of British imperialism over the savage Indian. In fact, the

Moonstone's theft is carried out by John Herncastle, an upper class Englishman whose bloodthirsty actions typify imperial greed. This colonial scene is set at the beginning of the novel and takes place during the siege of Seringapatam in 1799, an event which had secured the position of Britain's East India Company in the colony. While Collins's descriptions are not saturated with contempt for imperialist policy, this scene is not a mere accidental conception. It represents Collins's purpose to subvert imperialist ideology in an effort to identify the truth, despite its shifting racial perspectives.

Chapter Four crosses the Atlantic to examine the American perspective of the white "other" in Ida B. Wells's pamphlet, *A Red Record* (1895). From the day that slaves were emancipated, Wells declares, "more than ten thousand negroes have been killed in cold blood, without the formality of judicial trial and legal execution" (936). She observes 1892 to be a particularly brutal year in the American South. Her exploration of the "other" signifies the intimidation and lawlessness of the white American system, undermines white, American dominance, recognizes the determination of the black man to subvert the white man's accusations, and presents his side of the story.

The power of Wells's statistical record is her public and courageous deliverance of the real facts. Her strategy is a direct uncensored and public release of the facts about southern white lynching crimes. Like Victorian writers Charlotte Brontë and Wilkie Collins, she utilizes conventional configurations of race, but unlike these earlier authors, Wells does not camouflage her views in them. In fact her text is far from Victorian in its debate of these oppressive crimes. While all three authors combine darkness and femininity as symbolic liberating tools to portray pain and suffering associated with inequality and oppression, Wells reveals how southern whites hide behind constructions

of white woman's sexuality to justify their heinous crimes upon African Americans. In Wells's text, the uncrossed paths between race and womanhood finally meet to illustrate the savage rationale of a supposed civilized nation. Furthermore, the horrific pictures and gruesome evidence collected in the pamphlet were difficult for southern whites to refute.

In *A Red Record*, these horrific images illustrate the monstrous shape of the southern white man. Uncoerced by Victorian convention like her predecessors Charlotte Brontë and Wilkie Collins, Wells succeeds in reversing the imagery engineered by an oppressive imperialist ideology. She identifies the distorted passion in the faces of children and the bloodshot eyes of their sadistic white parents who were eager to participate in the sickening tortures of the unprotected black victim (Wells 170).

In exposing horrific photographs of lynchings and the false charges used to corroborate white mob action, Wells motivates her readers to identify with the humanity of the oppressed black victim. As in the resolution of *The Moonstone* conspiracy in which Jennings's character is granted some significance by his English peers, Wells conspires to elevate and empower the black "other" as she defends his name against the image of the "burly black brute" sensationalized by southern white newspaper reports. She believes whites as well as blacks need to be reeducated. She attacks social science's ideological notions regarding the inferior status of blacks in hopes of building self respect amongst the black race and willingness to question and resist their accursed lot (145). The helpless, feminized portrayal of Ezra Jennings in Wilkie Collins's text underscores the lack of self respect and a lack of faith in justice existing in late nineteenth century Victorian society.

A Red Record symbolizes American society's "unconsciousness" towards these atrocious and bloody crimes, and a willingness to turn a blind eye to the injustice, outlawry and hypocrisy existing within it. Wells believes lynching strikes at the very heart of America's problem with race (Giddings 2). In addition to the moral issue, Wells reveals how lynching dissuades investment in American industry while forcing its administration to defend its barbarism. Unlike Brontë's and Collins's configurations of the black "other" which remain excluded, victimized and unknown, Wells initiates the start of a spirited resistance: a crusade for social justice and black identity. Her aim is to inspire a black united front to defend the black name and its humanity. At the end of the nineteenth century, this hope remained only fantasy, despite her daring and courageous publication, as blacks tried to come to terms with economic divisions within their race. It was not until 1919 that Wells's hope for a united resistant force began to emerge.

Chapter Five switches gears as I move from events that lead up to 1919, to the examination of the responses to these climatic events. This chapter analyzes the representation of the new "other" in Claude McKay's celebrated poem "If We Must Die." In 1919, widespread lynchings fueled race riots as blacks, for the first time, marched together in a united and resistant front against white supremacy. World War I had given black soldiers an expectation of equality. At this time, being American or British could no longer be associated solely with whiteness. McKay's poem directly responded to Chicago's race riot in the summer of 1919 and was adopted as an anthem for the emerging transatlantic New Negro movement at the time.

"If We Must Die" is filled with angst-ridden visions of white and black America. McKay strikes out against a conventional white supremacist narrative by attributing

bestial metaphors, once used upon the unprotected and disenfranchised blacks, to white Americans. His exploration of the new “other” signifies the cowardice and fear of the southern white lyncher, undermines southern white dominance, recognizes the noble qualities in the black race, and destabilizes white supremacist ideology. The power of this poem lies in its ability to draw attention to the cultural dissent, disunity and contradictions within American society. Through the use of forceful imagery and symbolism, McKay acknowledges these cultural fears when he writes, “If we must die, O let us nobly die, / So that our precious blood may not be shed” (McKay 63). It is his dehumanization of the white oppressor which elevates the humanity of the black man as he is induced to fight back. By 1919, white fear of black retaliation and power reached its peak.

“If We Must Die” represents an unusual shift in black literature as it draws readers’ attention to white irrational fear and the brutality and savagery associated with them. Like his predecessors, McKay taps into the black discontent of his time. He too chooses to inform his readers through the use of symbolic difference. He utilizes private and public space to represent disunity and destruction; he describes the black man as “penned” and “hunted” in an “open grave.” Like Wells, McKay utilizes the public space to expose white supremacy. By 1919, the social narrative based on racial difference and social space had changed. McKay’s words formed part of a “no-holds-barred” public relations campaign to actively and publically change the insensitive hearts and minds of white America.

This thesis situates these literary works within a theoretical context. In Karl Marx’s view, ideology shields reality. Society blindly follows directives and worships

ideals that fulfill its needs. In his text, “The Alienation of Labor from Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” Marx observes society as a historical entity, which evolves out of a struggle between destructive and opposing forces, and which eventually finds a resolution in a synthesis of two sides. Wilkie Collins draws attention to the repetitive cycle of evolution at the end of *The Moonstone*, when he writes, “So the years pass, and repeat each other; so the same events revolve in the cycles of time” (472). *Jane Eyre*, *The Moonstone*, and *A Red Record* gradually raise the curtain of social consciousness in preparation for future resistance. “If We Must Die” represents the battleground of this resistance. Unlike Brontë, Collins and Wells, McKay succeeds in raising the curtain all the way to reveal the fight between defensive blacks and the supremacist white opposition.

My thesis is a cross cultural analysis of literary responses to racial violence which employs multiple genres. It is significant because few scholars engage in such analyses. With it, I am hoping to make a real contribution to the growing field of civil rights literary study. My thesis demonstrates how classic works should be read as significant cultural artifacts bestowed with symbolic power. It reveals how the continuum of society’s narrative, the cross examination of social spaces across geographical borders and the historical consequences leading up to 1919, leads to a deeper understanding of “Red Summer” and the significance of race at that time.

My thesis is not a history of race relations within a sixty year period nor is it solely an attack on white barbarism. Instead it is a literary study of racial violence that represents a continuum of time and place. It reveals how a system of changing social positions structured in various private and public spaces provides a social arena for

authors to frame the racial struggles of their particular culture and time. I am situating my literary study upon the “Red Summer” of 1919 because it symbolizes a spike in the depth and breadth of violence against blacks. It represents a time of greatest racial divide that the Victorian imperialist and the Southern white American helped to nurture.

In 1919, the root of this racial divide was largely attributed (by white press reports), to “Bolsheviks, Negros and Guns,” a charge that originated from an article in the *Wall Street Journal* (Voogd 119). The same elements play an essential role in this study. “A Bolshevik” not only refers to Claude McKay’s identification with the movement, but for the purposes of this manuscript, it also identifies with my utilization of Marxist criticism and theory to highlight the conscious position of each of the chosen authors. Similarly, I reference “a Negro” to symbolize the transforming face of the British colonial and the African American, while I utilize “a Gun” to signify the historic events of bloody racial violence.

In *Jane Eyre*, “a Gun” signifies Bertha’s rebellious and fiery escapes, which are reminiscent of the revolts and fires of destruction committed by black anti-slave rebels in the early part of the nineteenth century. In *The Moonstone*, “a Gun” symbolizes the British conquest at Seringapatam which evoked fearful memories within Victorian society of the Indian Mutiny in 1857. Furthermore, the Indian revolt was sparked by British imprisonment of Sepoy soldiers of the Bengal Cavalry who refused to use newly issued gun cartridges because they believed that they were covered with a lubricant containing cow fat (sacred to Hindus) and pig fat (abhorrent to Moslems). Imperial failure to understand ancient Indian customs certainly assisted in generating violent racial clashes. Similarly, in *A Red Record*, racial violence is blatantly visible in the lynchings of

African Americans by southern whites. The illegitimacy of these crimes against humanity motivated Ida. B Wells to act. Finally, in “If We Must Die,” I utilized “a Gun” to symbolize McKay’s mobilization of African Americans to defend against racial violence when he writes, “ O kinsmen we must meet the common foe/...Pressed to the wall, dying but fighting back!” (McKay 63). The symbolic coding associated with “...A Bolshevik, a Negro and a Gun” have permitted me to study and explore complex racial issues which I use to explain McKay’s poetic response.

My thesis study builds upon the work of Adam Gussow’s *Seems like Murder here: Southern violence and Blues Tradition*, Elizabeth Hale’s *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890- 1940*, and Jacqueline Jenkinson’s *Black 1919: Race, Riots and Resistance*. These books facilitate a diverse dialogue on the culture of segregation and racial violence. These resources are standard texts for explaining issues of race and violence and establishing the context out of which 1919 emerged. However, they are limited to the racial struggles within the United States or within Great Britain. In this thesis, I attempt to create a dialogue across the Atlantic. After all, problems of race and violence were transnational; they were not confined to one country.

“...A Bolshevist, a Negro and a Gun”

Chapter One: The Historical Events of 1919

This thesis begins and ends in 1919, a year hauntingly remembered for the wave of race riots which swept across the “black Atlantic” world, including twenty five cities in the United States and nine seaports in Great Britain.¹ At first glance, these shared racial conflicts may seem surprising, particularly when Britain was severely critical of America’s southern violence towards blacks during Ida B. Wells’s anti-lynching campaign in Britain in 1893 and 1894. In reality, British feelings of imperial superiority over its colonized people, in locations such as the West Indies and India, had already been well established by 1919. In fact, imperialist prejudice had generated an exclusive, rather than inclusive policy, of British national identity (Jenkinson 4). Despite these prejudicial notions, war-time demands brought many black colonial subjects into Britain as industrial workers and soldiers. Likewise, many African Americans migrated north for employment or fought for their nation. The racial riots in 1919 signaled a transatlantic response to a changing economic, political and cultural climate. The riots and their aftermath challenged the legitimacy of British imperial rule and white supremacy; they raised questions about the meaning of identity and status of colonial people and African Americans. How could any black man who had fought on the same battlefields as his

¹ ‘Black Atlantic’ was coined by Paul Gilroy in his text, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). The term refers to multiple cultures, consciousness and interactions between the colonized blacks and their oppressive colonizers.

fellow white compatriots still be treated as an inferior being? At the same time, the widespread black resistance motivated British imperialists and American whites to restore their warped economic, political and cultural systems in an effort to reinforce the color bar. By 1919, transatlantic racial violence and its widespread causes underscored the notion that being American or British could no longer be solely equated with whiteness.

World War I created a new sense of black empowerment. In *The Chicago Defender* newspaper, W.E.B Du Bois, American sociologist, historian and civil rights activist, was quoted at a National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) convention as saying, “Black veterans will never be the same again. You need not ask them to go back to what they were before. They cannot, for they are not the same men any more” (quoted in Tuttle 208).² Wartime experiences prepared blacks to organize and protest in large numbers against the discrimination and injustice experienced at home during peacetime. Claude McKay’s rallying cry in “If We Must Die” reveals this circle of resistance. Wartime was supposedly over, but there was still a battle to be fought on the home front. McKay’s celebrated sonnet protests against white supremacy and inspires the “New Negro” to fight against his “accursed lot.” 1919 could have been a time of equal promise, peace and rallying participation, but instead it proved to be one of the worst years of anti-black terrorism to have occurred on both American and British soil. James Weldon Johnson, a NAACP official and Harlem Renaissance writer, was the first to refer to it as “Red Summer.” In his memoir, *Along This Way*, he writes, “The Red Summer of 1919 broke in a fury. The colored people throughout the country were disheartened and dismayed. The great majority had trustingly felt that, because they had cheerfully done

² NAACP- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People began in 1910.

their bit in the war, conditions for them would be better. The reverse seemed true” (quoted in Wayne 71).

By 1919, black aspirations for equal rights coincided with postwar economic social and political pressures which ultimately and irreconcilably led to race riots across the transatlantic. The trigger for the violence in many American cities and British seaports was dissatisfaction among sections of the working class. The principal problem was competition for jobs (McWhirter 155). These conditions were exaggerated by employers who often hired cheaper black labor or replaced striking white workers with blacks. The tenant farming and crop-lien systems of the South motivated blacks to migrate to northern industries in an effort to find work and to evade increasing white hostility. Similarly, blacks migrated from British colonies, such as West and South Africa, the West Indies, Egypt and India, to Britain, with an aim to defend the British Empire while at war, or work in British seaports. Another chief problem was segregated housing conditions. As increased numbers of blacks migrated to northern American cities and British seaports to work, no compensation was made for the higher demand for accommodations. The imposed segregated areas burst with black multitudes. Whites refused to live near them which inevitably led to violent racial conflicts.

Inevitably every “Red Summer” riot involved an instance which triggered white mob brutality and provided an excuse to attack black individuals and/or communities. Each riot had local causes, which fitted into a larger multifaceted pattern. The tables below document the riots that occurred in the United States and Great Britain in June and July alone; months where the greatest violence occurred. Table 1 contains information regarding the riots in the United States. Data sources include the *Chicago Tribune*;

surveys produced by Monroe Work of the Tuskegee Institute, who sent information to some 300 daily white and leading black newspapers at the time; and, the Associated Press in Jan Voogd's *Race Riots & Resistance*. Voogd also referenced the Dyer Anti-lynching bill and NAACP records (4-5). Table 1 can be used as a means to outline the extent of the bloodshed. The data reveals that the riots were not just a northern or southern, city or rural, phenomenon. Using the table, it is possible to identify a pattern in the events and extract common themes. These themes include white fear towards black economic success, the new Negro spirit of resistance, competition for employment, housing and women, and political discrimination.

Table 1- Racial Riots in the United States in the month of July 1919

City and date	Bisbee AZ, Jul 3
Causes of the Riot	Black soldiers were perceived as a threat to white manhood, particularly those who had not participated in war
Trigger	White military policeman jostled by black soldiers
Deaths/Injuries	5 deaths
City and date	Longview TX, Jul 10
Causes of the Riot	Growing black business prosperity and white fear of black economic independence
Trigger	Black man, Lemuel Walters, lynched for cohabiting with a white woman
Deaths/Injuries	4 deaths
City and date	Port Arthur TX, Jul 15
Causes of the Riot	The spread of news about the Longview rioting which occurred a week prior.
Trigger	A white man objects to a black man smoking on a streetcar in the presence of a white woman
Deaths/Injuries	Unknown
City and date	Washington DC, Jul 19-23
Causes of the Riot	Community tensions between white military police officers and black civilians

Table 1- Racial Riots in the United States in the month of July 1919 (continued)

Trigger	Black attack on white woman Elsie Stephanik
Deaths/Injuries	9- 30 deaths and 150+ injured
City and date	Norfolk VA, Jul 21
Causes of the Riot	Racial prejudice and job competition
Trigger	Norfolk City Council honored returning black troops; white sailors also stationed there may well have felt diminished in comparison; police attempted to arrest one black soldier for allegedly fighting
Deaths/Injuries	6 deaths
City and date	Chicago IL, Jul 27- Aug 3
Causes of the Riot	Racial prejudice; job competition; shortages in housing; political corruption and exploitation of black voters; police inefficiency; reaction of whites to black soldiers returning home from wartime and newspaper misinformation about black crime,
Trigger	Black teenager, Eugene Williams, trespasses onto white territory
Deaths/Injuries	38 deaths, 500 injuries
City and date	Syracuse NY, Jul 31
Causes of the Riot	Polish and Italian workers went on strike. Globe Malleable Iron Works hired black workers to replace them
Trigger	Presence of black strike breakers
Deaths/Injuries	1 death

Table 2 below documents the information regarding the riots in Great Britain in June 1919. The evidence was collected from a range of available local administrative and press sources by historian Elizabeth Jenkinson. This table focuses on the riots that occurred in the month of June, because it represents the peak month of Britain's seaport violence.

Table 2- Racial Riots in the Great Britain in the month of June 1919

City and date	Liverpool, June 4-10
Causes of the Riot	Implementation of the Seamen's Unions' Policy which barred black, Arab and Chinese sailors from British merchant ships; growing unemployment among British white sailors; competition for jobs between foreigners, British colonials and British white sailors; mass demobilization, housing shortages and overcrowding, rent hikes; white hostility to sexual relationships between black men and white women; damage to black property
Trigger	Animosity between black British colonial and Scandinavian sailors
Deaths/Injuries	5 deaths, 21 injured
City and date	Cardiff, June 11-15
Causes of the Riot	Job competition and increased black unemployment; job and housing shortages; attacks on black property; expansion of the black population beyond segregated port area; black men's association with white women; allied troops in the port awaiting repatriation which caused tension
Trigger	Dispute between white crowd and a group of black men who had returned to the city after a day out with white female companions
Deaths/Injuries	3 deaths
City and date	Newport, June 6
Causes of the Riot	The spread of news from Liverpool's riot; job and housing shortages; organized white violence upon black property
Trigger	A violent white man's response to a black man trying to put his arm around a white woman
Deaths/Injuries	2 deaths
City and date	Barry, June 11-12
Causes of the Riot	White accusations that black soldiers and workers had avoided the sacrifices endured by the local white population during wartime
Trigger	Three white men attacked a black soldier for just being in "their" street
Deaths/Injuries	1 death

These tables show the worst acts of racial violence that were committed in Chicago and in Liverpool. These individual riots underscore the volatile complexities between black and whites during this time. The Chicago riot was one of five that occurred in the United States in July alone. In each of the riots, there was a trigger which generated full scale racial brutality. On July 27, 1919, a group of black men and women defied segregation policies and swam in an area that was designated for whites only. Violent conflict surmounted. Meanwhile a group of black teenage boys, unaware of the conflict within their community, swam towards a black section of beach. Upon spotting the boys in white restricted waters, a white man began to throw rocks and killed a young black boy named Eugene Williams (Tuttle 4-8).

These segregated racial tensions rose as early as 1917 when squalid, over-populated black sections of the city forced black families to seek housing in white Chicago neighborhoods. Further conflict was generated by the competition for employment; the exploitation of black voters in the reelection of the corrupt mayor William Hale "Big Bill" Thompson; the inefficiency, and in part the unwillingness, of the police force to curtail mob violence, together with unreported violence and anti-black sensationalist propaganda.

The racially violent, socio-economic circumstances which emerged after World War I had an overwhelming impact upon the political consciousness of the time (Richter 410). In essence, Chicago's increasing socio-economic racial tensions arose from a competition for housing and jobs when both black and white workers fought for safer conditions, higher wages and shorter work hours. Amidst their fight for better working conditions, capitalists accused union factions of revolutionary Bolshevik labor ideals,

identified later as the “Red Scare,” in an effort to spark divisions within working class factions. In fact, during Chicago’s riot, Justice Department officials supplied anonymous, anti-black statements to the press, accusing the International Workers of the World (IWW) and the Bolsheviks of “spreading propaganda to breed race hatred” (McWhirter 159).³ Ida B. Wells, a black activist and courageous investigator of southern white lynching crimes, was also questioned by Chicago’s Federal courthouse of investigators, although she ridiculed evidence that tried to implicate her in any collaboration with communism.

Wells, who lived in Chicago during the race riots, believed that the more her race advanced economically, the more it would be subjected to “legal disenfranchisement, Jim Crow laws and violence” (Giddings 227). She argued that the “best men,” the class authorized by the North to run southern businesses and race relations, would continue to use violence and to inspire further negative press images upon the rising wealth of the black man and his family. With these “Red Scare” tactics, many Americans wrongly believed the black working class had instigated the “Red Summer” riots and stirred revolutionary ideas. A *Wall Street Journal* article underscores these feelings when it declares; “Race riots seem to have for their genesis a “Bolshevist, a Negro and a gun”” (as quoted in Voogd 119). While reports like these were false, these growing opinions underscored by white press releases and administrative accounts, combined with anti-Marxist social beliefs, revealed just how the economic and historical circumstance of the time could influence society and its consciousness. Walter White, executive secretary of NAACP from 1939-55, focused on this so-called false consciousness in his contemporary

³ IWW was considered one of the most sympathetic of radical white groups towards black workers at this time

analysis of Chicago's riot, which he described in the *Crisis*, the NAACP journal. In his article, White asserts that the great wrong of Chicago's riot was that "as is usually the case, the Negro is made to bear the brunt of it all-- to be 'the scapegoat'" (quoted in McWhirter 156). Most historians consider Chicago to be the worst of the "Red Summer" riots leaving in its wake 38 fatalities and over 500 injuries in just 8 days (Voogd 44).⁴

Overwhelming violence together with the "scapegoat" theme also played out in the British seaport riots of Glasgow, South Shields and Salford. As in the United States, the height of the riotous scenes took place during the summer of 1919 in the British seaports of Liverpool, Hull, Cardiff, Newport, Barry and London, with the most violence occurring in Liverpool.

The trigger that instigated Liverpool's racial riot involved an attack of a black soldier named John Johnston by a group of Scandinavians on June 4, 1919. The following night another fight broke out between black colonial and white foreign sailors in a local pub. Liverpool's head constable, Francis Caldwell, did not accuse the white Scandinavians of the attack on Johnson. Instead the pub incident was described as an unprovoked attack on white foreigners by blacks. Caldwell's report was, however, contradicted in later reports. Following the attacks, police raided black homes to round up the black instigators. Charles Wooten, a black colonial sailor who had served in the British Royal Navy during the war, escaped police but was pursued later by a large white crowd. He was found drowned in the dockside that same evening. White racial hysteria,

⁴ *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* by Barbara Foley, *Race Riots and Resistance: The Red Summer of 1919* by Jan Voogd, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* by William M. Tuttle, consider Chicago's riot to be the worst of the "Red Summer" riots

exacerbated by lies about Negro crimes, continued unabated for three more days (Jenkinson 80-83).

While the waves of racial violence across transnational borders housed similar economic, political and social conditions, author and historian Jacqueline Jenkinson, argues that the riots did not serve such rational expressions. She asserts that blacks were seen as “foreign” despite sharing a common national identity. Jenkinson believes that an attempt by the British seaport trade unions to enforce a “color bar” on the employment of black and Arab seafarers after the war was one of the chief reasons for black resistance. Her argument maintains that the seaport riots questioned the meaning of national and cultural identity as black sailors protested against the employment of foreign white sailors (Jenkinson 23). The riots also found impetus in the British seaports due to the reduction in manufacture of the merchant shipping industry after the war, which led to increased unemployment. Sailors’ unions’ were incapable of maintaining the restrictive black and white practices that had been imposed before the war. The ports also suffered overcrowding as British black colonials sought work, while often cohabiting with white women. As a result, Britain’s seaport riots posed a challenge to imperial rule and raised questions regarding the status and identity of colonial people not only in Britain but in its colonies (Jenkinson 3). Black colonial veterans felt betrayed and unrewarded for their wartime sacrifice (Jenkinson 7).

Claude McKay, a British colonial from Jamaica, was in Britain during the seaport riots. He observed: “My experience of the English convinced me that prejudice against Negroes had become almost congenital among them. I think the Anglo-Saxon mind becomes morbid when it turns on the sex life of coloured people” (Jenkinson 25-26).

McKay witnessed the working class distaste for sexual relations between whites and blacks, which was made evident in press reports at the time. One article written in London for the *Atlanta Constitution* was headlined: “Negroes Being Hunted in England with All the Zest of an Enraged Southern Community” (quoted in Voogd 129). It described the cohabitation of black colonials with white British women in seaport communities. Blacks competed for jobs and white women, which clearly incensed white men. White men in Britain appeared to act just like southern whites in the United States when blacks challenged their social and economic circumstance.

Black sailors in British colonies, like many blacks in the United States, migrated in an effort to escape persecution and to acquire work. Their relocation necessitated crossing cultures and adjusting to new identities while still defending against white riotous threats. In Great Britain, black social and political mobilization challenged widespread imperial expansion. In the early twentieth century, it was still considered patriotic for the English to invade, conquer and subjugate other cultures. The British imperialist saw it as his right; he saw the black “other” as inferior, but he still held a fear of black colonial rebellion and domination which continued to be incensed by imperial ideology.

One of the contributing factors to the riotous violence was the new spirit of collective consciousness and resistance among African Americans, which was visible both culturally and economically. Alain Locke demonstrates this in his essay “The New Negro; An Interpretation” published in 1925. He explains that the “New Negro” is no longer just a “formula” identified and confined by ambiguous Victorian symbolism; the “New Negro” can no longer be classified as “a stock figure perpetuated as an historical

fiction partly in innocent sentimentalism, partly in deliberate reactionism” (1746). He is no longer willing to accept his accursed lot; to be “kept down,” or put “in his place,” or “helped up.” By 1919, it was the “New Negro’s” conscious struggle against discrimination which increasingly drew out the illusions fostered by the dominant supremacist faction. This time, Alaine Locke explains, his song of resistance was unmistakably a song of disobedience and a demand for equality.

Migration north and to the city transformed the Negro from a social problem in the South, to an identity problem for the entire nation because the Negro could no longer be considered an economic problem when he was proving his worth and independence. In essence, he could no longer be identified as an inferior being. Migration brought the African, the West Indian, the Negro-American, and the Negro of the North and South together from all walks of life. For the first time, black factions united based upon a common experience of violent oppression and segregation. In his text, however, Locke recognizes that it is only when “the migrating peasant...the “man farthest down”” opens his eyes to his own oppression that a collective consciousness would develop (1749). Marxist thought is clearly visible in Locke’s essayistic sensitivities. This is particularly evident when comparing how Marx elaborates and exposes the conditions of opposing forces and tensions between the proletariat and the capitalist. In his text, *The Alienation of Labor Economic from Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx like Locke, is hoping that the peasant, whom Locke defines as “the sleeping giant,” (1749) will open his eyes to his own oppression in the hope of inciting a clash against the dominant capitalist. Marx defines this conflict of tensions, the antithesis. His theory of *dialectical materialism* stemmed from Hegel’s generalized principles (Richter 397). In

this theory, Marx visualizes society as an historical entity which evolves out a struggle between contradictions and eventually finds a resolution. Marx hopes that the destructive and opposing forces within a capitalist system would be replaced by the eventual growth of communism once the proletariat took over production. Similarly, Locke protests against the white supremacist ruling faction. In his text, he draws attention to the contradictions between the opposing forces in the hope of forwarding “a new vision of opportunity of social and economic freedom” (1748), and a “full initiation into American democracy” for the African American (1754). Just as Marx asserts that the antithesis will lead to a new thesis with a renewed set of conditions and problems of its own, Locke trusts that the antithesis will lead to the eventual changing and daring shape of racial equality.

Locke confirms that twenty years prior, racial leaders could not have anticipated the growing consciousness that revealed itself in the “New Negro.” In the past, Ida B. Wells could only hope that her investigations would inspire the black man to defend his name and manhood. Now, twenty years later, Locke encourages the Negro, “to know himself and be known for precisely what he is” (1749).

From the mid nineteenth century, authors and artists fictionally differentiated between the white and black experience. In reality, their differences sparked violent and painful encounters in which the black “other” was invariably the victim. Locke asserts that it is the “New Negro’s” intention to achieve a truer self expression and break down the “spite-wall” over the “color-line” in the hope of transforming “a warped social perspective” (Locke 1750-51). Locke explains that the outcome from subjugation and prejudice is the conversion from a defensive to an offensive front.

However, Locke defines this offensive front as nothing but American. He argues that the Negro culture is not separate from American culture, but rather he is one with it. "Indeed," Locke asserts, "they cannot be selectively closed. So the choice is not between one way for the Negro and another way for the rest, but between American institutions frustrated on the one hand and American ideals progressively fulfilled and realized on the other" (1751-2). Locke acknowledges the varying tactics in which the Negro may share in American culture and its institutions, as he draws upon the literary leaders of resistant consciousness. These include Claude McKay and James Weldon Johnson.

Locke asserts that the race question is not just an American issue; but a world problem, as Negroes across the Atlantic link together in response to persecution. Their aim is to win cultural recognition and equality, and participate in their individual nation's democracy. If the Negro does not acquire this status in this timeframe, Locke writes, he can at least celebrate in his development and spiritual emancipation of his new resistant perspective (1754).

Marxist thinker, Georg Lukács (1885-1971), believed that perspective was very important because it determined the course and content of literary work. It allowed artists like Alain Locke, Claude McKay, Ida B. Wells and James Weldon Johnson to choose between what was crucial and superficial (Selden 154). Indeed, their perceptions and literary responses amidst sensationalist newspaper accounts, police and administrative reports, were supremely influential to society's consciousness in 1919. The emergence of the "New Negro," the "Red Summer" riots of 1919, and their aftermath raised questions about the meaning of identity and status of colonial people and African Americans. These riotous and complex interplays between blacks and whites emphasize the differences in

how people reacted and identified with the time, not just with specific events.

“Bolsheviks,” “Negroes” and “Guns” were examples of the crucial elements of this identification which manipulated society’s memory.

“...A Bolshevist, a Negro and a Gun”

Chapter Two: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and the Dark “Other”

Oppression, violence and injustice formed part of the culture and logic of imperial rule. Crimes against humanity were rationalized by a sense of racial and cultural superiority over the savage and subordinate dark “other.” Not everyone agreed with these imperial practices and rationale. Moral and economic debates led to the abolition of Britain’s slave trade in 1807 and of slavery in British territories in 1833 (Black xliv). Despite the new legislation, conditions for the natives were little improved, as Britain continued to rely on their hard labor for cheap raw materials. In her novel, *Jane Eyre*, published in 1848, Charlotte Brontë draws her readers’ attention to unique clashes between black and white individuals, and society as a whole, albeit under a ruse of ambiguous symbolic configurations often restrained by Victorian conventions. She employs stereotypical alternatives of human possibility to define the divisions between black and white identities, between the colonized and colonizer, and between social ignorance and individual reality (Rich 483). Today, literary theorists continue to discuss these ambiguities in Victorian conceptions of British imperialism as they search for new ways in which nineteenth century writers represent the “other.” One such theorist, Susan L. Meyer, in her essay “Colonialism and Figurative Strategy of *Jane Eyre*,” conceptualizes the “shared oppression” between women and blacks (Meyer 251). She associates the characters of Bertha Mason Rochester and Jane Eyre as acting *for* and *like*

the struggles of disempowerment, humiliation and oppression unconsciously present in mid-nineteenth century society. My research deviates from Meyer's conceptualization by focusing on the demonization of the darker race and imperial oppression. I argue that Brontë's pervasive references to "blackness" throughout the text should not be taken lightly. Brontë's configurations of "blackness" allow her female protagonist, as well as her readers, to explore beyond the restrictions usually imposed by typical female *Bildungsroman*. However, these configurations are also seen to inhibit her discovery of injustice and perversity associated with racial discrimination. In *Jane Eyre*, and in mid-nineteenth century English society, "blackness" symbolizes a buried and unresolved mysterious force within a warped, prejudicial imperial space.

In his text, *The Political Unconscious*, literary critic, theorist, and neo-Marxist, Fredric Jameson explains, "...in restoring to the surface of the text the buried reality of this fundamental history... the doctrine of political unconscious finds its function and its necessity" (20). Here Jameson focuses on the "gap(s) and discontinuit(ies) that," a novel like *Jane Eyre*, "symptomatically betrays" (207). He associates fantasy as a means to symbolically unearth these deeply buried conflicts or clashes, invisible from a social perspective, and which in reality are believed to have no resolution. Without a resolution, Jameson asserts history continues to hurt (102). Likewise Brontë veils imperialist atrocities and female degradation in her *Bildungsroman*, using what Jameson calls a shared symbolic code (84). It is precisely Brontë's symbolic coding which creates the discontinuity and ambiguity in her text. While this ambiguity inhibited critical moments of discovery and change in Victorian literature and society regarding 'blackness,' it has provided a springboard for creative literary theory and criticism.

Theorists and critics prove that it is essential to unearth social symbolic acts, what Jameson calls “the political unconscious,” in an effort to unearth the buried realities of history. In her text, *Playing in the Dark*, author Toni Morrison explains that a nation necessitated a “coded language and purposeful restriction to deal with the racial disingenuousness and moral frailty at its heart and so too did literature, whose founding characteristics extend into the twentieth century” (6). In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë’s fabricated “black presence” is crucial to her protagonist’s sense of womanhood. In the mid-nineteenth century, British literature was clearly a white, male dominated realm. Women were considered physically and intellectually inferior. Likewise, the image and feared dominance of colonized people were transformed by hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony and dismissive “othering” (Morrison x). As in *Jane Eyre*, blackness and its language were reshaped into predictable monstrous forms of hatred and discrimination, and associated with power and forms of oppression. While this reshaping may not have been completely known or understood by authors at the time, they depended on it all the same.

By not completely demonizing blackness, but not completely vilifying whiteness either, author Charlotte Brontë reveals her understanding, but also the restrictions imposed by imperialist conventions upon the “other.” In part, she challenges and explores the imperial language of her time and unshackles some of its racial determinations. In her article, Meyer argues that Brontë figuratively compares white women to blacks, not to degrade them, but to signify their low social status and oppression imposed by patriarchal and imperial society. Meyer’s claim is important because it implies that Brontë’s text reveals a “shared oppression” rather than a “shared inferiority” between women and

blacks (251). Interestingly, Brontë utilizes this shared experience as a symbolic liberating tool to question the female's unequal assertions and sites of cultural oppression. This shared experience is revealed in a variety of ways. First, when Rochester alludes to female status in society, he remarks, "hiring a mistress is the next worse thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior: and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading" (339). Second, when Jane rebels against her cousin John Reed's brutish control, she acknowledges, "I was conscious that a moment's mutiny rendered me liable to strange penalties, and, like any *other* rebel slave, I felt resolved, in my desperation to go to all lengths" (258). Last, without economic means and family connections, Jane's aunt, Mrs. Reed, sees her niece as "an interloper, not of her race" (48). By juxtaposing these female and black experiences, Meyer believes Brontë reveals her awareness of the oppression present not only in her society but in the British colonies.

In contrast to Meyer's article, Gayatri Charavorty Spivak asserts in her earlier essay, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," that the figure of Bertha Mason, Brontë's dark "other," is "produced by the axiomatics of imperialism" (247). She explains, "No perspective *critical* of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self" (253). Spivak argues that the author gives the white protagonist, Jane, individuality at the expense of the "native," Bertha Mason, who happens to play Edward Fairfax Rochester's secret wife (quoted in Meyer 251). Spivak considers Bertha's imprisoned perspective rather than Jane's as she reconfigures the attic space (quoted in Russell 130). Theorist Danielle Russell in her essay, "Revisiting the Attic: Recognizing the Shared Spaces of

Jane Eyre and Beloved” questions Spivak’s postcolonial motive. She believes that by reconfiguring the attic space, Spivak is creating an either/or space which inhibits discussions of *Jane Eyre*.

Despite these wide and varying interpretations, it is evident that “blackness” thematically highlights Jane Eyre’s sense of injustice. In fact, Brontë describes injustice as, “a dark deposit in a turbid well” which turns up in Jane’s disturbed mind (11). Injustice is a source of Jane’s distinct resentment, which instills in her a sense of self assertion, independence and individual reality. These developing traits are not traditionally found in nineteenth century female *Bildungsroman* (Abel 7). Traditionally, female protagonists are described in nurturing roles rather than being given an opportunity to encounter hostile forces.

Brontë further complicates her plot and its political strategy with the inclusion of a hostile and female dark “other.” The discontinuity and ambiguity located in this unconventional feminine configuration of darkness allows Brontë to consider the moral equivalence of the free white woman and the enslaved black female. She deliberately constructs the dark “other” as a woman for purposes of investigating imperialist and patriarchal power.

In her essay, *A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane’s Progress*, Sandra M. Gilbert refers to Jane’s encounter with Bertha, the dark “other,” as “a secret dialogue of self and soul” (484); an intersection between society’s ignorance and individual reality; a bridge between black and gender oppression. Gilbert argues that the third floor, a place in which Bertha and her insanity are kept isolated and imprisoned from society, corresponds to the same location where Jane’s own rationality and irrationality collide. It is here that

the protagonist defends her ambitions for freedom. Jane asserts; "...women feel just as men feel; they need to exercise their faculties... they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation" (Brontë 93). Standing alone on the rooftop, she challenges the enslavement of women's minds as she demands women are not made to serve men. If these words had been spoken amid Victorian society, they would have been considered insane and unnatural concepts for a woman to desire at the time. It was traditionally assumed that a woman's nature predisposed her to duty, obedience and sentimentality. As Jane sets forth her rebellious manifesto, her words are echoed by Bertha's rebellious and insane screams for freedom. In this scene, Brontë distinctively struggles to address the almost buried subjects of power, race and sexuality, again rarely if ever seen in a female *Bildungsroman* novel. Typically, female development relied on inner contemplation rather than on active forms of rebellion or withdrawal. Even still, Jane's solitary outspokenness, together with Bertha's eerie cries, (heard it seems only by Jane), reveal how social options and their explorations are clearly more limited for women in typical *Bildungsroman* plots.

Brontë's struggle against Victorian conventions and imperialist ideology reveals the hopelessness of exorcising the monstrous racial formulations assumed by society at this time. While darkness highlights Jane's sense of injustice, her suffering under the patriarchal hands of degradation and oppression cannot compare to the imprisoned existence of the dark "other" under the heavy handedness of imperialism. While I agree with Gilbert's assertion that, "Bertha is Jane's truest and darkest double," and "every one of Bertha's appearances... has been associated with an experience (or repression) of anger on Jane's part" (488), I argue that their shared experiences are not the same. Bertha

cannot act *for* or *like* Jane because Brontë has established a difference between them. In fact, on the rooftop of Thornfield Hall, Jane draws attention to the moral equivalence of the free white woman and the enslaved black woman when she explains, “Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot” (93).

In her novel, Brontë depends on a black identity that was rapidly taking shape through racial discrimination and difference. Brontë is restricted by imperialist sentiment from constructing Bertha’s “self” because she is the dark “other;” Bertha is not white. Brontë utilizes the common imperialist elements of blackness such as monstrosity, madness, violence and escape to define Bertha’s presence.

In her earlier existence as a West Indian heiress, Bertha is clearly visualized as white, based upon her social standing, although even at the beginning of her marriage to a British aristocrat, there are hints of racial ambiguity, as Rochester explains that she may not be as “good” a race as he (Meyer 253). He sees her at the beginning of their relationship as “tall, dark and majestic” (Brontë 260). In reality, in colonized nations, white planters often forced female slaves to be their mistresses. Their mulatto children were evidence of this oppression. Bertha’s heritage, a daughter of a West Indian planter and his Creole wife, may well have reflected this history. Bertha’s story indicts British colonialism and the “stained” wealth that was generated from its oppressive occupation (Meyer 255).

Once her madness is disclosed, Bertha becomes figuratively blackened; her transformation takes on a new dimension; her lips become dark and swollen and her drunken eyes roll. Bertha is no longer stereotypically white. British fascination with

monstrosity creates a one sided response which grows out of fear, exclusion and hatred. These white responses only confirm and compound the “other’s” status as alien (Conrad 431). The theme of madness adds to this alienation. Madness and monstrosity not only voice Bertha’s black rebellion, but a woman’s revolt against the oppressive “sanity” of ideological hegemony (Heller 28). In assuming that Jane and Bertha are doubles of each other, it is culturally appropriate that the demonic black woman externalizes the rebellion of the domestic white one (Heller 62).

These double sided associations are clearly evident when Bertha tears Jane’s wedding veil in an act of rebellion and revenge. Jane fearfully glimpses a discolored and savage-like shape (Brontë 242). Bertha’s hideously monstrous and blackened reflection in the mirror cannot help but remind readers of Jane’s violent and self destructive hysterics as a young girl in the Red Room (Gilbert 489). Here, Brontë associates Jane’s “mad cat,” feelings of victimization with the, “mood of a revolted slave” (Brontë 9, 11). These symbolic images of slave rebellion may well have triggered fear in Brontë’s readers as they were made to recall rising insurrections associated with the Maroons, the black Jamaican antislavery rebels and the Demerara uprising of 1823 in British Guiana (Meyer 247, 252).

The rebellious association of Bertha with fire and her desire for vengeance is reminiscent of the language used to describe slave uprisings in the British West Indies, where slaves used fires to destroy their master’s property and to signal to each other that an uprising was taking place (Meyer 252). White colonists lived in fear of the dark “other” waiting to destroy them. In fact, Jane questions the origination of these slave riots and its induction of white fear, when she asks: “What crime was this that lived incarnate

in this sequestered mansion and could neither be expelled nor subdued by the owner?” (Meyer 254-55). Thornfield’s third floor was filled with a history of imperial crimes against humanity. Despite the abolition of slavery in 1833, conditions were still oppressive. Britain relied on native hard labor for cheap raw materials. The products of colonial oppression were actually stored on Thornfield’s third floor. Here, imperialist crimes were conveniently erased when furniture fashions changed.

Despite the double sided character associations and commonalities shared between Bertha and Jane, Brontë continues to consciously necessitate their difference by never allowing Bertha and Jane’s paths to cross. Their uncrossed existence not only enforces a black and white divide but conspicuously differentiates the systems of female and racial oppression and suffering. In preventing their paths from touching, Brontë not only exposes the underlying “political unconscious,” and expands upon the novel’s complex symbolic debate, but also draws attention to her inability to visualize a solution to the oppressive and violent conditions of the day. Unlike Jane, Bertha has no future. Imprisoned on the third floor of Rochester’s Thornfield estate, Bertha exists in an English social space where her race and gender are not respected and granted legitimate power or status.

Likewise, Brontë denies Bertha a legitimate or respectful language; she is unable to complain, explain or object to her accursed lot, although she is given exits of recourse with her fiery displays of violence against Rochester, her brother and finally, to the entire Thornfield estate. Without a language, Brontë sidesteps the ultimate question of equality between whites and blacks. Without a language, Brontë dehumanizes and inhibits further discovery of Bertha and the dark “other.” In Bertha’s appearance and lack of language,

the author fosters an imperialist and supremacist attitude as she differentiates Europeans as a separate and superior race from the “other.”

Bertha’s identity and its association with female and black oppression offer the beginnings of an important moral debate. This is essential to recognize particularly when we consider the time in which Brontë lived. In the mid-nineteenth century, Britain suffered deep anxieties about the precariousness of its civilization. In fact, the nation demanded constant reassurance by comparing itself to its conquered peoples (Conrad 347). Likewise, in *Jane Eyre*, the despised “other” is consistently compared and open to assault. Ironically, the “other” is continually portrayed as a monstrous apparition to be feared but granted few literary initiatives to defend itself and its image against imperial discriminations.

Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* is a significant cultural artifact because its imaginings reveal critically symbolic moments through which race and gender experience can be examined. By combining dark monstrous traits with femininity, Brontë demonstrates a subversive intent. Jameson defines this purpose as “a socially symbolic act” (Jameson 139). By adopting a woman in a black role, Brontë’s text can be viewed as trying to disempower and transform the monstrous black image while also humanizing it. Alternatively, Brontë may have utilized Bertha’s grotesque and animalistic image to symbolize women as instigators of revolt, and their actions as premeditated disruptions to social order.

Furthermore, Brontë asserts that imperialists have been “darkened” and made “imperious” by their contact with the racial “other.’ By associating blackness with womanhood, Brontë reveals how contact with the dark “other” makes the British male aristocrat an arrogant oppressor both imperially abroad and as a patriarch at home (Meyer

260). Rochester is a tyrant, holding and hiding Bertha from societal view (Meyer 248). Their colonial marriage is a form of slavery which anyone would revolt against, but conveniently Bertha is made insane. Bertha's imprisoned existence mirrors the rationalization of male dominance and colonial rule by which the dark "other" and Victorian women in general, were oppressed and controlled. Rochester intentionally hides Bertha in an effort to prevent her from attacking others. He also uncharacteristically imprisons her to protect her from society's discriminating ignorance and fear. Rochester's motive, like imperial sensationalist propaganda, uses the woman to justify heinous, imperial crimes. Sadly, Bertha's insanity makes her unconscious of his crime, just as imperialism was unconscious of its immoral deeds upon humanity. With the exception of Rochester, the doctor and Bertha's brother, few people knew about Bertha's isolation at Thornfield. Likewise, the oppression of women and the dark "other," symbolized by Bertha's alienation and exclusion, remain "politically unconscious" conditions in Charlotte Brontë's text and in her lifetime. Gender and racial oppression remained largely unquestioned in mid-nineteenth century Victorian England.

In *Jane Eyre* and other Victorian literature, theorists and critics should be reminded not to consider just one meaning within a text or remove its ideological and historical foundations. However, it is important to recognize just how authors like Charlotte Brontë utilize the dark "other" as an essential ingredient in early nineteenth century literature. Her widespread use of blackness reveals just how much the time in which she lived was influenced by racial contradictions, imperial agendas, social ignorance and individual reality (Morrison 9). In fact, Brontë's exploration reveals just how much racial ideology influenced her mind and behavior (Morrison 12). While the

author combines femininity with black monstrosity, her “other’s” image and actions are still considered hideous and evil. Its indefensible image arouses fear in the hearts and minds of its readers. It is this fear that rose within society as a whole. It is this fear which reached a peak in 1919. As in 1919, early Victorian society could not visualize a moral equivalence between black and white experiences. However, Brontë’s configurations of the free white woman and enslaved black female, albeit symbolic, begin to raise questions regarding their experiential differences.

At the end of the novel, “the blackened ruin” of Thornfield Hall, Bertha’s death and Rochester’s mutilation, suggest an atmosphere cleansed from oppression and ill-gotten colonial wealth (Brontë 361). However, death and ruin also symbolize elements of sacrifice, instability and destruction. Brontë’s hesitation at removing the “other” from her text is revealed in the decaying description of Ferndean’s manor house, a place where Jane and Rochester remove to after Thornfield is destroyed by fire ignited by Bertha (Brontë 366). This dark and morbid scene indicates that Jane’s world is not completely purified from oppression. Brontë sees no resolution to the conflict. In essence, societal fear and ignorance of women and black’s existence shield imperialist ideology from reality. As these conflicts remain irreconcilable, social perspectives do not change and history, as Jameson purports, continues to hurt.

“...A Bolshevist, a Negro and a Gun”

Chapter Three: Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* and the Colonial “Other”

In his text, *The German Ideology*, Karl Marx argues that ideology is “a set of illusions fostered by the dominant class in order to ensure social stability --- and its own continued dominance” (Richter 399). This dominant and oppressive faction comforts itself with the false consciousness of steady progress, when in reality, the gap between it and the oppressed widens, and consciousness of its exploitation intensifies (Eagleton 256). In the mid nineteenth century, British ruling classes were sampling the commodity delights and profits of their Eastern exploits. They arrogantly assumed that the colonized would trade their ancient traditions for British technology, new laws and Christianity. Continued exploitation of resources and manpower eventually instigated rebel insurrections across northern India beginning in 1857. As Marx had earlier theorized, literature, histories and newspapers, commandeered by the imperialist ruling classes, convinced the British public of its superior qualities and the subordination and savagery of the colonial “other” (Sharpe 61). Wilkie Collins wrote *The Moonstone* a decade after these Indian insurrections amidst prevailing imperial fears of native violent atrocities, and changing social and political ideologies (Collins xix). In his text, Collins dismantles the divisions between dominant imperial ideology and domestic crime; between the colonial “other” and the English upper-class gentleman; between ignorance and reality, in an effort to facilitate an early literary and historical, racial dialogue. By referencing the

double-sided character associations between Ezra Jennings and Franklin Blake, this study will demonstrate how Collins unconventionally presents the “other” side of the story while drawing the perversities and injustices of imperialism ever closer to the surface. While Collins’s text ends with the desire to restore racial harmony to the domestic sphere, the buried sources of conflict and discrimination, like those in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, remain unconscious, mysterious forces within a prejudicial imperial space.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx claims that; “Ideas are the conscious expression-- real or illusory-- of (our) actual relations and activities” (111), because “social existence determines consciousness” (211). He warns that consciousness is questionable as it is devised by opposing factions. The British imperialist faction viewed the Indian Mutiny as a fight against “barbarians” who were rejecting the benefits of civilization. On the opposing side, were theorists such as Marx, Benjamin Disraeli, a member of the House of Commons and later Prime Minister, as well as Victorian historian John William Kaye, who observed the conflict as multiple military and civilian resistances to imperial unconsciousness (The Victorian Web). While widespread prejudices are visible, these opposing and varied opinions reveal how society is never unified, nor does it think or act with a thoroughly monolithic voice.

The British imperialists had annexed the Punjab and Natal provinces in the 1840s, and began building a vast railway system in India with a goal to improve India’s commercial efficiency (David 90). British colonial and technological expansion, and the subjugation of India’s racially different people, supported the imperial claim that Britain was supreme. The British equated racial superiority with success (David 88). This viewpoint was further strengthened by the policies of the East India Company. The

Company ruled as a commercial agent in India prior to the Indian insurrections. It unfairly annexed principalities and deposed rulers whom it deemed incompetent; it coerced Indian farmers to grow crops in favor of British commercial interests; and it allowed them few opportunities to make a profit. These changes put a tremendous strain not only upon the existing Indian economic system, but also upon British economics and urbanity, as free trade created unsteady wages, irregular prices, sudden unemployment and unstable trade associations (Marshall).

Along with this arrogant and fervent drive to improve India's commercial efficiency, British evangelical Christian missions and army commanders failed to understand ancient Muslim and Hindu traditions, which often generated local administrative clashes. Before the mutiny, the British high command, in particular, was beginning to employ soldiers from Nepal and the Punjab who held more flexible beliefs than their Brahmin compatriots. The Brahmin soldiers refused to serve outside India for fear of losing their caste. In essence, British ignorance and arrogant expectations sparked the riotous events in Meerut in the spring of 1857 (Brantlinger 222).

These mutinous events represented a challenge to British power and a change in the way the British perceived the colonial "other." While India retained an element of exoticism and decadence in English upper-class circles, racist fantasies incited fear and uncertainty as the British public grew less assured in the nation's ability to secure and protect from foreign offensives (Fraser 8). Authors, playwrights and historians began to demonize the Indian, while ignoring the rash of indiscriminate lynchings enacted by their own imperial forces (Brantlinger 222). Indian atrocities encouraged writers like Charles Dickens in *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners* (December, 1857) to focus on the

righteousness of British imperialism and the monstrous savagery of the Indian native. In *A Sermon for Sepoys*, serialized in the weekly journal *Household Words* in February 1858, Dickens demands that if he was Commander in Chief in India, he would “exterminate the Race upon whom the stain of the late cruelties rested...to blot it out of mankind and raze it off the face of the earth” (Collins xx). Even the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1856) referenced by Collins was equally as prejudiced. It claimed, “The inhabitants of Hindustan rank much lower in the scale of civilization than the nations of Europe...and their religion is that of a rude people” (Collins xx). Society’s narrative came to be seen as an imperial sacrifice to stamp out Indian savagery (Sharpe 81).

When Collins published *The Moonstone* (1868), a decade after these Indian insurrections, mention of India would still have prompted his readers to recall its haunting and terrifying events. In their eyes, the Bengal army had rebelled against commanding British officers, and cold-bloodedly slaughtered their countrymen and women. Collins’s readers would have been reminded of the Hindu ruler, Nana Sahib’s, false truce negotiation with the British at Cawnpore on June 27, 1857. His ruthless attack upon the British settlement and his horrific order for the dismemberment of all surviving women and children, aroused chills of terror, fear and further violence against the “other” within English society.

Collins’s *The Moonstone* represents an unusual change in Victorian literature, as Collins chooses not to demonize the colonial “other.” In his sensation novel, he designs a space that actively engages debate upon the exotic and mystical qualities of his Indian characters, and the prejudicial, arrogant and unsympathetic views of their British oppressors. Both factions contend and compete with each other in the search for the

stolen Indian heirloom. According to John Reed's influential reading in "English Imperialism and the Unacknowledged Crime of *The Moonstone*," Collins makes the novel's emphasis more political than domestic when he situates the source of this terror and fear in imperialist policy. Reed theorizes that Collins utilizes the Moonstone theft and its curse to signify an "oppressive society" (Heller 144). Reed's claim is reinforced at the beginning of the novel when the Moonstone is seized at the siege of Seringapatam in 1799. John Herncastle, a military English gentleman, arrogantly declares that his regiment "should see the Diamond on his finger if the English army took Seringapatam" (Collins 13). The British conquest reveals "deplorable excesses" as soldiers are seen to pillage, plunder and shout out, "Who's got the Moonstone?" (Collins 14). With a dagger dripping with blood in one hand and a dying Indian at his feet, Herncastle's image wreaks of foul play, savagery and obsessive greed.

Collins uses this scene to reveal British imperialism at its cultural and political worst. He also utilizes the diamond's subsequent curse of vengeance to symbolize the oppressive effects of imperialism upon the domestic sphere. Collins reveals how societal ignorance in *The Moonstone* is generated from the inglorious imperial impact upon the colonial "other." This is clearly defined in the scene soon after Ezra Jennings, a medical assistant and a man of mixed race, has accepted the responsibility of saving the life of his English gentleman friend, Dr. Candy. He described to Franklin Blake, an English aristocrat, the pain and suffering that he had endured by accepting this position, and defying traditional British medical advice. He explains "There were moments when I felt all misery of friendlessness, all the peril of my dreadful responsibility...I had no happy time to look back at, no past peace of mind to force itself into contrast with my present

anxiety and suspense” (Collins 373). In this passage, Collins paints a vivid picture of the prejudicial fears of defiance, solidified by the events of the Indian mutiny, existing within Victorian society. He refers to Jennings’s misery as a tool, to force open his society’s mind to the hideous injustices within it.

As Marx asserts in his work, critical thinkers have to portray objective reality. Their texts have to focus on the conflict between the dominant and repressed members of society in a given age. Meaningful literature must raise consciousness to affect societal change. It reveals the flaws in the dominant ideology so that readers are persuaded to question and act to change it (Eagleton 88).

Lewis Roberts’s article, “‘The Shivering Sands’ of Reality: Narration and Knowledge in Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone*,” is preoccupied with Collins’s objective reasoning. He draws upon the author’s notions of realism and reconstructions of actual circumstance. Collins’s intention to instill social and racial realism in his novel should not be surprising. After all, it is a detective novel whose plot is driven by uncovering the truth (Roberts 169). Roberts argues that Collins presents us with an “understanding of reality in which the familiar and the alien, the knowable and the unfathomable are equally present” (169). Here, Roberts takes one essential step back to assess the influential role of innocence and ignorance upon understanding. He argues that Blake’s attraction to Jennings emanates from ignorance of the “other’s” existence. In Jennings’s case, Franklin is motivated by the need to know the unfamiliar and the strange. In response to Roberts’ discussion, I contend that Collins utilizes Blake’s blindness to racial divisions in an effort to deconstruct the foundations on which these hierarchical separations were built. It was indeed a time, when as Ezra Jennings points out, the colonial “other” continues to be

mercilessly treated and victimized. It was a time when the colonial “other” was incapable of proving its innocence or appeal to their honor as men (Collins 379). I argue that these opposing representations of objective truth and ignorance, challenged by domestic and imperial unconsciousness, not only act *for* the oppression faced by the native defender and mutineer, but also act *like* the struggles of disempowerment experienced by the Victorian imperialist.

It certainly seems evident that Collins’s intent was to disrupt the British imperial psyche of the time. Unlike Brontë, who constrains the offenses of imperialist ideology by referencing the changing furniture fashions of a third floor country estate; the death of its imprisoned occupant; and by the inner ruminations of a young governess, Collins chooses to be less ambiguous. He unconventionally reveals the impact of imperialist oppression upon its colonial subjects and upon British society. The English aristocrat, Franklin Blake, witnesses the tyranny of imperialism and its ability to divide British society when he declares: “Look at the household now! Scattered, disunited-- the very air of the place poisoned with mystery and suspicion” (188). In his text, Collins sheds some light upon the realities of imperial oppression.

The nation’s deep anxieties about the impact of its imperialist oppressive policies, and the precariousness of its expanding civilization made it less assured in its ability to secure and protect from foreign invasion (Fraser 8). These fears encouraged it to continuously seek reassurance by comparing itself to its colonized peoples (Conrad 347). After 1857, Indians were no longer considered dependent English subjects to be protected and controlled. They were traditionally viewed as instigators of revolt. Imperial depictions of the “other” as a cutthroat, a thief and a lustful brutal beast sparked societal

terror towards the colonial “other’s” resistance and feared dominance. I argue that Collins aligns his text with these conventional associations of blackness in an effort to highlight his society’s sense of injustice. He exposes the system of racial segregation and discrimination. This is particularly notable when Blake observes the fear in Ezra Jennings’s servant girl, who looks anywhere but in her employer’s direction. Blake realizes from these visible signs that Jennings was “no favourite in the house. Out of the house...he was unpopular everywhere” (369). Even Blake, himself, adopts a racial view when he tries to access Jennings’s notes on Dr. Candy. He explains, “The grip of some terrible emotion seemed to have seized him, and shaken him to the soul. ...his eyes had suddenly become wild and glittering” (Heller 158). In this passage, Blake assumes the “other’s” fearsome countenance, which has been historically sensationalized by imperial dominant factions as the monstrous black image. Both of these scenes are examples of what Toni Morrison in her text, *Playing in the Dark*, defines as “impenetrable whiteness.” She sees this white shield of discrimination surface in literature whenever there is a black presence (32). She believes his shield makes it impossible for the black character to distinguish itself in the dominant imperial narrative.

However, Brontë, and later Collins, take cautionary but courageous steps forward to break this impenetrable whiteness. They utilize the “other” as an essential ingredient in an attempt to reveal just how much imperial agendas are influenced by racial contradictions and social ignorance. Brontë utilizes the female *Bildungsroman* while Collins employs the sensation novel, like the earlier Female Gothic, as vehicles for protest against society’s hidden oppressions (Heller 17). As in the Female Gothic of the 1790s, which explored the nightmarish figurations of feminine experience to draw

attention to oppressed groups such as the working class and slaves, Brontë and Collins also blend blackness with femininity. Collins considers the moral equivalence of the free black man's existence as opposed to Brontë's imprisoned black female presence. By providing Jennings with a female constitution, he is visibly transformed into a fragile and weaker force. Like Brontë, Collins's femininity transforms the "other's" feared existence into a defenseless and humanizing presence. Jennings's feminine constitution creates a subversive purpose in which Collins can investigate imperialist power within English society.

In the character of Ezra Jennings, Collins continues to expose the system of racial segregation and violence by drawing upon the sympathies of his audience. Despite its feminine qualities, Collins constructs a black "self" which is free and non-hostile. Franklin Blake identifies Jennings's "self" as a gentleman, a man of "*unsought possession*." He explains that Jennings's status "...is a sure sign of good breeding, not in England only, but everywhere else in the civilized world" (370). Collins necessitates Jennings's "difference" while trying not to succumb to late-nineteenth century's conventional and purposeful literary restrictions. He is not savage-like, raw or rebellious. Instead, Jennings's presence reveals to readers, in compelling and inescapable ways, the meaning of black existence. In fact, Jennings considers himself an Englishman, born and brought up in what he identified as "our" colonies. He makes no mention of his mother's origination (371). However, he agonizingly realizes that it is not his social status, but his "otherness," his color, which is the distinguishing feature and reason for his suffering. He draws attention to this color divide when he walks with Blake and picks some wild flowers from a roadside hedgerow. He notices how beautiful they are, but sadly contends,

“how few people in England seem to admire them as they deserve” (371). Their beauty and color are not admired because of what they are. Jennings has associations with these modest little roadside flowers.

In Jennings’s moral character, in the merciless, but undisclosed, treatment imposed upon him and his family in the past, and in his unenviable suffering at the hands of imperial discrimination and exclusion, readers can sympathize with his racial circumstance. It certainly induces Franklin Blake to feel considerable sympathy and sorrow for Jennings as he exclaims, “What a life!” (369). Unlike Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Ezra Jennings is granted language. Although he can object, complain and explain his accursed lot, his excluded and alienated existence still mirrors the rationalization of imperial rule by which he, as the colonial “other,” is oppressed and controlled. While he is not hidden from society’s view, but granted freedom, he is given absolutely no protection. He is given no alternative but to accept the imperial crimes committed against him and his race. Unlike Limping Lucy, a character in *The Moonstone* who rejects the subordinate role of the Victorian woman and visualizes a future as a working independent female, Jennings has no such visualization. He, like Bertha, is unable to envision a future in which his race is commonly respected and granted legitimate power and status. He calls himself, “bad company,” as a cloud of horrible accusations have rested upon him for years: he sees himself with no character as he resigns himself to a life of obscurity (Collins 379).

However, as we have seen earlier, Jennings does dissent from these oppressive sites in his exploration of unconventional and mystical methods of treatment for Dr Candy’s illness, and to prove Blake’s innocence of the diamond theft. Jennings realizes

that truth and definition collected in narratives are influenced by conscious and unconscious thoughts from yesterday and today; he attempts to consciously and reasonably define the truth as he slowly makes sense of the fragments of knowledge that he has originally been given. He explains that truth is, “penetrated through the obstacle of the disconnected expression, to the thought which was underlying connectedly all the time” (Collins 387). Here, Collins continues to unfurl the contradictions and sensationalized observations of imperialist ideology. He unusually assigns superior qualities in the colonial “other.” Jennings brings order to the preceding chaos when he explains: “It is all confusion to begin with; but it may be all brought into order and shape” (374). By saving these men from imminent danger, Jennings’s performance instills a sense of poetic justice. It is he who lightens the “white man’s burden” by giving the English gentlemen some relief and assistance (374). Collins’s decision to place Jennings within British society attempts to dismantle the imperialist fear of potentially dangerous interactions between the British and the supposedly violent Indians. Jennings’s actions in no way incite these fears. Figuratively, Collins conspires to elevate and empower the colonial “other” as he defends its name against imperial incriminations.

In his article, “Representations of the Abnormal Body in the *Moonstone*,” Mark Mossman visualizes Jennings as an ever present force within a prejudicial society that cannot be controlled (490). He reveals how “shifting” constructs of race in *The Moonstone*, are epitomized by Jennings’s character (Mossman 494). He suggests that Jennings’s empowerment is derived from his strange appearance which inspires fright and sympathy. In fact, it is his inscrutable appeal to Franklin Blake’s sympathies which makes it impossible for Blake to resist (Collins 369). While Blake easily and blatantly

ignores the appeals for sympathy by Limping Lucy and Rosanna Spearman (Lady Rachel Verinder's house-maid's), he is unable to dismiss Jennings's misery. Here, Mossman elaborates that it is Blake, not Jennings, who is in the position of power. Mossman explains that Blake categorizes and defines the meaning of each character based upon his own conceptualization of "reality" and "truth" of circumstance (493). I deviate from Mossman's point in my assertion that Blake cannot define Jennings's character because the "other's" difference remains insignificant and unresolved throughout the text. My assertion is reiterated when Jennings dies in an unmarked grave. Jennings maintains that "he would die as he had lived, forgotten and unknown... There was no hope now of making any discoveries concerning him. His story is blank" (Collins 460). Jennings's nameless and unmarked grave not only signifies English arrogance and its blatant disregard for ancient traditions and beliefs, but it also reflects society's inability to examine its own irrational fears towards the colonial "other." His grave marks the blood still yet to be shed and the unmarked graves still yet to be dug.

In his text, Collins imagines not only "difference" but a common ground between the English upper class-gentleman and the man of exotic race, an achievement that even Charles Dickens noticed when he described *The Moonstone* as "wild, and yet domestic" (Heller 145). Whereas Jennings upholds his English origins in spite of his dark complexion, Franklin Blake admits to being "foreign" despite his English heritage. In blurring these boundaries and the futures of these characters, Collins reveals that social status and inheritance are less distinguishing than color. Color obviously "meant" something much, much more (Morrison 49).

In blurring the boundaries between the colonized and the colonizer, Collins also reduces their social and economic difference and creates a less distorted psychological view of reality. According to Tamar Heller, Collins breaks down the terms of imperial ideology (145). This is made clear when Jennings and Blake become increasingly aware of each other's existence. Karl Marx claims, "Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life process" (47). Their shared experiences help to draw out the illusions fostered by the dominant and ruling imperialist faction.

Collins actually utilizes their shared experiences to illustrate black and white "differences." By representing Jennings as compassionate, Collins's text could be read as a yearning by whites for black forgiveness for the crimes imposed upon them. According to Toni Morrison, this white hope is only possible when the "other" recognizes his inferiority. Jennings admits to his inadequacies. When Blake is first introduced to Jennings, the English aristocrat describes the "other's" extreme black and white contours. He remarks; "Round the sides of his head-- without the slightest gradation of grey to break the force of extraordinary contrast-- it had turned completely white. The line between the two colours preserved no sort of regularity" (326). Jennings despises his own inadequacies, but permits his oppressors to torment and humiliate him. When looking at Jennings for the first time, Blake felt a curiosity which he was ashamed to say was impossible to control. He explains; "His soft brown eyes looked back at me gently; and he met my involuntary rudeness in staring at him, with an apology which I was conscious that I had not deserved (326). In connection with Marx's claims regarding consciousness, we can conclude that Jennings's consciousness can never be anything else but what he

experienced in real life. Jennings's inability to reconcile his English and Indian differences make him unable to fully defend himself against the contempt imposed upon him by English society (Heller 157). It is Jennings's difference which gives imperial whiteness its power and meaning.

Without Jennings's difference, there is no way for the imperial confines of the novel to mature. Blake's innocence of the stolen gem could not be proven without Jennings. Despite Jennings's success, conventional literary restraints and imperialist dictates restrict Collins from merging his black presence with whiteness. In fact the imperialist fear of losing its white identity by uniting with blackness results in a need for purification (Morrison 67). During this process, Jennings's black presence is excluded from all facets of white society; he cannot purge himself of society's vile accusations and toxic discriminations; he is denied the status of becoming an upper-class English gentleman or a highly respected man of his medical field. Instead his radical views of medicine remain separate and unpublished works; his blackness has no history; he dies as he had lived; "forgotten and unknown...His story is blank" (Collins 460); his unmarked grave signifies the "other's" undecipherable history, the "other's" inability to defend its name and manhood as well as the deep rooted racial divisions still painfully present in nineteenth century British society.

In essence, Collins's strategy is to break the silence and dismantle the imperialist disguise of the colonial "other." In fact, Jennings's eye-witness accounts in the investigation of the Moonstone theft, allow him to share his side of the story. It allows him to explain what it means to be "different" to his readers in late-nineteenth century imperialist Britain. *The Moonstone* was written at a time when Victorian values

continued to be contaminated by imperial panic and fear of native insurrections. In Karl Marx's view, dominant ideology shields reality. Society unconsciously follows directives and supports ideals that fulfill its needs. Marx's theory of *dialectical materialism*, sees society as a historical entity that evolves out of a struggle between contradictions (Richter 397). Collins draws attention to this repetitive cycle of evolution at the end of *The Moonstone* when he writes: "So the years pass, and repeat each other; so the same events revolve in the cycles of time" (Collins 472). He visualizes his society evolving out of a struggle to identify the truth, despite its shifting perspectives.

In *The Moonstone*, Wilkie Collins clearly sees the society in which he lives, as he identifies with the people and events of the time. Collins's novel demonstrates the importance of literature and its ability to raise the curtain upon the horrific conditions imposed by a dominant social class. Collins draws attention to the contradictions between the opposing forces by humanizing the colonial "other" and dehumanizing its oppressors; he reminds his readers that India and its colonized subjects are British property to be valued and respected. *The Moonstone* was written at time when Victorian values continued to be contaminated by imperial ideology. As in 1919, late-nineteenth century Victorian society could not visualize a moral equivalence between the black and white experience. However, Collins's blurred configurations of the white English aristocrat and the black, intelligent gentleman, albeit symbolic; begin to draw out the illusive qualities of imperialist ideology. Despite Collins's unconventional identification of racial superstition and violence housed within British society, his text defines, but does little to reform the immoral climate. In essence, societal fear and ignorance of the colonial

“other’s” character and existence continue to shield imperialist ideology from reality at this time (Duncan 305).

“...A Bolshevist, a Negro and a Gun”

Chapter Four: Ida B. Wells’s *A Red Record* and the White “Other”

From the day of emancipation “...more than ten thousand Negroes have been killed in cold blood, without the formality of judicial trial and legal execution” (Wells 141). In this declaration, Ida B. Wells references her pamphlet titled *A Red Record*, published in 1895, and challenges America’s tolerance for extralegal violence upon its black citizens. Her declaration was an unambiguous but symbolic call to action against lynching. At this time, oppression, violence and injustice formed part of the culture and logic of southern, white supremacist ideology. Its crimes were rationalized by a sense of racial and cultural superiority over subordinate and savage African Americans. Southern white journalists, police and administrators covered up their crimes using symbolism and analogies copied from other regions and other nations. Newspaper headlines such as “Negroes Incited to Riot by Vicious Leaders of their Own Race” created a national tolerance for lynching, while also motivating it (Waldrep 104). These white supremacist notions had been generated by a fear of growing black dominance and enfranchisement during the Reconstruction era. By the 1880s and 1890s, ex-Confederates had regained control of southern state legislatures and blacks became increasingly disenfranchised, yet lynchings surprisingly escalated. Tolerance for the practice of lynching was further accommodated by the end, in 1876, of the Republican Party’s long reign over the legislature as well as the U.S Supreme Court’s decision in 1883 to make the Civil Rights

Act of 1875 unconstitutional (Tolnay 12). This meant that Southern states, together with their local assemblies and courts, were free to manage their own affairs, including the continued suppression of their African American populations. Wells records these acts of oppression in an effort to reconfigure black experience. My research reveals how she constructs, undermines and demonizes the white “other” as she systematically fills in, what Fredric Jameson defines as the “gap(s) and discontinuit(ies) that,” earlier Victorian novels like *Jane Eyre* and *The Moonstone* symptomatically betray (Jameson 207). Her commanding rhetoric finds its function and necessity in a “political consciousness” which unearths the deeply buried distortions of white supremacist ideology.

The distorted news about lynchings was often qualified by white newspaper editors who judged the practice legitimate. This legitimacy was derived from the notion that individuals were lynched only if they had committed a heinous crime and their guilt had been proven. The questionable circumstances of these violent attacks drew the attention of Ida B. Wells. Her investigations revealed how the standard excuses presented by white journalists and administrators were themselves illegitimate (Waldrep 107).

In 1892, Wells grew conscious of these southern, white, illegitimate accusations when a Memphis mob lynched three of her friends, Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Henry Stewart. Local white newspapers relied on traditional and formulated notions of lynching to broadcast their untruths. Moss owned a local grocery store which competed with a white store serving the same area. The white grocer, W. T. Barrett, threatened Moss. Moss, McDowell and Stewart organized a defensive group and armed themselves in preparation for the expected white attack. They shot three white intruders. The police arrested and jailed many blacks including Moss, McDowell and Stewart. Wells later

described the horrific events in which a white posse stormed the jail, took them out to the city limits and shot them to death.

While the white press conceded that the killings of the white intruders were associated with economic competition between the black and white grocers, journalists still described Moss, McDowell and Stewart as “bad niggers.” They assured their readers that this information was attained from “respectable people of both races” (Waldrep 108). Wells realized that lynching was a word that could be associated with the powerful ability to question or justify southern whites and the nation’s tolerance of extralegal violence. She recognized that newspaper editors and their journalists were usually part of the community that approved of the murders (Waldrep 4). They, alone, had the power to determine whether their community and the nation regarded these acts as “lynchings” or if accounts were published at all (Waldrep 3). According to Wells, Moss did not have a bad reputation. She wrote: “He and his wife were the best friends I had in town” (Waldrep 108). She argued Moss’s real crime was his economic success.

Lynching had existed for a long time, but it was not until the 1880s that it became a concept tied to race. Wells adopted this notion as she investigated mob violence towards blacks only. She focused solely on defending the innocence of black victims rather than exploring their offences.

In 1886, Wells’s diary refers to the violent costs of blackness. The *Chicago Tribune* had calculated twenty-eight lynchings between January 1 and March 17. The Memphis papers did not cover all of these events, but mentioned fourteen, as well as three more that the *Tribune* had missed (Waldrep 106). On March 18, Wells wrote in her diary that “the daily papers bring notice this morning that 13 colored men were shot

down in cold blood yesterday” in Carrollton, Mississippi (Waldrep 103). According to the white press the group of black men had conspired to kill a white man. White journalists assumed that black criminality had incensed the “best (white) men” in town into violence. News articles in cities like Carrollton and Memphis reveal how southern whites engineered their own racial rhetoric, often enacting rape as a false justification for lynching. In her pamphlet, *A Red Record*, Wells illustrates the historic trajectory of this rhetoric while revealing the cold-blooded intentions of southern white supremacists.

In *A Red Record*, Ida B. Wells portrays a black objective reality as she unconventionally dares to reveal the flaws in dominant supremacist ideology. She draws attention to the first excuse fabricated by southern whites for their violence against African Americas during Reconstruction. Southern whites claimed that they were forced to “stamp out alleged ‘race riots’” (Wells 141). Black communities were slaughtered because white people feared insurrection.

This growing white hysteria may have been inspired by the slave rebellions in the British colonies earlier in the century. These included the rise of the Maroons, black anti-slave rebels, in Jamaica, and the Demerara uprising of 1823 in British Guiana. In her novel, *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë draws upon these incisive rebellions when describing the blackened character of Bertha Mason Rochester. Bertha’s fiery and violent escapes from her third floor imprisonment symbolize the slaves’ dependence upon fire to destroy their masters’ property and to signal to each other that an uprising was taking place. White fears may have been further prompted by Indian rebel insurrections across northern India in 1857. The Indian Mutiny was instigated by imperialist exploitation of resources and manpower, and a blatant disregard for ancient Hindu and Muslim beliefs

and customs. In his novel, *The Moonstone*, Wilkie Collins utilizes the diamond's theft and its curse to signify an oppressive, white, imperialist society. Wells draws attention to these irrational and fictionalized fears when she argues; "It was always a remarkable feature in these insurrections and riots that only Negroes were killed... and that all white men escaped unharmed" (Wells 142). She acknowledges that this first excuse began to lose traction as in time it became apparent that these riots were never actually insurrected by blacks.

The second excuse was the fear of black dominance. The early emancipated black vote provided Republicans with power in matters of state and national politics. Once in power, the government, which had declared the black man a citizen, chose not to protect him (Wells 143). The black man clung to his right to vote despite the discrimination and violent attacks against him. His feared dominance, like that of colonized people in India and the West Indies, was kept in check by hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony and dismissive "othering" (Morrison x). These illusions were fostered by southern white supremacists to ensure social stability and their own continued dominance. Early Victorian literature adopted this rationale. The black characters of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and Ezra Jennings in *The Moonstone* were shaped into predictable monstrous forms of hatred and discrimination which symbolized white oppressive power. Three decades later, Wells refuses to follow the same rationale as she fully understands the prejudicial intent of symbolic, monstrous black images.

By the 1880s, as blacks became increasingly disenfranchised, southern white society's narrative evolved into what Wells found to be the third excuse. She writes, "Negroes had to be killed to avenge their assaults upon women" (Wells 144). Wells

identifies lynchers as the “best men,” a class authorized by the north to run southern business and race relations. She sees these men as “reputed fathers of mulatto children.” She believes mob violence has to be checked before it spread to the larger cities (Giddings 225).

With all three evolving reasons for lynching African Americans, Wells recognizes that the new south had trumped up this final charge in an effort to reconcile with the north. The north would obviously side with the south, if southern women were being ravaged by a monstrous and brutish black race (Giddings 226). White chivalry demonstrated a subversive purpose which motivated Wells to investigate southern white supremacist power in society.

Wells believes that the more her race advanced economically, the more they would be subjected to “legal disenfranchisement, Jim Crow laws, and violence” (Giddings 227). Monstrous charges of rape motivate Wells to defend her race as she demands, “the Negro must give to the world his side of the story” (Wells 145). Her recordings of ritualized lynchings of African Americans help to configure the black experience and shape its narrative. In her text, *Exorcising Blackness*, literary and cultural critic, Trudier Harris, describes Wells as a “ritual priest,” for her efforts to define the forces that have shaped black lives (Waldrep 4).

In *A Red Record*, Wells consciously constructs arguments based upon persistent sources that southern whites could not refute. At the same time, she builds rhetorical support which undermines the southern white narrative. She has to persuade her audience that “lynching” is a synonym for racism and violence towards African Americans (quoted in Waldrep 5).

Wells had to contend with writers, social scientists and psychologists who supported the southern white mentality. In *The Plantation Negro as Freeman* (1889), author Philip Bruce blamed black women's sexual exploits for the downfall of their race (Giddings 157). In 1890, Daniel G. Brinton, a Yale graduate, explained that African Americans had regressed "midway between the Oran-utang and the European white" (Giddings 216). Even Darwin's idea of the survival of the fittest fed the notion that moral and spiritual progress translates into accumulation of wealth (Giddings 71). While the wealth of the black elites seemed to disclaim black inferiority, black disenfranchisement, for many southern whites, still impelled them to believe in the degradation of the race. These so-called "scientific facts" led Brown University sociologist, Lester Ward, to deduce that blacks were naturally inclined to rape white women as they aimed to "raise their race to a little higher level" (Giddings 216). Wells countered this argument. In fact, charges of rape were a factor in less than 30% of lynchings, and many of these charges were enacted for violations of Jim Crow taboos (Tolnay 48). Despite the facts, Brinton demanded that white women had a duty to preserve their racial purity and white men had the higher duty to protect them (Giddings 216). It was clear to Wells that women and sexuality allowed southerners to use lynching as a key to the repression of the African American race.

In her investigations, Wells realizes that the world is subjected solely to the southern white imagination which displays blacks as cut-throats, thieves and lustful brutal beasts. In *A Red Record*, Wells remarks that even Miss Frances E. Willard, the daughter of abolitionists who supposedly supported the Negro cause, acknowledges: "The grogshop is the Negro's center of power. Better whisky and more of it is the rallying cry

of great, dark-faced mobs...The safety of woman, of childhood, the home, is menaced in a thousand localities at this moment, so that men dare not go beyond the sight of their own roof-tree” (Wells 201-2). Wells realizes that she has to undermine and demonize the imaginations of the white “other.” She has to change the hearts and minds of white America regarding the premise of lynching. She attempts this by questioning the consensual relationships between black men and white women.

Wells had pursued a similar theme in her first anti-lynching pamphlet called *Southern Horrors* (1882). However, in *A Red Record*, her analysis of the issue is more critically refined and ambitious as she attacks social science’s ideological notions regarding black regression and rape. In stark contrast to Charlotte Brontë’s character, Bertha Mason Rochester, whose imagined black existence speaks of insanity and spurts of rebellious violence, and to Wilkie Collins’s Ezra Jennings, whose oppressive existence is intended to extract sympathy, Wells’s discoveries are not *like* these characters’ fictional struggles’. They *ARE* the struggles! Wells’s facts are based upon eye-witness real life accounts. These experiences are not restricted by fictional imaginations, but by the warped conceptualization of the white mob. Wells makes this distinction in Chapter One, when she asks the question; “What the white man means when he charges the black man with rape?” (Wells 145). Her language is understood by both black and white readers as she draws attention to the clashes between them. She explains that Southern white men find it “impossible” to believe that there could be a consensual relationship between a black man and a white woman (Wells 145). They assume that such relationships are made only through force.

Wells receives black and white criticism for her slandering of white women, but she remains on the offensive. In Chapter Six of *A Red Record*, she demands that lynching mobs have killed Negroes, knowing full well that their relationship with the white woman were voluntary (Wells 200). Intent on investigating these facts, she calls into question the claims made by the Judge of the Supreme Court of Georgia, Speaker Crisp and Dr. Hoss, editor of Methodist Church South journal, who cannot provide any evidence, but still defend the lynchings of negroes for rape based purely on their beliefs (Wells 201). More importantly, she also provides statements by white women such as Mrs. J. C. Underwood, the wife of a minister of Elyria, Ohio, who accused an African-American of rape. She did so because one of her neighbors had seen the fellow at her home; she was afraid of contracting a disease and she feared that she could give birth to a Negro child (Wells 203). She and other white women in consensual relationships with black men, were compelled by threats from society to make the black man a victim (Wells 205). Using their accounts, Wells undermines the white supremacist notion that white women would never enter into relations with black men willingly.

Wells urges that it is not her intention to criticize white southern women. Instead she recognizes their “misfortune” in that white men used them to “justify their own barbarism” (Wells 147) She claims, it is easy to prove that white southern chivalry is false because it is “written in the faces of the million mulattoes in the South” (Wells 147). At the same time Wells observes that northern white women, who heroically came to teach the black man in the South, were continually insulted and persecuted by southern white men while they never had to fear any “great dark faced mobs” (Wells 148). Wells

argues that the southern white man's behavior certainly cannot boast of its chivalry towards white women (Wells 148).

Unlike Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, Wells's *A Red Record* relies on diabolical truths rather than symbolic fantasy as a means to unearth deeply buried racial conflicts. In fact, even its title signifies blood spilled by merciless lynch mobs. However, like Brontë and Collins, Wells combines femininity with blackness to create a subversive purpose in which supremacist power can be investigated within English society. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha's existence symbolizes the shared oppression between women and blacks in mid-nineteenth century Victorian society, while in *The Moonstone* Jennings's female constitution helps to transform his feared existence into a defenseless and humanizing one. Wells's combination of femininity and blackness begin to unbury the deeply rooted and painful racial divisions imposed upon society.

In Chapter Seven, Wells continues to decode the ambiguities of rape. Ultimately, she is providing an "intersectional" analysis to deconstruct both white supremacist and patriarchal ideas. She explains that rape committed by white men against Negro women and girls is never punished by law (Wells 211). She refers to a leading journal in South Carolina which admitted that "it is not the same thing for a white man to assault a colored woman as for a colored man to assault a white woman, because the colored woman had no finer feelings or virtue to be outraged!" (Wells 211) In the 1880s, the Miscegenation laws of the south not only worked against the union of the races, but they left the white man free to assault colored women. In contrast, it was often death to the colored man if he made advances to any white woman.

According to the law, black women, on the other hand, could be white men's sexual partners but never allowed to be their wives even if there were illegitimate children. These black women were seen as immoral. Wells understood the Victorian ideal of true womanhood which demanded virtues of piety, purity, modesty, submission and domesticity. During slavery, black women were denied Victorian virtues based on their oppressive conditions. The Victorian age saw these virtues essential for women to improve themselves, their families and their community (Giddings 12). Wells assures her readers that, "virtue knows no color line," particularly since there were a million mulattoes living in the south at that time (Wells 147). As a black woman who dared to explore the buried subjects of power, race and sexuality, she may well have lived up to the immoral standards assumed by white society. However as an investigator, journalist and black woman, she refused to be restricted by these Victorian constraints.

Wells's *A Red Record* consists of ten chapters which contain stark gruesome southern realities (Giddings 228-9). Chapters Two and Nine are filled with statistics on recent lynchings of the time, while Chapters Four and Five include graphic and appalling photographs of these heinous crimes. With eye-witness accounts and horrific photographs, Wells's text does not follow proper, polite and genteel Victorian constraints. At the time, her audience was given no choice but to believe that lynching atrocities existed. These horrors were not the acts of cannibals or savages, but that of the American people living in what was supposed to be the home of the free and the land of the brave.

In her efforts to undermine white supremacist narrative, she identifies and defines the monstrous face of the white "other." Its ugliness is underscored in Chapter Three entitled "Lynching Imbeciles." Here, Wells argues that; "Never in the history of

civilization has any Christian people stooped to such shocking brutality and indescribable barbarism as that which characterized the people of Paris, Texas,” in 1893. In her investigations of the lynching of Henry Smith, she records the testimony of Reverend King, a well known minister in the area. His observations of the distorted passion in the faces of children and the bloodshot eyes of their cruel parents who held them high in the air to observe the lynching, extols the monstrous profile of the southern white man and his family. Reverend King explains that the crowd could not be held back, “so anxious were the savages to participate in the sickening tortures” (Wells 170). Wells confirms that none of the lynchers were indicted for the murder; none of them suffered “for the butchery of that man, than they would have suffered for shooting a dog” (Wells 12). Wells hoped that eyewitness accounts, like this one, would educate as well as appeal to the nation’s conscience.

By revealing these horrific southern white crimes, Wells believed southern whites as well as blacks had to be educated “to the point of proper self-respect” (Giddings 169). *A Red Record* provided African Americans, at the time, with a language to defend themselves against the illegitimacy of lynching. Similarly, Wilkie Collins granted his character of mixed race, Ezra Jennings, the ability to explain and object to his pain and suffering at the hands of imperial discrimination and exclusion. His racial circumstance drew upon readers’ sympathies. However, in contrast to Wells’s text, Jennings is incapable of proving his innocence. He can only assert his blamelessness on his oath as a Christian. He explains, “It is useless to appeal to my honour as a man” (Collins 379). His unmarked grave signifies a blackman’s inability to defend his name and his manhood

during this time. In 1868, when Collins's *The Moonstone* was published, blacks resigned themselves to a life of obscurity as few narratives had been constructed in their defense.

In defending the black man, Wells had to depend upon the black press and its ability to build support and alliances. In a series of speeches and editorials which began in 1889, Wells spoke and wrote passionately against white mob violence. Although her writings may have had little influence upon southern whites, they drew considerable attention on a national and international stage towards the horrors of black oppression in the South (Tolnay 28). One Englishman, whose word and influence were seen to have a huge investment affect upon the expansion of southern businesses is quoted by Wells as saying, "I will not invest a farthing in States where these horrors occur...such outrages indicate to my mind that where life is held to be of such little value there is even less assurance that the laws will protect property" (Wells 223). By building support against the acts of lynching, Wells called for acts of civil disobedience which would affect the white economic situation rather than the white man's conscience. This is where the spirit of black resistance, which manifested itself in 1919, began to rise.

In *A Red Record*, Wells makes the subjects of race, power and sexuality part of a national and international resistance dialogue. Her conversation is a far cry from the "secret dialogue of self and soul" in *Jane Eyre* in which the protagonist defends her ambitions for freedom. Uttered on a rooftop of a country estate, Jane's rebellious words are kept silent from society, where her desires would have been judged as insane and unnatural. Wells's courageous ambitions for freedom, on the other hand, are far from silent or isolated. Her public declarations about race, power and sexuality played an

essential part in restoring to the surface the realities of black history. Fredric Jameson's doctrine of "political unconsciousness" cannot find a function in Wells's work.

While Wells discloses the conflicts between blacks and whites, societal fear and ignorance of blackness continue to shield supremacist ideology from reality. As these conflicts remain irreconcilable in the 1890s, social perspectives are still not widely changed. History, as Fredric Jameson purports, "continues to hurt" (102). The black "other" cannot act *for* or *like* the white "other" because Wells, like her Victorian predecessors, has established a difference between them. This difference necessitates two paths which seem bound never to cross. As in the double-sided character associations of Bertha Mason and Jane Eyre, Ezra Jennings and the English aristocrat, Franklin Blake, the continued existence of segregation and inequality between African Americans and southern whites in the United States enforces a continuing and widening divide. By preventing their paths from touching, Wells draws attention to her inability to visualize a resolution to these oppressive and violent conditions.

However, in *A Red Record*, Wells is quick to prove that her crusade affected change. By the 1890s the act of lynching implied community support for racial violence, which enabled civil rights activists to use lynching as evidence for the need for reforms. She notes that governors of states, newspapers, senators and ministries, who had dismissed the murders several years before, were now forced to defend the charges against barbarism in the United States. While her strategy did not improve justice, it did draw the inhumanities of a supposedly civilized nation into an international arena where others could watch (Wells 217). Wells believed lynching struck at the very heart of America's problem with race (Giddings 2).

A Red Record plays an important role in the development of black anti-lynching literature as it bravely defends the black man against the excuses given in support of southern white barbarity during Reconstruction (Gussow 122). In it, Wells innovates a language, which influences the framework for judging the illegitimacy of lynching. She defines the act not only from a white, but a black, perspective. She urges her audience to rise up against the violence not just for justice or sympathy's sake, but to uphold the sanctity of American institutions and way of life. She believes the whole country was paying for the violence of the South (Giddings 255). Wells's configuration of the white "other" symbolizes the daunting crusade for social justice that was still to come, while the black presence remains a pervasive misunderstood force within a prejudicial and violent society. The 598 lynching incidents and the murders of 744 blacks in the 1890s is proof of this (Tolnay 31).

“...A Bolshevist, a Negro and a Gun”

Chapter Five: Claude McKay’s “If We Must Die” and a New “Other”

By 1919, being American or British could no longer be identified solely with whiteness. On a united war front black and white soldiers had fought for democracy and justice while the home front remained racially divided. Returning black soldiers faced “a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell” (quoted in Tillery 36). These words, written by black journalist, activist and author W.E.B Du Bois, in his May edition of *Crisis*, urged African Americans to fight for equality. How could America promote a world crusade only to turn its back on the horrific injustices imposed upon some of its own citizens? Black rebellious outcries filled with torn emotions of disillusionment, anger and protest found a literary outlet in Claude McKay’s rallying poetic cry, “If We Must Die.” The racial contention heralded within its form and style is overtly shaped by the violent narrative of society, the interrogation of social space, and by the oppressive cultural differences of the time. Like the earlier Victorian texts of *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë, and *The Moonstone*, by Wilkie Collins, McKay’s poem informs his readers through symbolic configurations of the black and white “other.” Despite the ambiguities contained in all three works, I argue that McKay’s poetic perspective leaves little doubt about his rebellious and racial intentions. His figurative analogies undermine and demonize southern, white, supremacist ideology, and defend blackness from white incrimination. The power of his poem, like the investigative

research uncovered by Wells, is its ability to draw attention to the cultural dissent, disunity and contradictions present within American society at that time. McKay, like Wells, continues to narrow the “gap” that Fredric Jameson, in his text *The Political Unconscious*, believes earlier Victorian novels, like *Jane Eyre* and *The Moonstone* symptomatically betray (Jameson 207).

By 1919, the social narrative based on racial difference and segregated social space had changed. It was a time when a new political agenda was evolving and promoting racial equality. Black intellectuals like W.E.B Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson aimed to transform the historic negativity associated with blackness. They perceived literature as a weapon to challenge the Darwinian belief that African Americans were incapable of expressing their own culture (Ramesh 69). McKay’s poem, “If We Must Die” symbolizes the battle cry of this spirited black resistance. It was an explosive reaction towards the blatant racist ideology coveted by southern white supremacists.

By 1919, defending the black cause continued to require urgent access to systems of public opinion, just as it had in the 1890s. The *Crisis* magazine founded by the NAACP under the general editorship of W. E. B. Du Bois, was a major outlet for African American readers to observe objective truths and participate in literary debate. Another outlet *Negro World* was founded by Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Jamaica in 1914. It began circulating in the United States along with the radical white magazine, the *Liberator*, edited by Marxist adherent, Max Eastman, in 1918 (Lauter 1742). Each addressed facets of life for blacks in America, and devoted special issues to topics such as women's suffrage, education, labor and

the war. They focused explicitly on racial concerns associated with the assertion of equal rights; the defense against violence, lynching, prejudice, and stereotyping; the deposition of white cultural imperialism; and the recognition of African ancestral culture and the beauty of color.

The depth and complexity of the “Red Summer” riots is reiterated by the lack of literature written about them. Lynching and mob aggression continued for 50 years following emancipation; it was nothing new. Earlier journalistic reports and statistics of lynching events from the likes of Ida B. Wells and Walter White were supplanted by the promotion of a defensive moral agenda; black writers and poets, dramatists and artists created a national and international, collective and critical consciousness, which focused their attentions on the emotions, expectations and horrors of black experiences. Indeed, these journals and magazines offered the chance for all of these literary artists to publish individual works to describe, assess and respond to the horrors of 1919 as the events unfolded. Their texts increasingly identified with people, their perspectives and the circumstances of the time rather than the actual riotous events themselves.

Mary Burrill’s literary response was defined in her one man play, *The Aftermath*, first published in the *Liberator* in 1919. It did not respond directly to the “Red Summer” rioting but it did dramatize the racial and oppressive circumstances of the time. It describes the response of a black soldier, returning home to South Carolina from World War I to find that his father had been lynched. The soldier speaks bitterly upon receiving the news: “...I mus’ let them w’ite devuls send me miles erway to suffer an’ be shot up fu’ the freedom of the people I ain’t nevah seen, while they’re burnin’ an’ killing’ my folks here at home!” (quoted in Armstrong 59). In her play, Burrill reveals a family

terrorized by fear. She exemplifies the spirit of resistance unleashed by returning black soldiers and the prevalent fear found within black communities at the time.

Oscar Micheaux's silent film, *Within our Gates*, is a literary response to Chicago's Race Riot of 1919 as well as to the release of D.W. Griffith's film, *The Birth of a Nation*, produced in 1915. In his production, black writer, director and producer, Oscar Micheaux, presents diabolical scenes and images of the oppressed African American in his dire struggle to improve his desperate circumstance. In the film, black existence in the north and south are compared. Subtitles describe a south in which, "ignorance and lynch law reign supreme." Sylvia Landry, the central character and heroine played by black artist Evelyn Preer, condemns racial inequality. She courageously accepts that, "it is my duty and the duty of each member of our race to help destroy ignorance and superstition." Along with this declaration, Micheaux unveils and questions black racial myths instilled by the southern white supremacist which are exaggerated in *The Birth of a Nation*. He exposes the economic oppression endured by southern black cotton field workers and their families. He expounds upon the necessity for government assistance to provide for proper Negro education. In fact, Sylvia plays a role in this activism to save her southern school from imminent closure. "Sylvia's Story" is played out in the latter part of the film. It offers a devastatingly, truthful critique of white mob violence, in which white men, women and children play a part in the brutal torture and murder of innocent victims including Sylvia's parents. The audience views the proclamation of their hanging in the subsequent, inaccurate and sensationalized white press releases. The headlines describing the Landrys' lynchings are disclosed as "accidental deaths." While *Within our Gates* sporadically juggles events from the past

with those in the future often confusing its audience the drama's violent and oppressive sentiment cannot be misinterpreted by its predominantly white audience.

Claude McKay's "If We Must Die" underscores the changing black literary environment. Just like Mary Burrill's *Aftermath* and Oscar Micheux's *Within our Gates*, McKay's poem defends against the supremacist ideology and the interrogation of black space. The poem's celebrated distinction becomes clear when critiquing it from modernist Marxist perspectives. In his works, *The Historical Novel* (1937), *Studies in European Realism* (1950) and in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, Marxist critic, Georg Lukács (1885-1971), reveals his search in modernist literary texts for a portrayal of an unfolding historical and economic system. He asserts that a realist text has to "reflect" the actual underlying patterns of contradictions in a social order (Selden 87-88). In doing so, Lukács draws attention to the power of ideology in literary texts. He asserts that an author's work cannot be a mere external vision, nor can it consist of individual objective and subjective isolated impressions. Instead, it must present a mental picture of human nature and social interactions that represent "the full process of life" (Selden 87). According to Lukács, this process has to possess an intensive totality which relates to the extensive dialectical totality of reality itself (Eagleton 10). Only by utilizing an "intensive" form can the writer succeed in creating a sense of order out of the chaos and complexity of actual life experience. Furthermore, the writer achieves social order if all underlying contradictions are understood within the entire mental picture presented.

Applying an "intensive" form, Claude McKay incorporates the black existence as part of a dynamic and dialectical development. Lukács's argument lies in the contradictions generated from conflicts between the capitalist and the worker, and the

visualization of a resolution in the unity within these contradictions (Selden 88). Similarly, McKay's poem unearths hypocrisies in the supremacist narrative and finds resolution in a defensive meeting between African Americans and the common white foe (McKay 63).

McKay achieves a poetic "reflection" of black and white existence, despite his narrow, alienated and reactionary representations. I must emphasize that the existence of blackness in the early twentieth century was still associated with the narrow and negative reference points of violence and fear. With this in mind, it is not surprising that black writers, like Claude McKay, absorbed this so-called narrowed consciousness in their creations. In fact, author, literary critic and theorist, Toni Morrison, confirms in her text, *Playing in the Dark*, that an American brand of Africanism emerged out of a narrowed ideological, imperialistic and subjugated rationale (38). She explains that society's narrowness resulted in African American "difference" that the dominant society intentionally denied.

Claude McKay, like Ida B. Wells, presents a narrowed and subjective defense of blackness in his graphic display and shocking conceptualizations of supremacist ideology. Another Marxist dramatist and theorist Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) contended that the essential quality of literary works and theatrical performances lies in their ability to shatter the illusion of reality by alienating or "defamiliarizing." He rejected universality and transitional, interconnected plot lines. He believed the facts of social injustice needed to be introduced as if they were, "shockingly unnatural and totally surprising" (Selden 89). In "If We Must Die," McKay devises a white monstrous image, a reversal tactic instigated by early Victorian writers, as a means to reveal the unfamiliar

facts of social injustice. In pure Brechtian fashion, McKay “defamiliarizes” the southern white oppressor. His words, “mad and hungry dogs,” “monsters” and “the murderous cowardly pack” are extended metaphors and parallels that he relies upon to open society’s eyes to the lawlessness of white supremacist ideology. By creating unfamiliar characters in recognizable roles, Brecht asserts the audience is forced to critically analyze the problematic situation. They are forced to understand the situation, emotions and conflicts of characters from an outside perspective (Selden 90). Audiences are compelled to point out the “underlying pattern of contradictions in a social order.” McKay, like Brecht, indulges in shocking methods and metaphors to wake both black and white audiences out of a revered acceptance of a capitalist and racist system (Selden 91).

McKay not only indulges in the irrational fears of the southern white but also in those of British imperialists. The notion of landing a final deathblow, “for their thousand blows,” suggests a resistant message indicative of historical West Indian slave rebellions in the early nineteenth century. McKay’s poetic message motivates African Americans to take up guns in the name of defense, when he writes, “O kinsmen we must meet the common foe /...Pressed to the wall, dying but fighting back!” His insurrectionary words not only have the “defamiliarizing” effect of striking out against the dominant culture’s false consciousness, but they also recognize the determination of the black man to subvert the white man’s accusations and come to terms with his own identity, while on equal terms with his common foe.

McKay’s “If We Must Die” incites the African American desire for equality despite its promulgation of racial difference. By 1919, social times were changing. African Americans returned home, having fought a war against oppression on the

battlefields of Europe, only to fight against oppression on their home front. McKay's poem defines the domestic fight as he differentiates between black and white existence. He contrasts the "penned" and "inglorious" black man with the wild and oppressive white. Unlike Wells, McKay utilizes "difference" to necessitate an intersection between blacks and whites. Unlike Wells, he visualizes a resolution by compelling blacks to "fight back." By 1919, the once "impenetrable wall of whiteness" was beginning to show signs of crumbling.

McKay's determination to strike out against white supremacist ideology is also divulged in his use of the sonnet form. Its structure and style of language not only is heroic in its rallying cry to raise arms, but it also demonstrates McKay's literary ability to master Western literary conventions; he attacks racial superiority, cultural hegemony and dismissive "othering" imposed by southern white supremacy and imperialist ideology (Morrison x).

Conversely, his choice of form and language may well have appealed to both black and white audiences. In fact, the poem was first published in the *Liberator*, a white radical and socialist publication. As a poet aspiring for universal acclaim, McKay may have been enticed by a wider audience, but his reasons for choosing this magazine also seem to reflect his early affiliations with socialism. He asserted that the problems faced by blacks worldwide were due to the oppression imposed by a capitalist system. He believed, at the time, that a solution could be reached if blacks embraced socialism. He seemed to conceptualize the black problem as more economic than racial. His position certainly differentiated him from Wells and her purely racial stance. He was even known

to criticize American black institutions like the NAACP for viewing the issue from the narrowed perspective of race (Ramesh 172).

Claude McKay's "If We Must Die" was one of seven of his poems to be published in the *Liberator's* July 1919 issue. They stand amidst articles adhering to the cause of the International Proletariat. Each article reasserts resistance against the "aggressions of a rabid master class" (Baggins 12) and follows the magazine's mission statement which claimed that; "Literature should contribute to the cause of social revolution" (McKay xxiv). However, many of the black journals and magazines adopted "If We Must Die" and used it as a rallying cry for the black cause (Ramesh 70). In fact, the *Crisis* later published Mary Burrill's one man play, *Aftermath*, alongside McKay's sonnet. (Armstrong 49).

McKay's use of sonnet form may also have been a means to infiltrate white ideological sentiment in the *Liberator*. This so-called "infiltration" acknowledges the position generated by Marxist theorists, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in their essay, *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* taken from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947). In the text, they assert that the "aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system" (Richter 1255). According to this viewpoint, what are considered individual truths, are only new concepts that are assumed to fit in with conventional social forms of the time (Richter 1261).

Adorno and Horkheimer's position can be observed in McKay's poem. In it, McKay recognizes the black man's determination to subvert white accusations and present his side of history. He transforms the black man from a domestic, hunted animal

into a brave human being when he writes, “O kinsmen we must meet the common foe! / Though far outnumbered let us show us brave” (McKay 63). It is McKay’s dehumanization of the white oppressor which elevates the humanity of the black man. This is clearly defined in the line, “Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack” (63). As Adorno and Horkheimer suggest, McKay is inflicting the same fate upon southern white oppressors as was dealt earlier upon the submissive black man. He creates new concepts which fit into conventional social forms of his time. These theorists assert that human beings are obedient to a system and to language that changes over time. In their opinion, this system and its language are incapable of providing access to the truth and to reality. Resistance is suppressed by the control of individual consciousness. However this struggle which, they believe, involves the “survival of the fittest” becomes a winning strategy when society’s inability to access the truth eventually results in the deconstruction of the existing system and its language (Richter 1256). In 1919, McKay’s poem assisted in the deconstruction of a supremacist system, as the ugliness of its oppressive language was finally accessed and revealed.

Claude McKay’s poetic words embody a particular social attitude and moral value which are affected by the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, between language and the literary text and between self and “other.” These comparisons are strongly influenced by his West Indian, rather than American, heritage (Ramesh 28). In fact, literary critic James R. Giles goes so far as to argue that McKay’s use of traditional poetic conventions in these comparisons actually restricts the poem’s message of protest. He explains that the “conflict between McKay’s passionate resentment of racist

oppression and Victorianism in form and diction creates a unique kind of tension in many of his poems, which weakens their ultimate success” (42).

McKay was brought up in the British colony of Jamaica, so his identity was not only structured by being black and being colonial, but also confined to British rather than American culture (Ramesh 9). As a black radical, he was also profoundly affected by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. As discussed earlier, McKay identified with the movement because it encouraged him to overcome alienation and discrimination (Tillery 52). His identification with communism and as a black American immigrant caused him to be caught in the middle of two worlds of cultures. Acknowledging these divisive influences is essential to the critique of his writings, particularly when American society identified solely with a strict black or white code. In the United States, African Caribbean immigrants like McKay were often distinguished as “black” or African American, ignoring their West Indian roots and essential cultural and national differences (Ramesh 9).

In America, McKay’s colonial mentality, influenced by universal romantic aspirations, and his education in British literature, was often besieged by America’s prominent racial issues, which addressed the concepts of double consciousness, freedom and segregation. “If We Must Die” is an example of this siege. McKay wrote it as an explosive response to Chicago’s race riot in the summer of 1919. It was immediately adopted by the “New Negro” cause. In comparison, other colonial texts that did not identify with the African American experience were clearly marginalized and ignored (Ramesh 10). Toni Morrison elaborates upon this point. She writes, “It is no accident and no mistake that immigrant populations (and much immigrant literature) understood their

“Americanness” as an opposition to the resident black population” (47). She believes it was the southern whites need to relieve fears of black retaliation and their ability to rationalize violence and exploitation of the African American which resulted in the existence of “other’s” *difference* (Ramesh 39).

The demanding racial situation and the *difference* in cultural experiences directly affect the style and form of all of McKay’s writings and are clearly visible in “If We Must Die.” While he uses the image of the “hunted” and “penned” “hog” to symbolize the oppressed condition of the black man, it could also reflect the black man’s acceptance of his cruel and repressive existence, while also revealing McKay’s outsider perspective. The linguistic meaning of the word “hog” has an economic attachment, which is created by the ways in which it is signified in social, political and cultural struggles. In his use of the word “hog” to describe the black working class, McKay could be exposing the economic injustices within American society.

While it was imperative for black writers to transform the negative identity traditionally imposed upon the African American image, McKay’s reference to the black urban lower class was seen by many of his contemporaries as enhancing this negativity and reinforcing the racist attitudes held by whites. McKay’s pervasive use of animal imagery when describing his black characters may well have reflected his belief that the African American was willing to accept his “accursed lot.” In contrast, new African American writers, such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston and Jean Toomer, turned to southern black folk heritage in their intellectual use of spirituals, sermons, blues and work songs. Their art promoted a positive image of the black bourgeoisie (Ramesh 97). In comparing the works of the new African American writers with McKay, it appears

that McKay was unable to lose sight of the literature and attitudes of the colonizer; it seems he could not fully adopt the literary concerns of his African American contemporaries (Ramesh 109).

While visiting the United States, Claude McKay was certainly caught up in his differences as the “other.” Social acceptance in the West Indies was not only governed by economic and demographic considerations but also on the color of one’s skin. Unlike in America where all colors were grouped together socially and legally, in the West Indies those with a skin color close to white were believed to be superior. In fact it was possible to pass from black to white in three generations. This notion is provided in Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Jane Eyre*, when Bertha, the daughter of a Creole woman and a white planter, married Edward Rochester, an English aristocrat. The color and class system, together with West Indian identification within the British system and its language, proved to be very different to that in the United States (Ramesh 43).

At the same time, words indicating race and color, like *black*, *colored*, and *Negro*, are surprisingly absent in the poem (Tillery 35). McKay’s romantic belief that art should have a universal appeal and not be restricted by race or propaganda may well have influenced this omission. The colonial aspect of McKay’s character did not understand the African American urgency to promote the race as equally talented (Ramesh 69). He believed literature should be independent of race and nationality. James R. Giles concludes that a great deal of McKay’s poetry cannot be classified directly or indirectly as black protest literature (42). Although the 1919 race riots were the impetus for McKay’s poem, years later he denied its racial objective (Ramesh 69). In his autobiography, *A Long Way from Home* (1937), he explains that the poem had a universal

quality. He claims that he wrote it for all men who were being “abused, brutalized, and murdered, whether they were black, brown, yellow or white Catholic or Protestant” (quoted in Tillery 34). McKay’s thoughts about the poem’s intent are, however, inconsequential to the point of this manuscript; it is how the poem was perceived at the time which is far more important.

Despite McKay’s struggle against the problem of race and the negation of his identity in America, “If We Must Die” vividly embodies the “New Negro” spirit (Tillery 35). According to Georg Lukács, perspective determines the course and content of an author’s work, and allows the artist to choose between what is crucial and superficial (Eagleton 154). Despite the poet and poem’s ambiguous motivations, I argue that it consists of crucial race elements which cannot be ignored. For this reason, Fredric Jameson’s doctrine of ‘political unconscious’ does not exist in McKay’s poem, just as it does not exist in Ida B. Wells’s *A Red Record*. The crucial elements of race are openly displayed in McKay’s close association with aspects of southern white mythology, in his assault upon historic oppression and its discrimination of social space, in his reference to black economic status, and in his undermining of cultural ideology.

McKay succeeds, where many before him had failed. Unlike Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* and *A Red Pamphlet* by Ida B. Wells, the binary constructions of black and white within “If We Must Die” no longer revolve around a self hidden behind the white “other.” The black existence no longer rests on subverted oppression, exclusion, expropriation and rejection, nor does its stereotypical image remain a pervasive, misunderstood force. While history continued to hurt, McKay’s poetic words present a new and spirited black resistance when he exclaims “If

we must die, O let us nobly die, / So that our precious blood may not be shed/ In vain...”

McKay’s 1919 rallying racial cry finally unveils what will be a long and arduous battle against the continued injustices of a prejudiced white society.

“...A Bolshevist, a Negro and a Gun”

Conclusion

This thesis begins and ends in 1919. Claude McKay’s rallying poetic cry in “If We Must Die” reveals the cycle of this resistance. Wartime was supposedly over, but there was still a battle to be fought on the home front. 1919 could have been a time of equal promise, peace and rallying participation, but instead heinous acts of violence reverberated across the “black Atlantic” making that particular summer one of the reddest and bloodiest summers in history. McKay’s cry resounded loudly and illustrated clearly the abhorrent actualities of a warped social and economic system, but these distorted and pervasive shadows of darkness amplified by white fear had persisted for over 50 years. Until 1919, British imperialist and white American societies blindly followed directives and worshiped ideals that fulfilled their economic needs. Wilkie Collins observes these recurring and unconscious systems in his novel, *The Moonstone* when he writes: “So the years pass, and repeat each other; so the same events revolve in the cycles of time” (472). While authors’ symbolic configurations of black experience transform over time, history is doomed to repeat itself as long as racial conflicts and clashes remained buried, invisible from any social perspective, and in reality unable to be resolved. In other words, history would continue to hurt, as Fredric Jameson asserts in his text *The Political Unconscious*, until a resolution could be found (102). McKay’s poem succeeds, where authors Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* and Ida B.

Wells's *A Red Record* had failed. By 1919, McKay's symbolic creations no longer rest upon subverted oppression, exclusion, expropriation and rejection nurtured by imperialist and white supremacist ideology. Although black history and its experience continued to hurt at this time, McKay's poetic words present a new and spirited black resistance.

My thesis examines how McKay's poem emerged out of a racial dialogue between early and late Victorian writers. This conversation raised several key questions on which I based my literary research. First, I examined how Charlotte Brontë, Wilkie Collins and Ida B. Wells represented the changing face of the "other." I discovered that each author distinctively and unconventionally turned to femininity to accentuate the black oppressive existence. The dark image transforms from a female monstrous rebel, increasingly darkened, insane and voiceless in Brontë's text, to a man of mixed blood, still monstrous in appearance, but humanized with a feminine disposition in Collins's novel. Here, Collins not only unconventionally bestows his colonial "other" with superior and mystical qualities, but also allows Jennings to describe the pain and suffering of his own existence. These descriptions act as reminders to readers of the anxieties imposed by British imperial rule.

While the changing shape of blackness crosses from fiction to reality at this point in my thesis, the illegitimacies of the imperialist and supremacist narrative remain the same. By the end of the nineteenth century, the black presence continued to be socially feared as it was marked by conventional monstrosity and brutality. As in Collins's text, Wells presents the black man with a voice, and a chance to defend his side of the story, but this time two shadows emerge from her text. The first is the black presence, while the second reflects the monstrous shape of the white "other" as she ingeniously reverses the

southern narrative's literary device. The white "other's" shadowed presence becomes ever darker and terrifying as Wells raises the issue of "consensual relationships" between black men and white women. Like Collins, Wells reveals that blacks were not racially inferior, nor naturally inclined to rape white women.

The subjects of race and sexuality transform Wells's dialogue into one of resistance which does not hesitate to press past national and international borders. Hers is not a secret dialogue between self and soul as in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, but rather a symbolic call to action. This call was certainly made more accessible to a wider audience in her distribution and use of the pamphlet. In fact, Wells's pamphlet and McKay's poem instantly drew my attention to the possible genres adopted by Victorian writers when configuring the issues of race and violence.

McKay's poetic configuration of blackness speaks as a rallying anthem, easily remembered by a united and defensive black front. Like Wells, he refuses to follow the white American ideological rationale, because he fully understands the dehumanizing intent of its symbolic monstrous devices. Just like Brontë, Collins and Wells, McKay differentiates between black and white existence as he contrasts the "penned" and "inglorious" black man with the "murderous" and "mad" oppressive white American. He too presents the black man with a voice and defends his painful side of the story. His sonnet form demonstrates the superiority of the new "other," while pressing further upon Wells's symbolic call for action against mob violence. However, unlike any of his predecessors, I assert that McKay utilizes "difference" to necessitate an intersection between black and white presence. Unlike Wells, he visualizes a resolution as he compels blacks to "fight back" in the name of equality.

My second key question examined the changing culture and logic of imperial and supremacist rule. Charlotte Brontë wrote *Jane Eyre* forty years after slavery was abolished in Britain in 1807. At the time her novel was published in 1848, black oppression was rationalized by an imperial narrative which readily affirmed a racial and cultural superiority over the savage and subordinate dark “other.” Similarly, Wilkie Collins wrote *The Moonstone* thirty years after slavery was abolished in Britain’s colonies, but only a decade after the Indian Mutiny in 1857. At the time his novel was published in 1868, the British equated racial superiority with its colonial success (David 88).

When Ida B. Wells wrote *A Red Record* slavery had been abolished in the United States for thirty years. Although her pamphlet was written over fifty years later than Brontë’s novel, southern white crimes were still being rationalized by a sense of racial and cultural superiority over the monstrous and inferior African American. While Wells succeeded in disproving the Darwinian belief with facts that demonstrated that African Americans were capable of expressing their own culture (Ramesh 69), sadly these facts did little to change the supremacist rationale of the time.

My third key question analyzed the historical, socio-economic and political attitudes expected to influence each author and his/her text. Slavery was abolished in the British colonies in 1833, but it is plausible that Charlotte Brontë may well have been aware of the oppressive conditions endured by natives as Britain still relied on them to provide cheap labor. She actually draws attention to the products of native oppression when her protagonist observes some of these items stored on the third floor of

Thornfield's estate. Many of these products were conveniently erased when furniture fashions changed.

In mid-nineteenth century Britain, native subjects held a low status, often degraded and oppressed particularly when living within English society. At the same time, women suffered discrimination under a patriarchal English system. They were considered physically weak and mentally inferior to men and were expected to act like dutiful and obedient slaves to their husbands. When Brontë wrote *Jane Eyre*, reality of this "shared oppression" between women and blacks was deeply buried within society's political unconscious.

In contrast, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, British society was consciously aware of the terrors of the Indian Mutiny and its challenge to British power. The native revolt was incited by the arrogance of British rule. They had ignorantly assumed that the colonized would trade their ancient traditions for British technology, new laws and Christianity as they improved India's commercial efficiency for their own gain. It was British exploitation of Indian resources and manpower which eventually instigated Indian rebel insurrections across northern India beginning in 1857. At this time, British journalists, authors, playwrights and historians began to demonize the Indian while underscoring the righteousness of British imperialism. Wilkie Collins was an exception as he unconventionally drew attention to the anxieties imposed by imperial greed and oppression.

Such anxieties about supremacist rule remained largely unconscious to white Americans across the Atlantic in the 1880s and 1890s. Ex-Confederates had regained control of their legislatures and were left to manage their own affairs by the federal

government. Southern white journalists, police and administrators committed crimes against blacks without prosecution as they illegitimately accused blacks of being vicious leaders of riots and violence. Sensationalized headlines and vicious lies created a national tolerance for lynching while also motivating it (Waldrep 104). Illegitimate accusations of black violence motivated Wells to present her own eye-witness accounts to disprove these white sensationalized reports.

Out of these historical, socio-economic and political contexts, conflicts between opposing black and white forces continued to build. They reached a peak in 1919. Lynching and mob aggression had occurred for the past fifty years; it was nothing new. What was new was the formation of a black defensive moral agenda aimed at creating a collective and critical consciousness. It focused on emotions, expectations and descriptions of the horrors of black experiences. This black front intended to transform the historic negativity associated with blackness by rallying a black press behind their cause. Magazines and journals such as the *Crisis*, the *Negro World* and the *Liberator* encouraged blacks to stand their ground. The white press could no longer completely manipulate national tolerance for racial discrimination. McKay's "If We Must Die" played a part in this defense as it was adopted as an anthem for the black cause.

Having created a literary and historical context in which to understand how each author raised the issues of race and violence, my last key question explored my own concept of each author's intent with the ultimate goal of explaining Claude McKay's poetic response to Chicago's summer riot in 1919. I assert that Brontë's configurations of the black experience liberate her protagonist's ability to define female oppression. However, I argue that they do little to liberate the black experience from imperialism's

oppressive narrative. Darkness still remains a buried, misunderstood force within imperialist society and in the mind of the author as I reveal how Brontë' unconsciously follows imperialist indoctrination by demonizing and imprisoning her dark "other." I do concede that Brontë does at least consider the moral equivalence of the free white woman and the enslaved black female as she recognizes the extensive pain and suffering imposed on the latter. She demonstrates this recognition when Jane admits, "Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot" (Brontë 93). Despite this conscious acknowledgement of the black oppressive experience, I argue that Brontë continues to necessitate society's racial divide by never allowing black and white paths to cross. Without crossing their paths, I assert that Brontë is unable to visualize a solution to the divide.

A solution to the racial divide is not reached in Collins's *The Moonstone* either. I argue that Collins also compares the moral equivalence of the free white man and the free black man by finding common ground between them. By revealing these commonalities, the differences between black and white experiences become clearer. However, the "other's" unmarked grave not only signifies the black man's uncharted history and his inability to defend his name and manhood, but it also symbolizes the blood still yet to be spilled and the unmarked graves still yet to be dug.

In Wells's text these unmarked graves are named and the amount of blood is measured, as she begins to make whites accountable for their horrific crimes against humanity. Wells focuses on the difference in experiences between blacks and whites. For instance, she draws her readers' attention to the Miscegenation laws of the south in the 1880s, which not only worked against the union of the races, but left the white man free

to assault colored women. In contrast, it was often death to the colored man if he made advances to any white woman. Well's pamphlet provides the African American with a history, albeit of suffering, and a language with which to defend himself against the illegitimacies of lynching. Despite her discoveries, I conclude that Wells, like her Victorian predecessors, establishes a difference between the black and white "other." This difference necessitates two paths which can never cross when segregation, oppression and inequality exist.

Finally, this intersection between the two paths is conceptualized in McKay's poem, "If We Must Die," as white America begins to open its eyes to the injustices buried within its supremacist narrative and discriminating social space. McKay's poetic words gain strength and resolution from the unconventional symbolic configurations and real records of white atrocities inspired by his predecessors. While the violence between blacks and whites reach a peak in 1919, the year marks an end to the repetitive cycle as racial conflicts no longer remain buried. Now unearthed, these opposing forces, and the wide divide that they have created, are visible from a conscious social perspective. My thesis may well begin and end with 1919, but the battle for racial equality had only just begun.

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