FICKLE FAULKNERIAN MATERNITY: CONSIDERING WILLIAM FAULKNER'S MOTHERS IN CONJUNCTION WITH CORRECTIVE BLACK MATERNAL VOICES

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by
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Abstract

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The aim of this project is to conduct a rhetorical literary analysis of the representations of maternal women within the works of William Faulkner, positioned in comparison with maternal care as understood by twentieth-century southern lay midwives and the contemporary African American reproductive justice movement. Crucial to this analysis is the navigation of space by maternal figures, as informed by bell hooks' essay, "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance" (1990) and societal expectations for maternal women across racial lines by dominant ideals of the US South. Revealing in the navigation of maternal space are the societal parameters defined for women, both Black and white, living in both the antebellum and post-Civil War US South. The culminating mission of this project is to track the rhetorical legacy of the oppression of marginalized women's reproductive rights within an example of canonized Jim Crow era literature, in order to reveal cultural trends that have led to contemporary attacks on reproductive justice.

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I must express my utmost gratitude for my thesis director, Dr. Zackary Vernon, who inspired and supported my interest in Southern American literature. Over the past year and a half, Dr. Vernon tirelessly guided me and my thesis research and has also been a mentor and supporter throughout my undergraduate and graduate career. Without him, this thesis would not exist. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Melissa Stone and Dr. Carl Eby. Dr. Stone expertly guided me through my research of the reproductive justice movement, and Dr. Eby was a crucial advisor to my exploration of Faulknerian texts. Finally, I would like to thank my friends at the University Writing Center, as well as the other graduate assistants in the Appalachian State English Department. Their friendship and encouragement has been vital, not only in completing this project, but also within my collegiate career writ large.

Dedication

Dedicated to my mother, Deborah Julian, who showed me from birth the profound power of her maternal love.

Table of Contents

Abstract iv

Acknowledgments.......... v

Dedication vi

“To Parent the Children We Have in Safe and Sustainable Communities”: An Introduction 1

Chapter One: “A Travesty and Paradox”: Navigating Spaces of White Southern Womanhood 12

Chapter Two: “The Ineradicable and Tragic Stamp”: Navigating Spaces of Black Southern Womanhood, as (Mis)represented through the Literary Rhetoric of Faulkner’s White US South 40

Chapter Three: “Intergenerational Mothers’ Wisdom”: Corrective Black Maternal Voices as Told through Twentieth-Century Southern Midwifery and the Contemporary Reproductive Justice Movement 67

Coda: “A Space Where the Self is Powerfully Remade” 90

Works Cited 96

Vita.......... 103

"To Parent the Children We Have in Safe and Sustainable Communities": An Introduction

At its most fundamental level, this project seeks to delineate and explain differing representational trends of southern motherhood across racial lines in the works of William Faulkner. In general, Faulkner's depictions of motherhood are problematic, but they become even more so when considering his depictions of motherhood as intersected by race. Beyond studying the constructions of both white and Black motherhood in Faulkner's novels, this project will synthesize these maternal representations alongside constructions of motherhood as understood by both contemporary and historical Black female voices. bell hooks and her theory of homeplace will be influential on this project. I will analyze how Faulkner's female characters, both Black and white, traverse physical spatial boundaries. In conjunction with this, I will also track parallels between Faulkner's descriptions of the female body as physical space, particularly the Black female body, and any subsequent descriptions of pregnancy, childbirth, and maternity, alongside understandings of the body as described by Black midwives operating in the US South during the twentieth century. A vocation largely defined as holistic and humanizing, midwifery dignified the experience of pregnancy and maternity, a stark juxtaposition to Faulkner's troubling rhetoric. Coupled with a textual analysis of Faulkner's works, the paper will investigate the author's textual commodification and exploitation of the female body to implicate this rhetoric in the modern-day struggle to achieve intersectional reproductive justice, especially in the US South. In this vein, this project will outline the specific maternal expectation espoused within the US South and how it differs across racial lines as it relates to experiences of childbirth and childrearing. Central to the experience of twentieth-century childbirth within the US South is the lay midwife, who

solely maintained maternal care of the marginalized during the slave-holding plantation system and the decades following Reconstruction. In depicting Black women based on stereotypes, Faulkner caters to a conception of the US South that is steeped in racist convention. These depictions, while aligned with the racism of the twentieth century, do little to accurately represent Black women, as told through the voices of the Black community. While challenging the larger cultural understanding of white southern motherhood, Faulkner upholds larger cultural expectations of Black motherhood through stereotype and commodification. In this way, Faulkner's works serve as a snapshot of a larger, dominant cultural rhetoric surrounding violence against women, particularly women of color.

Considering the blatant oppression faced by Black women in the US South as well as the US at large, I find it pertinent to also discuss the role of Black women in the US reproductive justice movement and how the movement itself was born due to radical interventions performed by Black women. Furthermore, I find this topic to be of paramount importance in light of the recent federal overturn of Roe v. Wade, the detrimental effects of which will largely impact women of color, minorities, the working class, and low-income individuals and families. The overturn has many implications beyond the direct effect of making abortion less accessible, including limiting access to birth control, emergency contraception, miscarriage care, and non-medicalized, dignified birth and labor. The term *reproductive justice*, coined in 1994 by the activist group SisterSong, is understood as "the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities" (SisterSong). This human right is egregiously defiled within Faulkner's fiction. Being a more contemporary movement, it may seem unfair to apply these ideas to Faulkner's texts, all of which were written long

before the 1990s. However, Faulkner's works depict the historical denial of the reproductive rights of Black women, and therefore, demonstrate the legacy of reproductive oppression faced by women within the US South. While Faulkner is not *the* representative of the Jim Crow era US South, as a canonized southern writer, he certainly can serve as *a* representative of the dominant ideals within white society during the twentieth century.

Using his literature as a snapshot of dominant ideals at the time, I apply the lens of the reproductive justice movement in order to highlight how the need for a contemporary movement began with the historical oppression depicted within Faulkner's works. At its core, reproductive justice considers the importance of community in maintaining healthy attitudes toward reproductive autonomy. SisterSong itself is a "Southern based, national membership organization" whose goal is to "build an effective network of individuals and organizations to improve institutional policies and systems that impact the reproductive lives of marginalized communities" (SisterSong). One of the founding organizations of the reproductive justice movement in the 1990s, SisterSong is led by women from the "Native American, African American, Latina, and Asian American" communities. The contemporary movement takes into consideration the fact that reproductive justice is inherently intersectional and "recognizes the importance of linking reproductive health and rights to other social justice issues such as poverty, economic injustice, welfare reform, housing, prisoners' rights, environmental justice, immigration policy, drug policies, and violence" (Price 43). With these things considered, it becomes impossible to analyze the movement separate from the oppressive legacy of slavery and subsequent segregation. These legacies of abuse can be seen in Faulkner's fiction, and in comparing his representations with the real

lives of Black women, I hope to make plain the discrepancies in understanding maternity between the dominant white society of the twentieth century and Black communities.

In order to position this study, I will turn to the works of bell hooks and her contributions to the book *Maternal Theory* (2021), an anthology of essays about motherhood. In her chapter, entitled "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance," hooks posits that motherhood and homemaking for Black women takes on a different cultural weight than it does for white women. hooks cites Black women's specific positioning within society as directly involved in maintaining the homes and children of white people. The importance of the home/familial space is emphasized in hooks' declaration that "one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist" (100). The domestic sphere, reserved within southern society as a feminine space, is hijacked by white society for Black women, thus rendering women of color 'obsolete' outside of this hijacked position. hooks takes this idea a step further in a later chapter in which she delves into the 'housewife' archetype as understood by larger white society and how this archetype fails to account for Black motherhood. While many white women during the US feminist movement of the mid-twentieth century were tired of isolated homemaking and longed to enter the workforce, hooks asserts that many Black women longed to spend more time with their families as opposed to serving the families of others (87). The Black mother is alienated as a domestic worker within the US South, as the role forces her to build up communities that actively oppress her own.

hooks writes, "when a people no longer have *space* to construct homeplace, we cannot build a meaningful community of resistance" (104; emphasis added). The specific use of the word "space" holds compounded significance when analyzed in tandem with the

navigation of familial spheres by maternal women. Women are tasked with making a space for others, while simultaneously limiting their presence outside said space. hooks' idea of homeplace is described, "not as property, but as places where all that truly matter[s] in life [takes] place – the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls" (99); it is a place separated from white oppression, "where one could freely confront the issue of humanization" (100). At the center of this homeplace exists Black women, who have historically constructed this safe space so "black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination" (100). Homeplace is a site generated to foster Black humanity and community. By this definition, homeplace inherently is not found in white homes because it is a shelter from dominant white culture. Created as a direct response to the dehumanization faced by larger society, white women are not compelled to create similar spaces because they are not subject to racism and exist as part of the dominant, oppressive culture. In researching the establishment of such spaces, Patricia Hill Collins acknowledges that "Black women see the unpaid work that they do for their families more as a form of resistance to oppression than as a form of exploitation by men," but she takes this idea a step further by also acknowledging that "Black women's unpaid labor is [also] exploited within African-American family networks, for example, by boyfriends, relatives, and even government-supported social policies" (52). Loving, maternal spaces can indeed take a toll on the woman at the center of them, as she is expected to care for everyone around her at the expense of her own wellbeing. hooks' notion of homeplace specifically focuses on the forcible misplacement of Black maternal energy from their own families to external white families. The ideal homeplace is one of community give and take,

where Black mothers do not "[long] to have time and energy to give to their own [children]" (hooks 100), but rather are able to do so freely and without consequence.

I will also briefly consider a Kristevan outlook that considers the abjection of the (mostly, white) pregnant body in conjunction with southern expectations of maternity. Julia Kristeva's theory notes the loss of self often felt by mothers. Faulkner himself also "identified women as part of the struggle for literary creativity" (Clarke 3), and considered the mother a source to drink dry, "What she [the mother] has, what she embodies, must be appropriated by any possible means; the writer lives off – and ultimately kills off – 'his' mother" (3). Kristeva's work helps us to see Faulkner's willingness to disregard the mother's identity for the sake of her (most often, male) children developing their own. This obfuscation of maternal identity can be compared to expectations of southern maternity described by Lynn Zimmerman, particularly the expectation that a woman should live solely for her husband, children, and God. This definition of southern womanhood is not exclusive to white mothers, and it also operates based on the abjection of the maternal body. The obfuscation of the pregnant body's identity with the identity of their offspring undermines all conceptions of identity. Shari L. Thurer stresses the need to understand that the mother herself is an individual person, "not merely an object for her child" (194). In a world where a woman must be strong to only serve the interests of others, she is sure to lose herself.

The first chapter will pick up the foundational knowledge shared by hooks and Zimmerman in order to analyze Faulkner's white maternal figures. Characters in the analysis include: Caroline and Caddy Compson, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929); Eula Varner, *The Hamlet* (1940); Addie and Dewey Dell Bundren, *As I Lay Dying* (1930); and Charlotte Rittenmeyer and the unnamed woman, *If I Forget Thee Jerusalem* (1939). This chapter will

consider the navigation of space by each of these women, as informed by hooks' idea of homeplace. Notably, homeplace is a space that hooks defines as existing entirely separately from white oppression (hooks 100), and by definition, homeplace cannot exist within white homes. However, I will use the idea of homeplace to emphasize the separation and isolation expected of white women in upholding the notion of ideal antebellum womanhood. As well as synthesizing the navigation of feminine space, the chapter will rely on the foundational scholarship of Deborah Clarke, Diane Roberts, Minrose Gwin, and Judith Sensibar. The chapter will also provide a historical discussion of childbirth expectations among middle- and upper-class antebellum women, which was decidedly filled with anxiety as there was a tendency to blame the mother for unfortunate fetal and birth outcomes. This neglects to consider lackluster care as potentially causing birth complications and further implicates the mother in being solely responsible for the wellbeing of her children. The chapter will culminate with a discussion of whether Faulkner seems to punish or reward white female characters who push back against their idealized maternal roles.

The second chapter focuses on how Faulkner (mis)represents maternal Black figures as a physical resource to be commodified. This chapter will rely heavily on close textual analysis of Faulkner's depictions of Black womanhood. Characters in this analysis include: Dilsey Gibson, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929); Molly Beauchamp, *Go Down, Moses* (1942); Nancy Mannigoe, "That Evening Sun" (1931) and *Requiem for a Nun* (1951); and Raby Sutpen, "Evangeline" (1979). All of these women serve white families as domestic workers to some degree, much at the expense of their own homeplace and self-actualization. To position this discussion within an authroial biographical context, I will also once again turn to Judith Sensibar for her biographical work on Caroline "Callie" Barr, the Black woman

who served as a domestic worker within the Faulkner home. Barr maintained this role for the Faulkner family her entire life, but she also made sure to spend time with her family and community, walking to visit her daughters every weekend and spending time with her niece. In this way, Barr very much was able to traverse between white and Black spaces within the US South. However, this kind of authentic representation, a Black woman finding fulfillment and community outside of the white home she serves, is absent from the texts analyzed in this chapter. Notably, Faulkner fails to directly implicate slavery and white supremacy in the mistreatment of these women. While ever-present in the background of his novels, slavery and its legacy are not understood as a contributing factor to the mistreatment of these women, but rather a benign driving force for them to fill a 'lack' in white society.

In the third chapter, I will focus on synthesizing the voices of Black women who speak on the construction of Black maternity within the US South. These Black maternal voices serve as a corrective to Faulkner's demeaning and trivializing depiction of Black motherhood. Ruth Hays details the inherent exploitation of women within the slavery system and the methods slaveholder used to normalize the destruction of Black families and separation of Black mothers from their children (166-167). Enslaved women of color were forcibly positioned within dominant white society, and therefore, were forced to split time between their own communities and the communities of their oppressor. In order to combat this forced erasure of Black identity in favor of upholding white supremacy, Black women curated and defended their own homes and communities most significantly through the vocational calling of lay midwifery. Onnie Lee Logan constructs midwives as providing holistic care, fully embedding their lives within the lives of the people they care for through performing any and all needed household chores while the new mother spends time

recovering and bonding with her new baby and family (52). Unlike the prisoner in *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*, Black midwives were fully engaged in the helping process, and not for their own benefit. Midwives operating in the twentieth century US South oftentimes worked for little to no pay if the laboring mother was unable to provide, because, as described by the descendant of 'granny' midwife Elizabeth Perry Turner, "she believed that delivering babies was her calling from God, and she could not deny a woman in need regardless of her ability to pay" (Turner 22). Onnie Lee echoes this spiritual sentiment, citing God and her ancestors as the sole influences on her midwifery knowledge, "That's how come I say God give it to me. The bo'd a health didn't give it to me. Readin books didn't give it to me. I progressed that outa my own mind. My own mind. Thinkin and listenin and knowledge that God give me" (Logan 84). What Logan refers to also touches on the idea of 'motherwit,' which Julia Chinyere Oparah defines in the introduction to *Birthing Justice* (2016) as "intergenerational mothers' wisdom" (Oparah 12). Borrowing from Patricia Hill Collins, Laurie A. Wilkie uses the term "motherwork" to describe the contributions of Lucretia Perryman, an Alabama midwife. The term "motherwork" is understood as the act of performing mothering on the behalf of an entire community, "By working as a midwife, she [Perryman] increased, not diminished, the circle of those she mothered" (xx). Black women within this community are encouraged to trust their instincts, their bodies, and each other without the intervention of the dominantly imposed, medicalized, white, Western view of obstetric care.

Furthermore, Jenny M. Luke maintains that the lay midwife, more so than any other societal position held by Black people during the era of slavery, was able to negotiate the position of enslaved communities within the dominant oppressive system. Luke posits, "In most cases black midwives were relied upon to care for expectant slaves, and their elevated

status allowed them to negotiate for better working and living conditions on the behalf of the women" (21). Ruth Hays also touches on this dynamic, saying that "Because of their relative closeness to slaveholders, [granny midwives] were able to act as emissaries, carrying the concerns of the enslaved to their owners" (169). Through this position of relative power, Black midwives were able to create a kind of transient homeplace, one that they carried with them to the different homes and families they served. All of this being said, midwives were unable to protect their communities entirely due to the domineering power structures in which they existed. In this way, many lay midwives of the twentieth century were able to bridge the gap between homeplace and reproductive justice, creating transient sites of homeplace that served as "safe and sustainable communities" (SisterSong). Modern obstetrics and gynecology originated based on the non-consensual abuse of enslaved Black women by J. Marion Sims and his "sadistic experimentation on the bodies of enslaved women" (Wilkie 63). Due to the methods espoused by Sims, many enslaved women suffered "Vesico-vaginal fistulas, or tears between the vaginal and rectal track", which "became [an] all too frequent side effects of forceps deliveries." Furthermore, Sims' original design for the speculum is still used by some physicians in the twenty-first century, thus ensuring his legacy of racist and sexist oppression lives on in an everyday tool used for reproductive healthcare (Horwitz). Despite his human rights violations, Sims still enjoys the title of "Father of Gynecology" to this day. This overreaching control of both birthing and reproductive choice by patriarchal institutionalized medical structures continues into the present US South with attacks on abortion and contraception, as well as within the US at large with the federal repeal of Roe v. Wade.

Overall, I hope to accomplish the following in my project: articulate the specific expectations of southern womanhood, and by default, motherhood, as anticipated within society at large, but also as Faulkner represents this ideal. In this vein, I hope to demonstrate how this expectation differs across racial divides within the US South. I understand this expectation as having come from the idea that the southern white woman should, before herself or anything/one else, live for the betterment of her family (husband and children). Faulkner depicts less-than-ideal white maternal figures, none of whom fully succeed in living up to this expectation of southern womanhood. Black women are exponentially othered under this expectation, as women of color represented within Faulkner's works are held up as the 'solution' to the failures of white culture. In pointing out these trends, I hope to acknowledge the real-life, vibrant cultural experience behind Faulkner's Black female characters, to whose likenesses and livelihoods their author was never able to do justice. Most egregiously, both white and Black women are degraded and abused through the actions of other characters, as well as through Faulkner's narrative voice, representing an overall hostility toward the pregnant, female body. Most harmed in this representation are the exploited Black women, upon whose backs and communities white southern society was able to take root and exert oppressive power. Faulkner's depiction of southern Black womanhood speaks to a legacy of reproductive abuse and exploitation, beginning in the destruction of Black families and communities during the era of slavery, and continuing into contemporary US politics. The southern lay midwife, more often than not a Black woman, embodies an essential, powerful caretaker who actively resists the destruction of Black communities. The lay midwife understood that building community begins at the very start of a person's life – with a healthy and respectful birth.

Chapter One: "A Travesty and Paradox": Navigating Spaces of White Southern Womanhood

This chapter will explore the navigation of space by Faulkner's white maternal figures, as informed by bell hooks' idea of "homeplace." While this term was coined by hooks to describe the maternal experiences of Black women, – and will be employed in the second chapter where Faulkner's Black maternal figures are explored – the term can also be used to shed light on the pitfalls of white culture, specifically, white maternity. First, this chapter will investigate conventions imposed on the ideal southern white mother and outline the expectations of southern womanhood. Keeping this in mind, the chapter will draw parallels between the expectation of relative isolation and hooks' description of homeplace, pointing out how white maternity is inherently not an example of homeplace but instead stands in active opposition to the idea. Secondly, I will discuss the female body as a commodified space along with historical accounts of pregnancy and childbirth as understood within southern white society. This will further define expectations of white southern womanhood and demonstrate Faulkner's textual commodification of the female body. Next, I will explore aspects of Faulkner's cultural upbringing that could have encouraged him to misrepresent maternity within his texts, as well as provide a general overview of the author's experiences with southern motherhood. Throughout the chapter, I will analyze several of Faulkner's central white maternal figures with special attention paid to their navigation of space and how this reflects the distance between embodied womanhood and cultural expectations of womanhood. Works analyzed in this chapter include *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *The Hamlet* (1940), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), and *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* (1939). Through this culminating investigation, I seek to demonstrate that Faulkner's white female

characters maintain a proximity to expectations of southern womanhood, but all transgress in varying degrees of severity, thus insinuating that these expectations fail to account for the authentic experiences of women in the US South. Whether Faulkner is writing to uphold or dismantle these expectations remains nebulous, as trends within his literature indicate subversive women either being punished for their transgressions, or by the end of their stories, a return to expected convention.

Because the need for homeplace grows out of the oppressive legacies of US chattel slavery, it is important to unpack how white womanhood in the antebellum South was used to deny such a space for enslaved Black mothers. The home space in white antebellum southern culture becomes a place of patriarchal domination rather than community uplift. Furthermore, white southern maternity was decidedly anti-homeplace in its dependence on the oppression and enslavement of the Black community; in other words, in the destruction of true homeplace. According to Diane Roberts, "Slavery allow[ed] white women the leisure to be ladies, to help create a southern class along the lines of the British landed gentry, to hold the refinements of culture in trust for their men and their children" (6). In the context of the US South, ownshership (of land, valuables, and even human beings) is a decidedly male construct that granted authority to white men over things and people. As a result, according to Coppélia Kahn, "patriarchal structures loom obviously on the surface of many [of Faulkner's] texts, structures of authority, *control*, force, logic, linearity, misogyny, male superiority" (qtd. in Clarke 7; emp. added), culminating in a patriarchal culture, which according to Minrose Gwin is "certainly an apt description of the Deep South of Faulkner's experience" (15). While Faulkner lived and wrote in a decidedly postbellum culture, antebellum social ideals persisted beyond the conclusion of the Civil War. Essentially, the

ideals of southern motherhood depended entirely upon the patriarchal destruction of Black maternity, community, and homeplace. Patricia Hill Collins articulates this detrimental link between maternity and race as perpetuated into the modern era: “Motherhood and racism were symbolically intertwined, with *controlling* the sexuality and fertility of both African-American and White women essential in reproducing racialized notions of American womanhood” (57; emp. added). Motherhood as an institution is not safe from compounded intersectional discrimination. Cultural constructions of the institution sought to control all women in order to maintain a racially divided society, privileging white males above all.

The dominant patriarchal culture then constructs white southern motherhood by pushing the expectation that white women live up to an unattainable, abstract ideal focused on hierarchical privileging of landed white men. Conventions of white southern motherhood, defined through the antebellum idea of ‘Confederate womanhood,’ favored separation over community togetherness. Now, this is not to say that white southerners have never experienced a close, loving family home, but rather that the overall cultural expectation for the family unit was one of separately functioning pieces making up a whole. Roberts asserts, “[a]s a society, the South has based its ideology on hierarchies or oppositions where a person is defined by what he or she is not” (xiii). A woman is not a man and, therefore, should not partake in masculinized activities or mannerisms. Southern society holds a particular proximity to Victorian social ideals, one of those being the doctrine of separate spheres, meaning that men and women hold equally important yet starkly different social responsibilities (Kerber 10). To transgress would be to venture into a sphere (space) that is unacceptable, even inappropriate. In addition, the antebellum Confederate woman herself is believed to, “[embody] the religious, political, and gender discourses of the Civil War”

(Roberts 1). She is an "unfilled space, 'pure' so that the ideology of the plantation South may be inscribed on her: she is represented as being what men are not and what blacks are not – soul, not flesh" (2). Lynn Zimmerman echoes this sentiment, stating that a southern woman should be weak on the outside, but "strong to serve the interests of her husband, her family, and the South" on the inside (304). The woman herself disappears. She becomes a physical embodiment of the dominant cultural ideal. Obviously, no human being can embody an ideal, and eventually, the individual will fail to live up to every facet of theoretical perfection. The 'unfilled space,' as described by Roberts, is inherently gendered, and in this way, the gendered body is pathologized as a commodifiable space.

Faulkner engages with these constructions of white southern maternity throughout his pantheon of fiction. Minrose Gwin rightly asserts that woman, within Faulknerian texts, is othered and, "traverses the space between presence and absence, between her own subjectivity and her bounded status in male discourse" (14). What becomes a point of contention in Faulkner's texts, however, is the fact that the spacial spheres in which southern culture operates are actively dissolving around the characters. Lisa Klarr asserts that "to say that a culture is in decay is to indicate that all of its physical-conceptual aspects – spatial components (house, farm, plantation), relational systems (slavery, feudalism, patriarchy), collective imaginaries (myth, story, narrative) – are losing cohesion" (407-408), thus linking spatial decay directly to cultural decay. Much of Faulkner's fiction takes place at the end of the nineteenth and during the first half of the twentieth century and therefore grapples with the fall of 'the Old South.' Pre-Civil War gender, race, and class conventions cannot withstand the passage of time, and Faulkner is painfully aware of this, yet unwilling to fully disregard tradition. The strict boundaries laid out for him by his culture are not so distinct as

they once were, thus revealing the arbitrariness upon which these ideals are created and readily adopted. Particularly if the white male patriarchal authority of the antebellum South crumbles, what then is the point of maintaining these distinctions? In searching for answers, "both men and women must confront the transformative power of the mother" (Clarke 5).

Representative of the failed ideal of maternal perfection within Faulkner's fiction is the ailing matriarch of *The Sound and the Fury*, Caroline Compson. The maternal head of the Compson family, Caroline has fully internalized the expectations of southern white womanhood, and yet she fails to act according to these ideals in a decaying plantation setting. The novel deals with the fall of the 'Old South,' exploring its crumbling social and cultural conventions, as the previously well-off Compson family is forced to sell pieces of their land to pay for their son's education. Caroline spends all of her time secluded within the Compson family home, leaving only to visit the family cemetery, is often sick with a mysterious illness, and as a result of her aversion to stepping outside spatial boundaries, attempts to control her children's navigation of their home space. Scholar Te Ma touches on Caroline's obsession with playing the role of the southern lady: "her dealings with space reflect her misunderstanding and misinterpreting of the core components of this social ideal" (40). Ma finds Caroline's isolation to be an extreme interpretation of the southern woman's domestic role, and in adhering to this interpretation, the Compson household becomes more of a prison than a domestic sphere: "in restricting her movements [Caroline] has gradually transformed her home into a space of imprisonment" (41). Caroline also fits Zimmerman's description of the southern woman being strong only to serve the interests of the South and her family: "I wish for Jason's and the children's sakes I was stronger" (8). She also clearly adheres to the power of patrilineal succession within southern families, telling her husband, "My people are

every bit as well born as yours" (44), but at the same time undermines this tradition in asserting the importance of her own patrilineal line along with her husband's. She even reflects this pride in patrilineal lineage onto her daughter when chastising her for carrying her brother Benjy: "All of our women have prided themselves on their carriage. Do you want to look like a washerwoman" (63). This statement also reveals her classism, another symptom of her middle- to upper-class upbringing. She cares greatly what others think of her and feels compelled to maintain this image to the public. Unable to control her rebellious granddaughter, she frets that "the school authorities think that I have no control over her" (181), rather than being concerned for the girl's wellbeing. Damning in her ability to live up to the ideal image is her dependence on Dilsey, the family's Black maid, cook, and live-in nanny. Dilsey repeatedly soothes Benjy, puts him and the other children to bed, cooks supper for the whole family, and tends to the matriarch while bed-ridden. If anything, Caroline is very much aligned with but behaves in opposition to Zimmerman's description of white southern motherhood – she strives to maintain a facade of strength, but once inside the Compson house, her dysfunction is palpable.

Quite revealing in her maternal tendencies is Caroline's treatment of her youngest son, Benjy, who is mentally disabled, and her daughter, Caddy, who steps in as Benjy's surrogate mother figure. Jennifer Lavoie corroborates reading Caddy's role in her relationship with Benjy as maternal, saying "Caddy and Benjy bond as a mother and son should" (170). In the first section of the novel, narrated by Benjy, he recounts his interactions with his mother, but notably, "his" Caddy is often present to navigate these interactions with him, at least during their childhood. In one of the novel's opening scenes, Caroline tells both Caddy and Benjy after playing outside that, "you'd better both stay in" (7), due to the

growing winter cold. Neither children want to and when she finally relents (at the encouragement of her brother Maury), Caroline scolds Caddy for almost taking Benjy outside without being properly dressed for the weather. Before they depart, Caroline implores Benjy to give her a kiss. Rather than reacting to her specific request, Benjy notes that "Caddy took me to Mother's chair" (8). Caddy is thus navigating maternal interactions for Benjy, as he does not feel as much affection for his mother compared to his sister. Furthermore, Benjy's narrative voice shifts syntactically when describing the closing of space between himself and Caroline as opposed to Caddy. He narrates, "Mother took my face in her hands and then she held me against her" (8). The word "took" connotes aggression, as if she did this without his permission, and similarly the phrase "held me against her" implies some level of forceful restraint. When describing a similar moment of closeness with Caddy, his tone shifts more to one of reciprocated affection rather than subjection to another's touch: "Caddy knelt and put her arms around me and her cold bright face against mine" (9). Caddy gets on Benjy's level, her arms are "placed" around him, and rather than grabbing his face with her hands (as one would grab anything else), she gently places her own face to his. The resulting image is one of parent-child affection – the caretaker lovingly enfolding the child in their arms. Despite internalizing the expectation that she live solely for her family, Caroline falters in her responsibilities to her child most in need, thus giving rise to her self-flagellatory remarks, "I know I'm nothing but a burden to you" (181).

The cause of Caroline's failure to embody an idealized example of southern motherhood, other than the obvious fact that no human being can embody an ideal, is her stagnancy within space alongside her desire to control others within said space. Benjy's cries are a mere annoyance as she chastises Caddy for not being able to keep him quiet while she

rests in her sick bed: “Why won’t you let him alone, so I can have some peace” (41). Ironically, the reason Benjy is crying is because he does not want Caddy to “leave him alone,” as he fears losing her. Caroline frequently uses her bed rest as a reason not to tend to her son, seeing his needs as a distraction. After burning his hand in fire, Benjy wimpers loudly as his wounds are tended to by Dilsey. Caroline hears the whimpering and comes downstairs to remark, “Do I have to get up out of bed to come down to him, with two grown negroes to take care of him” (59). She does not inquire as to how Benjy is feeling, but instead lashes out at the people doing the caretaking: “You got him started on purpose, because you know I’m sick” (60). In addition, she others Dilsey and Luster with this statement through referencing their race, even though their race has little to do with the matter at hand, and she could have just as easily said “two grown people.” While the novel never offers a specific explanation as to her illness, Sally McMillen does note that the contraction of malaria was common in the Deep South, especially if near a water source (48). However, considering that Caroline is often well enough to rise from her sickbed to chastise those around her, contraction of a severely limiting physical disease seems unlikely.

While it is crucial to investigate the movement of maternal figures within the space of their physical environment, equally important is an investigation into how the female body itself is constructed as a lucrative and commodifiable, yet forbidden, space. How is the physical maternal body believed to acceptably take up and navigate space? Roberts lists several expectations of southern ladyhood, “white, distant, statuelike, and upper-class” (xiii), and links these qualities directly to Bakhtin’s theory of the classical body (as opposed to the grotesque body). According to Bakhtin, the classical body is “finished, completed, strictly limited,” all orifices of the body being closed (320). This closed sectioning off then

"prohibit[s] all that is linked with fecundation, pregnancy, and childbirth," therefore rendering the maternal southern woman a paradox. The body as a potential site of homeplace could be applied here, especially when considering the violation of bodily autonomy experienced by enslaved Black women. Bodily autonomy is a crucial component of homeplace. Pregnancy and childbirth are allowed and even encouraged, but only within a specific, reserved context. Deborah Clarke references Julia Kristeva, linking the dominant religion of the US South to perpetuation of this paradoxical belief, "the cornerstone of Christianity is the virgin mother, an icon perpetuated by a patriarchal system in an effort to deny women's sexuality as a necessary ingredient of motherhood" (23). The classical body of the antebellum Confederate woman becomes innately grotesque through the process of childbirth. In this way, she moves from one spacial connotation to another, while simultaneously existing within both.

Caddy Compson, the only daughter of the Compson family, stands as an example of the dichotomy between the classical body of southern womanhood and the grotesque body of fallen womanhood. Due to her mother's failure to care for her youngest child, Caddy is forced to step into a maternal role early into her childhood; however, she too is unable to live up to the demands of southern womanhood. The difference here compared to Caroline is that Caddy never internalized these expectations herself, but rather had them forced upon her by family. Even as a young child, Caddy constantly transgresses spatial boundaries using her bodily autonomy. She climbs human-made barriers such as fences (13), as well as natural ones such as trees (39). She is comfortable with disruption: "I don't care, I'll walk right in the parlor. I'll walk right in the dining room and eat supper" (23). The aforementioned tree is climbed so that she can peer into her family's home where the adults have congregated for

her grandmother's death – a space she and the other children have been strictly prohibited from intruding upon. During her teenage years, she violates the boundaries of her family home by sneaking out: "The shaking went down the tree [...] we watched it go away across the grass" (74). As she ages, her transgressive behavior is aligned more and more with her body and by extension, her sexuality, and eventually, she becomes pregnant out of wedlock. Upon the birth of her daughter, she is banished from the Compson family home where her daughter is raised "not to know its own mammy's name" (31). Caddy's presence is entirely eradicated from the family space due to her willingness to break from conventional behaviors and expectations. It goes without saying that homeplace does not deny the existence of its community members, nor does it exclude community members based on an unattainable ideal of perfection.

Relevant to the exploration of woman's navigation of space within convention is a consideration of the female body as a site of morality. The female body is something to be figured out, something to categorize neatly as it is placed upon a distant, not-to-be-touched shelf. In order to investigate this phenomenon, I turn to Faulkner's *The Hamlet* (1940). This novel follows the Snopes family's relationship with the powerful Varner family, the second section of which explores the life of the Varner's preteen daughter, Eula. Admired by seemingly all of the teenage boys and young men of the town, Eula's barely pubescent body is described in the following way; "the girl whom, even at nine and ten and eleven, there was too much – too much of leg, too much of breast, too much of buttock; too much of mammalian female meat which [...] was a travesty and paradox" (100). Despite being a child, Eula's body is sexualized due to its ability to take up "too much" space. Female sexuality, as well as women taking up more space than expected, is problematized. Eula is further

described as being neglectful of her domestic duties and lacking an interest in anything beyond sitting inert. As she becomes a preteen, she attracts the attention of both schoolboys and her adult school teacher. Her teacher, Labove, is pervertedly transfixed, saying she is "at once corrupt and immaculate" (113), a reference to the unattainable Mother Mary, both virgin and maternal. One day after school, Labove attempts to assault Eula, who "stood her ground" (120). She fights back, striking him twice and spitting the words, "Stop pawing me" (122), before crossing the threshold of the schoolhouse as she escapes Labove's depraved assault. Eula is able to forcibly move the adult man through space, exerting her authority over institutionalized male authority but is nonetheless still subject to the constant leering and lustful advances of the town's men.

Eula's "static" (98) nature might be viewed as contrary to her society's expectations of womanhood, but this does not prevent an entire community of suitors and admirers from flocking around her. Eula, while stationary herself, is able to manipulate the spatial movements of others through no effort of her own,

> Instead, with those two or three or four lesser girls she sat, nucleus of that loud frustrated group; the nucleus, the center, the centrice; here as at the school parties of last year, casting over them all that spell of incipient accouchement while refusing herself to be pawed at, preserving even within that aura of license and invitation in which she seemed to breathe and walk – or sit rather – a ruthless chastity impervious even to the light precarious balance, the actual overlapping, of Protestant religious and sexual excitement. It was as if she really knew what instant, moment, she was reserved for, even if not his name and face, and was waiting for that moment rather than merely for the time for the eating to start, as she seemed to be. (128)

According to her religious cultural context, Eula's latent sexuality causes such a stir because it is unbounded by male control. Clarke elaborates on this notion, "These inventions serve to define women by their sexual status and yet avoid female sexuality itself as women's identifying characteristic, for virginity and motherhood exist in relation to male possession, male sexuality" (23). Furthermore, Eula herself at this point is not sexually active. The spatial configuration of her body is what implies this hidden sexuality, waiting to be unlocked by the right man. Indeed, after she becomes pregnant from a fling with a wandering vagrant taken in by the Varner family, Eula is married off to Flem Snopes solely due to her pregnancy, thus ensuring "before a woman can become a mother, a position of considerable power, she must bear the cultural mark of male domination: a wedding ring" (23). Eula's power is frightening because she exists in this limbo state between virginity and motherhood. Despite being a virgin throughout most of the story, those around her have already decided that she cannot remain so, existing in a state of "being naked and not even knowing it" (Faulkner 116). Her body becomes something that must be owned and quantified in order to be acceptable.

Having looked at two instances of 'illegitimate' pregnancies, as determined by the culture in which they exist, it now becomes pertinent to discuss the experience of pregnancy within this culture. Offering an opportunity for women to connect with support circles, pregnancy and childbirth were similarly commandeered by male authority as a way to extend influence over historically female spheres, including the female body itself. Childbirth in the era leading up to the Civil War was a deeply terrifying and isolating experience, as determined by insufficient obstetric care and harmful cultural beliefs concerning maternal responsibility. Contributing to this anxiety surrounding parturition was the tangible danger

that it involved, especially in the antebellum US South through the era following the Civil War. Sally McMillen writes that "a persistent fear of childbirth clouded the anticipation of a new son or daughter" (25). Leading up to and after the birth itself, middle- and upper-class women were expected to undergo a restful period of confinement due to frequent illness as a result of lacking obstetric care. Because of this lackluster care and knowledge base, less than ideal pregnancy outcomes were often explained by directly implicating the mother. A common belief of the time was that "the uterus was the controlling organ of a woman's anatomy and being," and therefore she was to "abstain from serious study, which might draw vital blood from the uterus to the brain, limiting fetal growth" (37). Similarly, several southern physicians spouted the belief that "deformities, stillbirths, and miscarriages occurred only if mothers behaved in an 'unnatural' manner" (26). This assertion not only implicates the mother when it comes to commonly experienced, often unavoidable pregnancy outcomes, but also hints at an expectation that there is a specific 'natural' way for a woman to behave. Contrary to the isolated, stoic image of the Confederate woman described by Roberts and Zimmerman, McMillen acknowledges that at least when it came to the period of confinement, "family and friends involved themselves in decisions [...] thus creat[ing] a sense of female and kin bonding" (57). However, McMillen somewhat undermines women's authority when it comes to birthing situations, saying "southern physicians, *with some accuracy*, believed that women fueled one another's fears" (55; emp. added). This statement degrades feminine community-based circles, both by physicians at the time, as well as McMillen herself. McMillen then goes on to acknowledge the common presence of Black women in the birthing chamber of middle- and upper-class white women, but leans too far into treacherous optimism with the declaration that, "childbirth [...] dissolv[ed] for a moment

racial barriers." While allowed to be present in vulnerable birthing situations, Black women of the time had to have been painfully aware of their tolerated presence in a white space in order to navigate it safely. This was a space where the birthing white woman even had to be careful not to transgress in front of medical male authority; it follows that Black women assisting the birth would have felt similarly scrutinized. Chapter Three will discuss in further depth the medicalization of childbirth, as well as the incrimination of Black women caretakers by the white medical authority in maternal death rates.

While these conventions often apply to middle- and upper-class southern white women, the maternal experiences of the mother-daughter pair in *As I Lay Dying* (1930) demonstrate that southern maternal expectations also affect lower- and working-class women. Addie Bundren is the family's deceased matriarch and Dewey Dell, her pregnant, unwed daughter. As part of her dying wishes, the Bundren family embarks on a cross-state journey with Addie's coffin in order to bury her in her childhood hometown, as opposed to her maternal home. Dewey Dell's pregnancy is unwanted from the beginning, but she struggles with conflicted feelings over whether or not to terminate her pregnancy. She laments her position and the indecisiveness she feels: "I don't know whether I am worrying or not. Whether I can or not. I don't know whether I can cry or not" (64). Notably, Dewey Dell is concerned with what she 'can' do. That she has options besides becoming a mother does not immediately occur to her; she instead ponders whether her indecision is even acceptable. This speaks volumes to the cultural expectation of womanhood being synonymous with motherhood and pregnancy being synonymous with blessing. As Dewey Dell accepts her decision to end her pregnancy, she repeatedly assures herself, "I believe in God, God. God, I believe in God" (122). In rejecting maternity, she calls into question her

relationship with her entire belief system in part due to the expectation that women's societal role as mothers is so inextricably tied to her relationship with her family and with God. On top of struggling to come to terms with her potential maternal role, Dewey Dell, like Caddy, is still expected to take up the role of caretaker for her family in her mother's absence, "*with you to take good care of them all*" (51), despite Anse, her father, being the remaining parental figure.

Dewey Dell's pregnancy itself is conceived in the fields on her family's farm, outside a physical home as well as outside social convention. Dewey Dell recalls going with Lafe the farmhand to "the secret shade" and repeats that what happened after, "she could not help it" (27). Whether this implies a violation of consent and sexual assault or Dewey Dell giving in to her own desires is unclear. However, what is clear is the father of her unborn baby is not present in her pursuit to seek reproductive care. Lafe gives her ten dollars for an abortion and advises her to go to a drug store. Dewey Dell does just this, first encountering a druggist named Moseley. Rather than help her access the care she requires or even just comfort her, Moseley instead shames Dewey Dell, "tell your pa, if you have one, and let him make somebody buy you a wedding license" (201). This statement reinforces the convention that pregnancy must be confined within marriage. He goes on to shame her using religious dogma, "The Lord gave you what you have, even if He did use the devil to do it" (203), further calling her belief systems into question. Moseley prompts her to go back to Lafe and "get married." The second druggist, MacGowan, is arguably even worse. He too furthers the notion that she should be married, "You ain't married, are you?" (243), then sells her fake medication, propositions her, and presumably, coerces her into a sexual encounter. Upon leaving his store, Dewey Dell repeats, "It ain't going to work" (251), knowing that he has

taken advantage of and manipulated her. Without a wedding ring, she is untethered from any sort of maternal authority, which is further reflected in her journey through unknown physical space. She is also thus untethered from male authority, in that without a wedding ring, she is subject to her father's authority and because he is absent in these encounters, she holds only her own attempt at authority within a patriarchal society. There is no man backing her decisions, and therefore, men in power do not take her seriously.

Equally profound in her rejection of maternity is Addie Bundren's words from beyond the grave. In the only chapter narrated by her, Addie discusses her relationship with her husband and ironically puts into words her qualms with language and by extension, with her status in life. Her realization that, "words are no good" happens after the birth of her son Cash, an event that convinced her, "that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (171). This is where she first mentions the word 'motherhood,' which she claims, "was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not" (171-172). Her implication here being that those who are mothers should not feel the need to identify as such, aligning themselves with the standardized and accepted meaning of the word 'mother.' Addie's words offer a direct explication of the arbitrariness of convention. Later in the chapter, she mentions the condescension of her neighbor Cora where she, "would tell [Addie] that [she] was not a true mother" (173). Her use of the word 'true' here is significant, showing that Cora subscribes to the usefulness of words and their use in upholding ideals of the Cult of True Womanhood – that 'true' womanhood is innately "associated [...] with the home and family" (Boydston). Addie's sentiments toward the term 'mother' are much more accepted in modern society, with more and more people acknowledging that there is no one correct way to be a mother.

However, in Addie's world, this was not the case and caused genuine resentment. Greg Chase pinpoints Addie's cause for frustration: "she sees that her society's linguistic practices seek to define and control her experience, provoking a hostile desire to subvert such hegemonic modes of speech" (175). As a white southern mother, she has certain things expected of her, and she is at odds with these expectations.

Carrying over into life and her navigation of the white maternal home space, Addie very clearly favors her son Jewel over her other children and, in so doing, fosters a hostile home environment for the rest of her children. Conceived due to an affair with Whitfield the minister, Jewel is the only child Addie perceives as being her own. The others belong "to Anse and to God" (174). In fact, Darl realizes that Jewel has a different father due to Addie's altered navigation of maternity when interacting with Jewel versus the others. Addie orders Dewey Dell and Vardaman to do chores around the house, thus lightening Jewel's workload. In a moment of engaging in stereotypically maternal behaviors, she "would fix [Jewel] special things to eat and hide them for him" (130), proving that she is not all-opposed to partaking in the expectations of her station. She also shares space with Jewel, coming in close proximity to him, as Darl encounters her "sitting beside the bed where [Jewel] was sleeping, in the dark" (136). While seemingly innocuous (a mother watching her child sleep), it is this moment of closeness that convinces Darl of Jewel's illegitimacy. Furthermore, in an action akin to sacrilege, Addie tells Cora that Jewel is her "cross" and her "salvation," going so far as to say "he will save me" (168). Clearly unbothered by cultural expectation, Addie transgresses within even the most sacred of spaces. While Faulkner does give Addie the space to lament her station in life, at the end of the day, she dies a miserable, bitter woman, locked into the very institution she is able to critique only from beyond the grave.

Fusing both Addie's disdain for motherhood and Dewey Dell's active pursuit of abortion is Charlotte Rittenmeyer of *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* (1939). These two stories, more so than the others analyzed, showcase the very real dangers involved in pregnancy and birth. Of all the women discussed in this chapter, Charlotte most freely navigates space and crosses societal boundaries. Her story, called "The Wild Palms," is told as an intertwining shorter text within the larger novel. The narrator of the story is Harry Wilbourne, a virginal medical student who meets the outgoing but married Charlotte at a party. She boldly approaches Harry and the two begin a passionate affair. When Harry asks Charlotte about her daughters, she confesses, "I wasn't thinking of them" (41) and dismisses a suggestion of divorce because her husband is a Catholic. Part of Charlotte's appeal is her ability to stand out in an unapologetic way. In the opening chapter, her and Harry's landlord remarks at her tendency of "not doing anything" (5), staring out at the ocean. She also causes quite a stir when the real estate agent tells the landlord, "She's got on pants [...] I mean, not these ladies' slacks but pants, men's pants" (6). Through her actions and dress, Charlotte defies expectation and as a result, is a puzzle to the men around her. Even Harry struggles to understand her, oftentimes masculinizing her as a way to explain her lack of maternal instincts. She abandons her children, she rarely cooks, she enjoys going out, and she is an artist, a creator not of children but of miniature dolls replicating human beings. These attributes are not commonly associated with femininity, and in order to rectify this disconnect in his mind, Harry repeatedly mentions Charlotte's so-called non-femininity. When she does decide to cook a meal, Harry notes that it "brought out in her a quality which he had never seen before, a quality not only female but profoundly feminine" (79). Previously in the chapter, he echoes this language, describing Charlotte's handwriting as "a big sprawling

untrained hand" (69), which at first glance is associated "with a man," but upon further examination it is realized to be "profoundly feminine." It bears pointing out that larger handwriting that *takes up more space* is at first believed within the narrative to be associated with masculinity.

In her navigation of space, Charlotte also undermines Harry's male authority to some degree, frustrating and emasculating him. In the earlier stages of their affair, Charlotte decides to find an apartment for her and Harry, but when she tells him about it, he is hurt: "*There's a part of her that doesn't love anybody, anything*" (70). She also remarks that the studio apartment will be a place, "Where I can work too," and Harry replies by inquiring, "Too?" Despite knowing that she left her family for him and that she more or less does what she wants, when she wants, Harry is still surprised when she carries this independent attitude into their own relationship. As for the apartment space itself, it is one large room "with a skylight in the north wall" (71). Harry notes that there is not much space "for kitchen and bath." When Charlotte pays for part of the rent with income earned from selling her dolls, he expresses visible discomfort and she chastises him, "You don't like the idea of your woman helping to support you, is that it? Listen" (75). Over the course of the couple's time living there, Charlotte works with "dense and concentrated fury" (77) on her art. Her work space dominates the living space, her dolls "accumulating about the apartment" (78), and she interrupts her work "only by eating and sleeping," as opposed to cooking and homemaking. Eventually, her puppet business abruptly shuts down and she attempts a more housewifely image, but this is only temporary. Soon enough, Harry finds her "at the work bench again" (81). Not only does Charlotte reject maternity in her pursuit of her puppet business (which, as compared to motherhood also deals in creating miniature people), her work dominates the

shared space and provides financial support for it. Certainly unconventional for the time, Charlotte exerts financial control over the space, a traditionally masculine role.

The end of the story, however, sees Charlotte subjected once again to male control and domination as she dies due to Harry's failed authority during a surgical abortion procedure. One interpretation is that Charlotte is punished for her previous transgressions. Alternatively, Harry's failure compared to Charlotte's previous success could indeed undermine patriarchal authority. Harry does not attempt to avoid punishment for botching the procedure, as he tells the doctor who attempts to rescue Charlotte, "I did, I tell you. Myself. In God's name, man!" (235). While he does own up to his actions, his words exert some level of ownership over the situation. Furthermore, when asked by the doctor who "murdered" Charlotte, Harry responds, "I did." Even in death, Charlotte is subjected to some level of male authority. Equating an accidental death with murder once again removes Charlotte's agency in deciding to undergo the procedure in the first place. She tells Harry: "I don't [want a child]" (173), and encourages him to perform a surgical abortion on another woman in order to make sure he could effectively perform such a procedure. When Harry insists that he won't do the surgery, Charlotte tells him, "Maybe we can find a doctor to do it when we go out next week." Even without Harry's involvement, Charlotte made up her mind about getting the abortion. Her relationship to Harry only provided convenience and proximity to accessing the surgery, but did not affect her desire to terminate her pregnancy. As Harry agonizes over Charlotte's decision and considers whether he will perform the surgery, he thinks of medical, as opposed to surgical, abortions: "*A kind of pill* he thought – this, a trained doctor: *whores use them, they are supposed to work, they must work* [...] *it can't be this difficult, this much of a price*" (174-175). Harry is torn between his love and borderline

obsession with Charlotte and his own desire to keep the unborn fetus. He loves Charlotte, but cannot shake his cultural upbringing that only "whores" would willingly undergo an abortion. And yet, he also acknowledges that Charlotte's desire to terminate is the most logical decision: "she knew that one of them must keep some sort of head and she knew beforehand it would not be him" (175). He thus implicates his own desires as irrational, as Charlotte is the one who "keeps her head" about her. Harry's perception of Charlotte's reason in this decision is further masculinized when he thinks, "*She is not only a better man and a better gentleman than I am, she is a better everything than I will ever be*" (174). Charlotte, in Harry's mind, is further masculinized in her rejection of maternity. It is almost as if Harry, and men like him, cannot comprehend femininity without maternity. And if a woman is to reject the latter, she cannot occupy a space within the former. Katherine Henninger analyzes female desire for abortion as a direct undermining of male individualism as complementary to female collectivism: "If pregnancy provides physical justification for a feminine representation of collectivity, abortion presents a physical manifestation of the threat posed by female assertion of individual will to the masculine construction of 'rugged individualism'" (28). In this way, Harry feels somewhat emasculated due to Charlotte's agency in her maternity, which historically, was dictated by an individual male's sexuality. He suggests various alternatives to abortion, but Charlotte rejects them all. As he comes to the realization that her mind will not change, he submits to her will and thus "watch[es] the ultimate last of his courage and manhood leave him" (183). With this in mind, his declarations after her death can be thus read as his small attempt to reclaim his masculine power in family planning. *He* committed murder; Charlotte did not ask for a medical

procedure. She was a mere victim, a maternal woman who succumbed to his selfish masculine demands.

Alternatively, the second story within the novel, "Old Man" offers a glimpse of childbirth itself. The story follows a prisoner called the tall convict as he is ordered to rescue a woman stranded due to massive flooding (and based on the real-life 1927 Great Flood that devastated Mississippi). Unbeknownst to the convict, the woman he is slated to rescue is pregnant and upon rescuing her, she goes into labor. The convict uses disgusting language to refer to the woman's pregnant body. Her body is "deformed," a "swell" supported by "its" (126) arms. He further laments being stuck with her out of "all the female meat that walks" and frequently reduces the woman to simply "the belly" (126). She is degraded due to the convict's insecurities and the assumption that she should be someone else's problem, as evidenced by his belief that she was "quite certainly (or certainly should have been) somebody's wife" (125). Once the unnamed woman encounters the convict, she commands space for herself and her unborn child. In fact, in terms of her pregnancy and the baby, the convict defers to the woman on how care should best be provided. The woman even does some ordering around in the lead up to the baby's birth. Upon meeting the convict for the first time, the woman tells him, "It taken you a while" (125) and then asks, "Could you maybe get the boat a little closer?" (126). Already, the woman is willing and able to vocalize her needs and prompt male movement through space. Her demands are met with further scornful thoughts by the convict. During her labor, she tells him to "hurry! Hurry!" (144), much to his displeasure; and when the moment of delivery draws near, she asks the convict "if he had a knife" (192). Her ability to vocally command her environment, even in the midst of a flood, speaks volumes in terms of her disruptive abilities.

In this vein, the unnamed woman's authority to give birth is not questioned. During the labor, she remarks, "If I just had a little hot water" (193), and the convict, inexperienced in the field of birth and labor, begins to "hunt wood dry enough to burn" in order to acquire hot water for her. During the time he is away looking for the wood, the woman's baby is born and is "[laid] wedged between two cypress-knees" (194). She handles the entire birth experience by herself, fortunately without complication. She then bathes the newborn, and the convict watches her with "savage curiosity and interest that [becomes] amazed unbelief." The man is in awe of her maternal knowledge. The pair eventually come across a doctor, who rather than being surprised at her handling of the birth by herself, remarks with a note of admiration, "Did it all yourselves, eh?" (206). He does not chastise the woman for taking her birthing experience into her own hands. Other than a nurse near the end of the story, no one comments on the woman's ability to carry out her birth experience and care for her newborn. When the nurse tells the woman that her baby must be bathed or he will die, she remarks, with an air of sarcasm, that the baby "ain't never been bathed before" (231), despite the woman having bathed him in the floodwater right after his birth. Her retort seemed to almost imply that the baby has never had a *proper* bath before, but nonetheless, she was able to carry out her expectation of care.

Despite the birth experience's link to water, the unnamed woman's body is not so much aligned with the floodwater surrounding the boat. Rather, the body of the convict is. During the initial storm surge, he is almost thrown from the boat, but saves himself by grabbing onto the gunwale. He drags himself back into the vessel, "streaming with blood and water and panting," (122). He is then marked with "blood-infused water streaking his jumper," and "expel[s] a gout of blood" (125) from his nostrils. In a way, it is almost like the

convict undergoes a journey similar to that of a newborn baby – or a laboring mother. The convict discovers a newfound appreciation for maternal experience, and therefore, his encounters with water hold a positive, albeit stressful, connotation. He emerges from the waters a better, changed man. The man's perceptions of her pregnancy are problematized rather than the pregnancy itself. In spite of the harrowing language used to describe the woman's body, this is seemingly one of the only instances in Faulkner's works where female and maternal deviance is fully validated. Perhaps this is because such deviance can be coded as indeed 'natural.' The woman's birthing situation was only subversive due to forces outside of her control, and despite this, she fulfilled her maternal 'duties' in securing the safety of her infant.

Able to shed light on Faulkner's specific cultural background and relationship with his maternal figures, Judith Sensibar, in *Faulkner and Love* (2010), turns a keen eye to the real-life women present throughout the author's upbringing. I bring in Faulkner's biography here not to offer his life as concrete evidence as to why he made certain decisions as a writer, but to provide a specific context for the type of southern upbringing with which Faulkner might have been familiar and to trace parallels within his fiction. Notably, Faulkner had experiences with a Black maternal figure forced to compromise her own life to maintain those of her white charges – Caroline "Callie" Barr. Barr was Faulkner's childhood maid, nanny, and primary caretaker, but in his mind served as a 'mammy' figure as evidenced by the word's inscription on her gravestone (Sensibar 18). Much of Faulkner's biography and criticism has only understood Barr through the eyes of the Faulkner family, but with her book, Sensibar brings to light Barr's personal history, as disclosed during interviews with family members and those who knew her personally within the Black community. Not only

does Sensibar's book provide valuable corrective history to the narrative of Faulkner Studies, it also demarcates the relationship between Faulkner and his white mother, Maud Butler Falkner, and his wife, Estelle Oldham Faulkner. In researching the three most central women in Faulkner's life, Sensibar sheds new light on the author's works. In addition, Bart Welling writes of Faulkner's struggle to understand the dynamics of having 'two mothers': "For years Faulkner had been struggling to find a language expressly denied to him by family and community, a vocabulary that would bridge the distance between his feelings for his two mothers, between himself and Callie's birth children, between what [...] he seemed to feel were the inextricable but warring strands of his own hybrid cultural makeup" (540). Caroline Barr and her lasting influence over the author will be explored in further depth within Chapter Two.

Another maternal figure who stepped outside social conventions would be Faulkner's biological mother, Maud Butler Falkner. According to Sensibar, "Just as Faulkner's attachment to Callie Barr included her black family and community and was regulated by the unspoken and spoken rules and codes of his white family and their world, so his relationship to his biological mother played out in the same realm" (129). An important aspect of Maud's lifestyle was that she "was intellectually and socially active" (132), writing on women's roles in her society. None of Maud's writing from this era survives, but the fact that she was thinking about women's roles most likely suggests some level of dissatisfaction with her current station. This idea appears especially relevant considering her husband's abusive and alcoholic behavior. Exceptionally bright, Maud's literary intellect and thirst for knowledge was likened to being "like a man's" (164), thus establishing that her culture had little to no regard for female thought and academic contribution. On the other hand, Maud was also an

artist, painting numerous portraits and landscapes that survive to this day. Faulkner most assuredly inherited his artistic and literary interest from his mother, but the men of his family, as a symptom of larger white southern patriarchal culture, considered art to be a "feminine pursuit" (167). Maud Falkner received all of her sons' "devotion and involvement [...] throughout her long life" (133), despite also having been characterized by family members as "mean as a snake" (2) and by Faulkner himself as "aloof" (6). Faulkner visited his mother on a daily basis throughout his adult life, clearly demonstrating their close relationship. Despite this closeness, Jill Faulkner (daughter of Faulkner and granddaughter to Maud) remembers her grandmother's house as having a "feeling of tension," and because of this, she would frequently escape to Caroline Barr's house, which was according to her "a happier place to be" (15).

Perhaps more revealing than Faulkner's individual interactions with the two women are their reported interactions with each other. Their dynamic was complicated to say the least. Maud Falker was an "unapologetic segregationist, who [...] believed absolutely in racial inequality" (63). One of Callie Barr's virtues in Maud's eyes was that "she knew her place"; however, Sensibar points out that "knowing one's place, whether one is black or white, and staying in it are not simple matters" (66). Despite this, Maud painted portraits of Callie Barr that avoided racial caricature and also said that Callie would "sit with [her] to keep [her] company" (75). The two women would sit side-by-side in their respective rocking chairs. Even after Callie's death, Maud "still kept two rocking chairs" (76), which she reportedly moved about the house according to the season. Like her son, Maud defied convention in certain ways, but was unwilling to abandon it in other contexts. Maud's beliefs when compared to her actions appear incongruous – how is it that white southerners

convinced themselves that they loved the Black people who worked for them, while simultaneously denying their humanity? Reflecting on these strange contradictions, Jill Faulkner concludes that she and her father "grew up in a situation where everybody lied" (88), thus indicating a lack of authentic representations of southern womanhood, both black and white. This deficit manifested as a direct result of the societal disapproval inflicted upon those who dared to traverse their decreed societal boundaries.

If anything, these novels reveal that pregnancy and maternity are not viewed with the dignity these institutions deserve with southern society as influenced by antebellum ideals and dogma. Rather, motherhood is an exploited institution, designed to keep women within spheres that do not threaten dominant white male power structures. Furthermore, this construction keeps women isolated from one another, concerned with the immediacy of their family unit. Unable to organize, unable to share ideas, or question dominant modes of thought amongst other women subjected to the same expectations, the system perpetuates itself, thus ensuring the survival of antebellum societal dogma. This does not even begin to get into the compounded exploitation faced by Black mothers, as evidenced by hooks' emphasis on the need for homeplace. Grappling with the downfall of the 'Old South' and all of the conventions associated with it, Faulkner seems to oscillate between both condemning mothers who overstep the confines of appropriate motherhood and critiquing the enforcement of these boundaries as being an overall hindrance to functioning family units. Faulkner's white mothers definitely clash with these barriers but in their clashing, they are not frequently rewarded by the text for doing so. Caroline continues to mourn the dissolution of antebellum ideals while also self-flagellating for being unable to live up to these very same standards, decaying away along with the space she inhabits. Caddy never returns to her

childhood home, thus being continuously severed from her own child and support system. Eula is married off to a man she does not love purely for the sake of saving face due to her pregnancy conceived out of wedlock and is thus removed from her own childhood farm. Dewey Dell's maternal fate is left uncertain, far from home and still pregnant against her will, and her mother Addie passes with little more than contempt for her family and children, longing to return to her childhood home in death. Charlotte dies tragically at the hands of an inadequate male authority after continuously clashing with this same authority in asserting her individual will. Finally, the unnamed woman lives through her unconventional laboring situation along with her baby, but despite this, she is not free from male scrutiny within the thoughts of the convict, thus reflecting larger cultural beliefs ingrained beyond a single pair of individual characters. Furthermore, the space around the characters is devastated, hidden underwater due to forces of nature with which humans cannot compete. Where will the unnamed woman mother her child amidst this total annihilation of livable space? Faulkner's white maternal women paint a complicated picture – despite the text itself complicating and questioning the beliefs which create tension between the individual woman and her expected role, it cannot help but condemn the woman in the long run. While bleak, this condemnation becomes all the more so when analyzing Faulkner's Black maternal figures.

Chapter Two: 'The Ineradicable and Tragic Stamp': Navigating Spaces of Black Southern Womanhood, as (Mis)represented through the Literary Rhetoric of Faulkner's White US South

The second chapter will investigate William Faulkner's misrepresentation of Black maternal figures, similarly informed by bell hooks' theory of "homeplace." I will first continue with an in-depth discussion of hooks' idea of homeplace. The chapter will then detail the perspectives of several scholars, including Dorothy Roberts, Patricia Hill Collins, Trudier Harris, and Loretta J. Ross, whose works investigate the exploitation of Black women's reproductive autonomy and the historical destruction of homeplace. Finally, I will apply the above corrective Black maternal voices to Faulkner's decidedly problematic depictions of maternal Black women. I will emphasize how Faulkner's outlook cheapens and demoralizes spaces of Black community and maternity, as informed by Thadious M. Davis' scholarly work on Faulkner and his representation of Black characters. Works analyzed in this chapter include *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) with a focus on the final "Dilsey section," *Go Down, Moses* (1942), *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), "That Evening Sun" (1931), and the posthumously published short story, "Evangeline" (1979), which operated as a precursor to the novel *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). Through this exploration, I evaluate how Faulkner's rhetorical choices reflect deeply embedded cultural beliefs about reproductive justice, or a lack thereof, as well as Black maternal identity.

Continuing the discussion of homeplace from the previous chapter, I find it pertinent to emphasize hooks' notion that homeplace affirms Black people as "subjects, not objects" (100) in a radical, transformative way. hooks says this creation of the Black subject is accomplished through "affirm[ing] our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and

deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world" (100). hooks acknowledges the prevalent historical trend of US white families employing Black women to handle the domestic duties and responsibilities of the white family:

> This tension between service outside one's home, family, and kin network, service provided to white folks which took time and energy, and the effort of black women to conserve enough of themselves to provide service (care and nurturance) within their own families and communities is one of the many factors that has historically distinguished the lot of black women in patriarchal white supremacist society from that of black men. (100)

Due to intersectional oppression, Black maternal care was actively displaced from the family unit and reconfigured into the homes of white families. hooks further posits that despite "sexism assign[ing]" (101) Black women the job of "establish[ing] homeplace," "it is more important that [Black women] took this conventional role and expanded it to include caring for one another" in ways that "kept [the community] from despair" (101). As pointed out by Patricia Hill Collins in the previous chapter, this is an enormous undertaking, to shoulder and ease the suffering of an entire community of individuals. hooks directly implicates white society in the destruction of Black homes and communities. This separation is not an accidental byproduct of a demand for labor – it was a calculated, intentional destabilization of Black families in order to maintain white control over Black support systems.

Perhaps Faulkner's most famous Black maternal figure, *The Sound and the Fury*'s Dilsey Gibson has long been believed to be a fictitious representation of Caroline Barr. While the differences between the real-life Barr and the fictional Dilsey dispel the belief that

Dilsey is a direct fictionalization of Barr, the two are also similar in many ways – particularly in their profession and subsequent spatial proximity to whiteness. Dilsey, as the Compson children's maid, cook, and primary caretaker, maintains a valuable role within the Compson household. Whether or not this value is always recognized by her white charges is another question. From the beginning of the novel, Dilsey's defined space is recognized as the kitchen of the Compson house: "You all got to get done and get out of *my* kitchen" (26; emphasis added) and the cabin in which she lives with her family, separate from the main house. As a target of racial oppression, Dilsey is aware of the separation that must exist between white and Black spheres within the postbellum US South. Even as she takes in Benjy, the youngest of her charges, and allows him to share a bed in her cabin with her grandson, Luster, she creates a physical barrier between the two boys: "Dilsey took a long piece of wood and laid it between Luster and [Benjy]. 'Stay on your side now.' [she] said" (32). Dilsey, as opposed to dominant white society, commits this act of racial segregation not because she believes it necessary, but because she has been conditioned to deem this separation proper as per her experiences with white society. Benjy, more so than any of the other Compson children, crosses these spatial boundaries based on race. This could be due to the fact that since he is mentally handicapped, he requires more frequent and direct care from Dilsey, his primary caregiver. Another explanation could be that because of his disability, Benjy is unable to fully understand white racism in the same way that other white children do.

Equally contributing to Dilsey's othering as understood through her navigation of space is how her physical body is described through a decidedly white lens. The cultural and spatial conventions enforced within the US South are thus reflected upon the physical space

of her body and how she is allowed to take up space. Dilsey is described as matronly and spent through the eyes of the white oppressor. She is not projected upon, but rather reconfigured entirely, as this view of her neglects consideration of her role as a wife, mother, and grandmother to her own family members. Furthermore, she is not only dehumanized but animalized in her descriptions. Her breasts are “fallen” (265), her midsection is a “paunch,” which causes her garments to “balloon”:

> She had been a big woman once but now her skeleton rose, draped loosely in unpadded skin that tightened again upon a paunch almost dropsical, as though muscle and tissue had been courage or fortitude which the days or the years had consumed until only the indomitable skeleton was left rising like a ruin or a landmark above the somnolent and impervious guts, and above the collapsed face that gave the impression of the bones themselves being outside the flesh, lifted into the driving day with an expression at once fatalistic and of a child’s astonished disappointment, until she turned and entered the house again and closed the door. (265-266)

Notably, the word “paunch” is used multiple times to describe her body throughout this section of the text. She is simultaneously infantilized and yet made to seem matronly, a seemingly paradoxical description. She is both small, decaying yet demure, but also large, a shapeless mass. As she mounts the stairs, her body “wholly blot[s] out the gray light” (267), and she pants as she climbs the stairwell, “shapeless, breathing heavily” (267-268), a “blobby shape without depth” (272). The phrase “without depth” could also refer to more than just her physical presence, insinuating her presumed mental and cultural simplicity relative to the Compson family. As she descends the stairs, she is once again likened to a child: “She turned slowly and descended, lowering her body from step to step, as a small child does, her hand

against the wall." Most shocking is Caroline's perception of Dilsey, which equates her to nothing more than a working farm animal: "Mrs. Compson knew that she had lowered her face a little and that she stood like cows do in the rain." White society simultaneously cannot decide on how Dilsey should be described, while at the same time having decided definitively what she is not. She is, essentially, everything the antebellum expectation of southern womanhood is not.

The Compson household is Dilsey's *responsibility*, and yet, it is not *hers*. In the final section of the novel, known as "Dilsey's section," she vocalizes her displeasure at Mrs. Compson's lack of involvement in household choring and calls out her tendency to demand others do things while she remains in bed: "wid you standin in de hall, holl'in at folks fum de crack of dawn" (270-271). Caroline then implores Dilsey to begin making breakfast in order to avoid Jason's wrath, as Dilsey is currently engaged in waking Benjy and helping him get dressed. Amidst Caroline's orders, Dilsey points out the ineffectiveness of the white woman's oscillation: "I can't do but one thing at a time" (271). However, instead of hinting that Caroline should help Dilsey, she prefers to tell the other woman to stay out of her way: "You git on back to bed, fo I has you on my hands dis mawnin too." Caroline, as the maternal head of the Compson household, is little more than another person Dilsey has to look after. Despite this, Dilsey would not be considered the maternal head of the household by white society.

The intentional destruction of Black families by white society is explored in depth by Dorothy Roberts in her book, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (1997). While speaking from a more contemporary standpoint, as compared to Faulkner's works, Roberts traces the origins of reproductive violence against Black women

to slavery within the antebellum US South. Roberts writes, “I came to grasp the importance of women’s reproductive autonomy, not from the mainstream abortion rights movement, but from studying the lives of slave women” (5). This is not to say that Roberts dismisses the importance of abortion rights within the reproductive justice movement, simply that it should not be the *only* issue tackled by the movement, as “[p]ublic and scholarly debate about reproductive freedom has centered on abortion, often ignoring other important reproductive health policies that are most likely to affect Black women” (5). Furthermore, Roberts asserts that “the denial of Black reproductive autonomy serves the interests of white supremacy,” and that the US uses a number of policies to “persuade people that racial inequality is perpetuated by Black people themselves.” In this way, Roberts maintains: “*Reproductive freedom is a matter of social justice*, not individual choice” (6). Scholar, activist, and co-founder of SisterSong, the groundbreaking reproductive justice collective serving women of color, Loretta J. Ross furthers this understanding of reproductive justice in her chapter, “Birth Justice and Population Control,” within the anthology, *Birthing Justice: Black Women, Pregnancy, and Childbirth* (2016). Ross unpacks the 1968 Kerner Commission report, which cited “Negro fertility” as a driving force behind poverty and crime, and thus cemented in the public mind “the inexorable relationship between ‘overpopulation in the [...] black community and social chaos’” (78). Ross takes this a step further, arguing that this perception of Black reproduction perpetuates harm directed towards Black families: “Because our children are defined as products of ‘morally impoverished’ upbringing. They become disposable cannon fodder for US imperialism around the world or neoslaves in the prison-industrial complex” (80). Here, Ross makes a direct link between Black reproductive justice and social justice.

Representative of the link between reproductive justice and social justice within Faulkner's works is the character Raby Sutpen. The short story "Evangeline" explores the spatial boundaries able to be navigated by Raby as a biracial domestic worker. A significant narrative figure, Raby physically destroys the white home space boundary, both in her climactic destructive act at the story's conclusion and in her own heritage. The story is told from the perspective of an unnamed narrator who is curious about the decrepit remains of a local farmhouse previously occupied by the Sutpen family. The narrative follows Judith and Henry Sutpen, Judith having courted and been engaged to Henry's friend Charles Bon before the onset of the Civil War. Both men leave to fight for the Confederacy, leaving Judith behind in the house with Raby, her mixed race half-sister. After years of pining, Judith learns that Bon has been killed in a duel by Henry upon his finding out that Bon has a secret mixed race wife in New Orleans. Judith dies never having been married, and Henry wastes away in the house as it falls into ruin with Raby and the Black members of her family keeping watch over the grounds. The story ends with Raby burning down the farmhouse, herself and the dying Henry Sutpen remaining inside. Raby and her act of fiery destruction at the end of narrative are believed to be a precursor to the character of Clytie in the novel, *Absalom, Absalom!*. While a much more layered work, *Absalom, Absalom!* is packed with a multitude of characters and their connections to the climactic end, but with its shorter length, "Evangeline" allows for a more central focus on the Raby/Clytie character.

As a mixed race southern woman living shortly after the Civil War, Raby has the quite common experience of serving her own white half-siblings. Mary Chesnut, a Civil War diarist who documented her wartime experiences as an upper-class plantation wife, describes

the frequency with which plantation owners would forcibly have children with the enslaved women:

> Under slavery, we live surrounded by prostitutes [...] Like the patriarchs of old, our men live all in one house with their wives and their concubines; and the mulattos one sees in every family partly resemble the white children. Any lady is ready to tell you who is the father of all mulatto children in everybody's household but her own. Those, she seems to think, drop from the clouds [...] my disgust sometimes is boiling over. (29-30)

Notably, Chesnut's language implicates the enslaved women rather than the plantation owners, a decidedly narrow perspective. The household Raby serves is described as "decaying" (584), with many of her white relatives (and employers) having passed. Despite Raby's proximity to her white relatives, she is still very much separated, fetishized and animalized by the story's unnamed narrator, based on her race:

> She's pretty near white than she is black; a regular empress, maybe because she is white. The others, the rest of them, of her descendants, get darker each generation, like stairsteps kind of. They live in a cabin about a half mile from the house – two rooms and an open hall full of children and grandchildren and greatgrandchildren, all women. Not a man over eleven years old in the house. She sits there all day long where she can see the big house, smoking a paper, her bare feet wrapped around a chair rung *like an ape does*, while the others work. (585; emphasis added)

In this way, she is approximated in much the same way Dilsey is by white society, but experiences the compounded familial strife that comes with being related to her oppressor. When asked by the narrator why she has kept house for the Sutpen family for so long,

“Didn’t you have your own life to live, your own family to raise?” (604), she responds by saying, “Henry Sutpen is my brother.” Early on, the narrator of the text even acknowledges in regards to Raby that “[her] name was Sutpen too” (585). Raby, as a mixed race woman, struggles to create for herself a homeplace due to her own white blood. Thus, she is unable to create a space that is free from white oppression, because her very parentage denies this separation. This is not to say that women of mixed and biracial identities cannot form homeplace, but Raby certainly is hindered from doing so due to her own lingering sense of loyalty towards the Sutpen family.

With the decline of the white Sutpens, Raby, in a way, becomes the Sutpen family homestead’s authority. She tells the narrator: “You go away from here” (605), and is able to control and command the guard dog that roams the premises. Raby’s authority over the space represents her own gradual coming-to-terms with the arbitrariness of white domination within the culture of the US South. Scholar Jennie J. Joiner acknowledges the racial identity of Raby’s descendants as another marker of her willingness to destabilize white authority: “[Raby] leaves behind her daughters, granddaughters, and great-granddaughters who ‘get darker each generation [...]’ (585), as if erasing the last traces of miscegenous activity and reinscribing the binaries of black and white” (Joiner 534). Whether Raby is indeed seeking to reinscribe the binary between black and white is debatable, but she does appear to seek methods of destabilizing the influence of white over black. In this regard, Raby could be read as attempting to form a pseudo-homeplace in the inferno of the Sutpen farmhouse. She is making the space hers, removing it as a site of white racial domination and turning it into a site of Black liberation. However, this liberation results in her death, which could be read as the text implying that Black women can only be free from white domination in death.

Roberts goes on to discuss the oppressive expectations forced onto maternal southern Black women in detail, as well as unpack their origins. Where the previous chapter discussed the cultural integration of antebellum womanhood within the white US South, Roberts investigates stereotypes directed towards Black women, who were excluded from this notion of southern womanhood: "One of the most prevalent images of slave women was the character of Jezebel [...] [who] was a purely lascivious creature: not only was she governed by her erotic desires, but her sexual prowess led men to wanton passion" (10-11). Because of this belief in the corrupting influence of Black female sexuality, Black women were constantly compared to white women in order to make white women appear more feminine: "Jezebel was diametrically opposed to the prevailing vision of the True Woman, who was chaste, pure, and white" (11). Roberts cites this juxtaposition as the justification behind "white men's sexual abuse of Black women." The stereotype of promiscuity worked to "defin[e] [Black women] as bad mothers" (11). In response to the Jezebel stereotype, white society concocted a version of the Black woman that would be deemed appropriate in the eyes of white America – the Mammy. Mammy, as opposed to Jezebel, is an excellent mother, especially to children that are not her own: "While whites adored Mammy, who dutifully nurtured white children, they portrayed Black slave mothers as careless and unable to care for their *own* children" (14). The perpetuation of this stereotype could not have been an accident. White society created a cultural stereotype which was then used to justify the separation of Black mothers from their own homeplace. Roberts delves into several more stereotypes directed towards Black mothers, touching on yet another that is employed most readily in Faulkner's literature: "Americans have expected Black mothers to look like Aunt Jemima – *dressed in an apron and headrag and working in a white family's kitchen*.

American culture reveres no Black madonna. It upholds no popular image of a Black mother tenderly nurturing her child" (15; emphasis added). The Black mother, in essence, is constructed by white society as belonging to white society.

Patricia Hill Collins speaks alongside Roberts' ideas concerning the marginalization of Black women through their labor connections to white society in her landmark text, *Black Feminist Thought* (1990). Collins articulates a similar link between Black women's labor status within US society and intentional othering performed by white America: "Motherhood and racism were symbolically intertwined, with controlling the sexuality and fertility of both African-American and White women essential in reproducing racialized notions of American womanhood" (57). Digging deeper into the racial divide separating Black and white US women, Collins unpacks how mainstream feminism movements did not serve the needs of Black women, as compared to those of their white counterparts. Collins cites pay disparities between men and women: "For African-American women the issue was less one of achieving economic parity with their Black male counterparts and more one of securing an adequate overall family income" (60). While Collins does not speak for every individual, she does speak to overall trends uncovered in her own research, so while there definitely were Black women concerned with the wage gap (based both on gender and race), there was an overall sentiment which reflected a need for adequate familial support, as opposed to the more individualized support sought by white feminists.

A doomed domestic figure, Nancy Mannigoe features in both the short story "That Evening Sun" and the novel *Requiem for a Nun*. Representative of Black women's separation from their communities within postbellum southern culture, Nancy struggles to create homeplace even within her own home. I will start with the short story, as it comes first in

Faulkner's bibliography and is the first story to feature Nancy as a character. In this iteration, she is the stand-in house-servant for the Compson family while Dilsey is sick. The story opens with a description of how the larger community of Jefferson, Mississippi, is rapidly changing during the twentieth century – the roads are "paved now" (289) and "telephone and electric companies" cut down "more and more" of the trees. Despite this changing environment, the Black women of the community "still take in white people's washing after the *old* custom" (289; emphasis added). Within the story's opening paragraph, a divide between the Black community and specifically, the community of Black women, is established in comparison to the larger society in which they live. Black women are othered in regards to societal progress. However, one distinction the narrator makes is that now when performing their washing, the women use "automobiles." However, "fifteen years ago" women would line the street carrying their washing bundles on their heads, transporting the washing "between the kitchen door of the white house and the blackened washpot beside a cabin door in Negro Hollow." The opening imagery of the story demarcates the divide between white and Black. Inherent in this description is the subservience of Black women to larger society, a society which has no indication of allowing them to progress alongside, or within, it. Another thing this passage accomplishes is to outline the physical separation of white neighborhoods from Black ones. The communities are physically separated, as well as culturally and even historically.

The next image Faulkner gives the reader is of Nancy herself through the eyes of the white Compson children. The children are impressed by her ability to carry her washing on her head without touching it, but her going about her work is perceived as little more than a spectacle for the white children. The narrator (young Quentin Compson) details, "Sometimes

we would go a part of the way down the lane and across the pasture with her, to watch the balanced bundle and the hat that never bobbled nor wavered" (290). The performance of her work, in the service of a white family, is considered a fun display by the children whose laundry she could potentially be preparing to wash. Furthermore, Nancy herself is described as: "tall, with a high, sad face sunken a little where her teeth were missing." Her demeanor and therefore existence is thus understood by a white child as being "sad," an unfortunate, somewhat degrading descriptor considering it comes as Nancy performs physically demanding work for a white family. The narrator also details the children going to Nancy's cabin to "tell her to come on and cook breakfast," and in so doing, "throw rocks at [her] house until she [comes] to the door." This shows a blatant disregard by whites for the space Nancy calls home. It is possible that the children's actions would not even have been condemned by an onlooking white adult.

It is also in this section of the story that readers are clued into the abuse Nancy experiences at the hands of her husband, Jesus, thus hinting at the absence of homeplace in her life. Quentin remarks, "Sometimes the husbands of the washing women would fetch and deliver the clothes, but Jesus never did that for Nancy." This is one of the lesser offenses committed by Jesus, but its inclusion in the narrative hints at Nancy's less-than-ideal domestic situation. In other words, her homeplace is actively attacked by white children and destabilized from the inside through the abuse of her own husband. Nancy seems to be very much without homeplace, merely occupying a space in which she lives. Despite his hostility towards Nancy, Jesus recognizes the lack of control he and Nancy have over their own household: "White man can come in my house, but I can't stop him. When white man want to come in my house, I ain't got no house" (292). Jesus' abuse of Nancy and subsequent

undermining of their homeplace occurs as a result of his frustration and rage with white oppression. This statement serves to highlight just how difficult it was for Black families to establish homeplace, a site free from white domination; however, it does not account for the intersectional struggle Nancy experiences as a Black woman. Jesus' statement is in reference to his physical home space, but also in reference to the physical space of Nancy's body. Nancy's previous interaction with Mr. Stovall, where she calls out to him, "It's been three times now since you paid me a cent" (291), thus implies that she supplements money made from washing with work as a prostitute. When Nancy is then visibly pregnant, "her belly already swelling out a little, like a little balloon" (292), Jesus has reasonable cause to suspect the unborn fetus may not be his. Notably, Nancy's implied client is a white man, as are the clients for her washing job. Jesus then sees Nancy's pregnancy as a breach of his control over her, and thus, incites the main conflict of the story through Nancy's fear of his violence. Furthermore, Nancy laughs in the face of Mr. Stovall's violence: "Nancy [laid] in the street, laughing" (291), but cowers at the thought of what Jesus could possibly do to her. In order to escape Jesus' imminent violent reaction, Nancy turns to the white family for whom she works as a substitute maid, securing the children's aid in walking her home every evening: "If I can just get through the lane [...] I be all right then" (294). The transitional space between her place of employment (within dominant white society) and her own residence (within the Black community) becomes a site of danger. In fact, it is Nancy's ability to cross these physical spheres that places her in a position to be the recipient of her husband's rage due to her encounters with white male clientele.

Over the course of the story, Nancy's fear of violence escalates. Convinced that Jesus lies in wait for her on her walk home, Nancy now spends the nights within the Compson

household after Mrs. Compson complains at her family's nightly walking Nancy home. Rather than being permitted to use a guest bedroom, the family "fixed a pallet in the kitchen for Nancy" (296). Her place of rest is also her place of labor. Fearful, even within the walls of the white household, Nancy wails during the night until Mr. Compson brings her pallet into the children's bedroom. When the Compson family starts to think Nancy has overstayed her welcome, the recovering Dilsey recommends she stay in her family's cabin. Nancy rejects this idea, "Won't no n----- stop him" (298), trusting in the added security achieved by staying within a white household. Nancy takes this a step further by insisting she stay with the white children, understanding the added layer of protection their presence will give her. Dilsey is eventually well enough to start returning fully to work and asks Nancy how she knows that Jesus lies in wait. Nancy tells her: "I done lived with him too long. I know what he is fixing to do fore he know it himself" (297). Nancy asserts that living in proximity to someone (through the collapse of physical borders) allows one to become known. Therefore, the segregation of white and Black neighborhoods forces the two demographics to remain somewhat unknowable to the other. This divide between white and Black physical spaces is bolstered by the young Jason Compson's musings throughout this passage, as he begins to use the n-word as a synonymous descriptor of Black people, thus equating his idea of Black identity with the slur.

In a final effort to keep her security blanket in the form of the Compson children, Nancy brings them with her upon return to her own home. As Nancy arrives at what should be her homeplace, she is palpably anxious. Upon their approach, the children note, "we were going fast then" (301) and upon entering the home, "[Nancy] lit the lamp and closed the door and put the bar up." The Compson children are uneasy while inside the house. Quentin notes,

"There was something about Nancy's house; something you could smell besides Nancy and the house" (302). The children's discomfort may stem from their occupying a Black space as opposed to a white one. It could also originate from the tangible fear of violence emanating from Nancy herself. Perhaps it comes from a combination of both. It is at this moment that Jason says, "I want to go home," for the first time and continues to repeat the phrase until the end of the story. When Mr. Compson arrives to retrieve the children, Nancy begs him not to leave: "When even your own kitchen wouldn't do no good. When even if I was sleeping on the floor in the room with your chillen, and the next morning there I am, and blood–" (307). Due to Nancy's own traversal of racial boundaries, she is apprehensive of, yet confident in, Jesus' ability to do the same. If he was willing to enact violence within a forbidden space (the Compson kitchen), he most definitely would be willing to do so within an accessible space (his own home).

Resigned to imminent death, Nancy does not even close the front door of her home after the Compsons leave. Quentin recalls, "From some distance down the lane we could look back and see her through the open door" (308). She leaves this boundary unguarded, reluctantly accepting the destruction of her life and by extension, possible homeplace. With the publication of *Requiem for a Nun*, it eventually becomes clear that Nancy did in fact survive that night; however, her unborn child was never carried to term due to an act of violence. In the closing moments of act three of the novel, Temple asks Nancy about her unborn child: "that you were carrying six months gone, and you went to the picnic or dance or frolic or fight or whatever it was, and the man kicked you in the stomach and you lost it?" (219). Stevens, Nancy's defense attorney, asks a clarifying question, "Its father kicked you in the stomach while you were pregnant?" to which Nancy replies, "I don't know," meaning she

does not know if it was the father who kicked her, as "any of them might have been." Could this have been Nancy's interaction with Jesus that night at the end of "That Evening Sun"? This becomes secondary to the point when considering that regardless of who kicked Nancy, her bodily autonomy was denied in the man's decision to enact violence against her and her unborn fetus.

In *Requiem for a Nun*, the violence inflicted upon Nancy comes back around in the violence she enacts upon Temple's infant. Throughout the story, repeated references to Nancy's attire cement her identity as a domestic maid: she dons "the standardized department store maidservant's uniform" (141), and in a subsequent scene, she is "dressed exactly as before, except for the apron" (211). In this same scene, she folds her hands "*across her middle as though she still wore the absent apron*" (212), her status as a domestic so innate that she subconsciously operates as such. It is this status as a Black maid that makes her murder of Temple's infant that much more appalling to white onlookers. In fact, her profession is so incongruous with her behavior towards a white child that the white characters concoct an explanation that repositions her into a different role: "n----- dope-fiend whore" (48), "a drunkard," "a dope-fiend whore that [Gowan and Temple] took out of the gutter" (94), "hopeless, already damned before she was ever born" (96), "murdress" (163). According to white society, the Mammy becomes the Jezebel. Nancy's true motive for committing the murder becomes moot, as in the eyes of the oppressor, her reasoning does not matter. She has transgressed against white society, and for that, she must die.

In the book, *From Mammies to Militants: Domestics in Black American Literature* (1982), Trudier Harris explores the literary and cultural connotations of the Black maid within US society writ large, as well as within the US postbellum South in particular. Her

research represents a thorough look into the most common employment status for Black women following the Civil War, a job status referenced by both Roberts and Collins – the domestic maid. Harris opens the book's first chapter with a quote from writer Alice Childress: "it's a rare thing for anybody to find a colored family in this land that can't trace a domestic worker somewhere in their history" (3). Harris cites the prevalence of this profession amongst Black women as having grown out of slavery: "They cooked, cleaned, and tended children in the same households where they had formerly worked as slaves" (9). She elaborates on this, stating that in the pre-twentieth century US South specifically, "'domestic servant' was synonymous with 'black woman.'" Furthermore, through referencing the words of scholar Ray Marshall, Harris compares the US job market to a caste system, which used "[c]ustom [...] combined with law and other factors to ensure the low employment status of Blacks." Following the Emancipation, many newly freed women were unlikely to find work outside of the labor they had been performing previously and thus remained in the same position. Adding to this nefarious othering of Black Americans, and specifically Black women, the job market was designed to intentionally isolate Black maids from larger society and each other. Harris states that white employers "wished to keep wages low, to keep maids isolated in the individual white homes so they would be less tempted to try to bring any union-inspired structure into the employer/employee relationship" (9-10). Branching off of this, Harris articulates the inherent unique challenges faced by Black women in the workforce, as opposed to other marginalized groups:

> To whom could the black woman complain if she were forced to leave her children alone for two hours to cook dinner for a white woman, or if she received fifty cents instead of a promised two dollars for the work she did? Since control of time, wages,

> and work was solely in the hands of the white woman, black women were essentially alone in the hiring and firing process. They did not have an immigration office to place them or a church or relatives as sponsors. (10)

To support her claim, Harris cites another scholar, Gerda Lerner, who maintains that "black maids have had few unions – all of them of short longevity – and no lobbying groups." Due to the scant amount of organization permitted amongst domestic maids, many maids were pitted against each other: "A potential worker could quickly discover that she had encroached upon territory already staked out by another woman like herself, and she could suffer verbal abuse for being 'underhanded'" (11). Not only were individual women forcibly ripped from their familial homeplace, Black maids as a collective were unable to form a community-based homeplace amongst themselves due to white oppression. While certainly a symptom of institutional racism, this separation and isolation of Black women from their support systems was far from unintentional.

To now focus more specifically on Faulkner's engagement with the above historical precedent surrounding the treatment of Black women, I turn to the scholarship of Thadious M. Davis, a scholar and academic who can speak to the experiences of Black women within the US South and has studied Faulkner's work extensively. In her book, *Faulkner's "Negro": Art and the Southern Context* (1983), Davis maps Faulkner's use of Black characters throughout his works. Davis notes that in his early novels, Faulkner used Black characters more as a collective, as opposed to writing about individual characters. Davis looks at the novel, *Soldiers' Pay* (1926), and notes that the Black characters are represented only in "brief pictures," and are most often "in the background of the central action" (49). In fact, Davis characterizes Faulkner's use of Black characters in this novel as being employed

merely as a literary device, thus "link[ing] a specific mood or emotion contrapuntally to the white world" (53). In other words, the Black characters of the novel are discussed solely in their relation to the actions of the story's white characters. The Black community exists for the sole purpose of supporting white society. This idea very much falls in line with the historical precedent Faulkner would have experienced as a middle class white man who employed Black workers in his home. Davis also touches on *The Sound and the Fury*, citing Caroline's inability to care for her own family (and Dilsey's subsequent management of the Compson household) as evidence of Faulkner's own belief that the Black community makes up for the faults of white society: "[Faulkner] uses the black world, as he perceives it from the outside, in order to characterize the weaknesses or, more rarely, the strengths of the white world and its inhabitants" (70). Faulkner clearly had a fascination with the postbellum Black maid, an interest which manifested in the numerous depictions of Black domestics within his fiction. He seemed to revere Black maids for the work they performed for white society, and yet this reverence is flawed due to the very nature of its existence. White appreciation was still founded upon Black sacrifice for white society, coming at the expense of the Black community itself. Furthermore, Davis' assessment of Faulkner's representation acknowledges the inherent inauthenticity with which he speaks about the Black community. In essence, Faulkner's engagement with race, and specifically the Black maid, is nothing short of problematic.

I focus heavily upon the role of the domestic maid due to the frequency with which Faulkner wrote about Black women in this specific working role, but also because of the author's own upbringing and biography. As mentioned in Chapter One, Faulkner was raised in part by Caroline "Callie" Barr, a formerly enslaved woman who was employed as the

Faulkner family's cook, maid, and nanny following the Civil War. Judith Sensibar chronicles the life of Caroline Barr and attempts to deconstruct the Faulkner family's image of her as the sole sum of her humanity. The introduction to Part One opens with a description of Barr's tombstone, made by Faulkner himself and full of inaccuracies. Sensibar notes a long history of misinformation and scholarly neglect surrounding Barr's generation, "the last to become adults under slavery" (19). Her gravestone is marked with her diminutive nickname, "Callie" rather than her given name, neither her exact death date (which Faulkner knew) nor her exact birth date (which he might have known) were included, and according to Barr's family, he used the incorrect surname. Most egregiously, the stone bears the word "Mammy," forever linking Barr to her connection with a white family. This gravestone serves as the only official record for Caroline Barr. Flippantly and without considering his redefining power, Faulkner reconstructed Barr in death. Additionally, Faulkner and his brothers placed an inscription on the gravestone reading "Her white children bless her" (18). This statement, while most likely true to the Faulkner brothers, erases Barr's identity as a mother to her biological children. During Sensibar's interviews, she also found that because of her commitment to the Faulkner family, Barr's "long work hours limited her visiting with other black families" (45), thus isolating her from her own community and family. When Barr would disappear from the Faulkner family's estate for days at a time in order to "help her daughters' families get in their crops," Murry Faulkner adopted a habit of telling his sons that, "Mammy had run off again with some man" (49). This was yet another attempt on the part of a crumbling white patriarchal system to demonize Black women for caring for their children because it came at the expense of neglecting the white families that employed them. Based on the historical narrative, Faulkner was just as familiar with Barr taking on a maternal role as his own birth

mother, if not perhaps moreso. The Faulkner family's ability to exert control over Caroline Barr's identity and narrative speaks volumes to how maternal identity is constructed: according to those in power.

While Caroline Barr's historical image was forcibly altered by her interactions with the Faulkner family, Barr herself was largely responsible for exposing the young William "Willie" Faulkner to the feminine traversal of bounded space. Barr was extremely close with her niece, Molly Barr, a local midwife and owner of the town jook joint, a place "where black people came from miles around to make music, dance, play the dozens, drink, and gamble" (57). Because of her profession as a midwife, Molly Barr was able to purchase the land on which her jook joint stood (a rare occurrence for a Black woman in Jim Crow Mississippi), as well as loan money to other members of the Black community at a standard rate, as opposed to the higher interest rates white lenders charged Black customers (59). Jooks were some of the only places where Black individuals could escape, at least for a period of time, the racism and oppression of Jim Crow social conventions and "celebrate their bodies and their voices" (60). Molly Barr's jook also doubled as her home. In essence, jooks like Molly Barr's embody a true representation of homeplace – a site to affirm and celebrate Black humanity. In taking young Willie Faulkner along with her to her niece's jook, Caroline Barr ensured that "Willie was crossing regularly into an exclusively black community where he was exposed to a view of black life radically different from the one he learned in the 'big house'" (61). This allowed Faulkner and his brothers to "[enter] a community and a home where a black woman was first in command"; however, it unfortunately did not prevent the author from employing racist rhetoric when describing Black characters. Despite this, Sensibar argues that Caroline Barr's willingness to expose her

white charges to her own community offered the young Faulkner a first glimpse at the arbitrariness of social convention and racial boundaries. Sensibar posits that "watching Barr's transformations as she moved between these two worlds first taught [Faulker] that race, like culture, was performative and that its performance changed in response to place and audience" (62). With this, Faulkner's fascination with the traversal of identity-based spheres took root.

I close this chapter with an analysis of one of Faulkner's most layered and intergenerationally complicated texts, *Go Down, Moses*. Peripheralized within the novel's second story, "The Fire and the Hearth," is mother and midwife Molly Beauchamp, the wife of the story's protagonist. This analysis seeks to bring Molly closer to the center of the text. Narrated by her husband Lucas, the section details the aging man's complicated relationship with his white relatives. Descended from the same man, Lucas and his cousin Zack Edmonds, fiercely butt heads due to Edmonds inheriting the entirety of the McCaslin family land (as Lucas is mixed race, a product of his grandfather's incestuous affair with his mother, and Edmonds is white, descended from the female side of the family). Lucas further resents Zack Edmonds for his commandeering of Molly following the death of his own wife in childbirth. It is the scene where Molly's role in both the birth and rearing of Edmonds' son is discussed that I find most interesting.

Lucas recalls Molly nursing their own child, tending to her own family and homeplace before she was relocated to the Edmonds home: "Molly, a young woman then and nursing their own first child, wakened at midnight by the white man himself" (45). Upon their rousing, Molly and Lucas follow Edmonds to his home where "Molly delivered the white child with none to help but Edmonds and then they knew that the doctor had to be

fetched" (46). Edmonds, from the outset, defers to Molly's authority in the realm of childbirth and delivery. The doctor is a second, last resort. In an uncanny twist of southern societal expectations, a white man defers to the expertise of a Black woman. However, this deferral comes at the expense of Molly being able to stay with and care for her own young baby. Upon returning to the house, Lucas "find[s] the white man's wife dead and his own wife already established in the white man's house." Whether or not Molly was asked to take this position is irrelevant because the expectation that she agree to it was already implicit due to her status as a Black woman relative to a white family. Lucas further laments Molly's displacement from their shared home: "his own wife, the black woman, now living alone in the house which old Cass had built for them when they married, keeping alive on the hearth the fire he had lit there on their wedding day and which had burned ever since though there was little enough cooking done on it now." Molly's spatial displacement continues until Lucas demands her to be relocated home: "I wants my wife. I needs her at home," and further spits a final retort to his white cousin: "I reckon you thought I wouldn't take her back, didn't you?" (47). Lucas, as well as the Edmonds family, believe themselves able to claim ownership over Molly and her labor. Lucas fears Edmonds' control over Molly to the point that he considers resorting to violence in order to bring Molly home: "*I will have to kill him* [...] *or I will have to take her and go away*" (48). Furthermore, Lucas' anger at Molly's displacement seems to come more from a place of himself feeling slighted and displaced, rather than Molly herself. He recounts Molly breastfeeding Edmonds' child: "[He was] [l]ooking down not at his own child but at the face of the white one nuzzling into the dark swell of her breast" (50). Taking a more paternalistic view of the situation, Lucas resents that his *own* wife is not nursing his *own* child. This paternalistic view, while flawed, is a

symptom of the larger society in which Lucas finds himself – one based on property ownership, passed down from grandfather to father to son. Lucas' way of thinking is further evidenced in his belief that Edmonds has less of a legitimate claim to old Carothers' inheritance than himself because "what [Edmonds] got from old Carothers had to come to [him] through a woman" (55), whereas Lucas is directly descended from Carothers' male descendants.

Thadious M. Davis discusses patterns of male inheritance as influenced by racial divides in her book, *Games of Property: Law, Race, Gender, and Faulkner's* Go Down, Moses (2003). In the second chapter, Davis delves into the theme of property and more importantly, how this theme is applied to human beings. Davis asserts that, "the major classical theories of property [...] depend on an embodiment theory of personhood in which the body is personal property" (79). In applying this idea to *Go Down, Moses* specifically, Davis writes that: "the ultimate act of ownership is bodily control, especially of women because they have the capacity to reproduce. *Go Down, Moses* is predicated on the hierarchical location of men as owners" (89). Using this notion, Davis understands "the sexual submission of enslaved women" as a manifestation of "an exercise of white male power, not desire, intended to demonstrate absolute control and will to assert complete power and authority over blacks" (91). Knowing this historical precedent, as established within the antebellum US South, Lucas' fears that Edmonds has stolen Molly away speaks to a well-established precedent of abuse and subjugation. Where Lucas may stray is in his concern more with his own lack of control, as opposed to his wife's, the person who is directly laboring under the control of a white family (and Lucas' relatives). Molly's own opinions about the arrangement are never revealed, as opposed to Lucas', who laments, "can a black

man ask a white man to please not lay down with his black wife? And even if he could ask it, how to God can the white man promise he won't?" (59). Lucas expresses a very real fear, but there is a stark lack of voice when it comes to Molly herself. It is this silencing of the Black midwife, in service to her own family and community, that I am most interested in.

Due to his own demographic status as white and male, Faulkner's representation of Black women is inherently inauthentic and flawed. However, his own complicated relationship with the societal ideals of the US South are compounded to make his representations that much more flawed. All of the figures depicted above are severed from an iteration of Black homeplace. Dilsey is the matriarch of a home that is not her own, focusing most of her time on the Compson family children. Raby feels indebted to her white relatives, despite them keeping her in servitude relative to them, and she sees no way out of this influence other than self-destruction. Nancy lives her entire life in proximity to white families and loses her life because of it. Molly is denied a narrative voice despite being a midwife, an important historical figure that will center in Chapter Three and was also a profession centered on establishing temporary homeplace during labor, delivery, and the period immediately after birth. Furthermore, she is kept in service to a white family beyond general expectations and presumably, is unable to dedicate as much time as she might have preferred to her own community. While this severing from homeplace would have occurred historically and is something many Black authors have spoken on, where Faulkner's texts differ is in their lack of validation and acknowledgement of the importance of these spaces that operate as homeplace. While Caroline Barr was separated by physical space from her daughters, she still traversed miles upon miles on foot to visit them nearly every week. She may have been an involved domestic worker in the Faulkner household, but she also spent

time at her niece's jook. Within Faulkner's fiction, Black people do not exist outside of their relationships with white southerners, and while this would have been Faulkner's only way of familiarizing himself with the Black community, like young Jason Compson, his view is filtered through the lens of white racial domination and supremacy, as determined by the culture in which he was raised and is thus incomplete. In order to complete the picture, I now turn to the corrective voices of maternal Black women, as well as women of color actively working and fighting for reproductive and social justice.

Chapter Three: 'Intergenerational Mothers' Wisdom': Corrective Black Maternal Voices as Told through Twentieth-Century Southern Midwifery and the Contemporary Reproductive Justice Movement

The final chapter will take a culminating approach to the previous two, while also centering Black maternal voices and the innovative work of the contemporary reproductive justice movement. First defining reproductive justice, the chapter will then move into a discussion of maternal stereotypes applied to Black women, as well as investigate the institutional causes behind these stereotypes. Essential in tackling societal stereotypes about motherhood, the rhetoric and implications of pregnancy will be explored. The chapter will then move into the historical abuse of enslaved Black women and the ways in which this abuse undercuts modern healthcare systems within the US. In looking at the institutional destruction of homeplace, the chapter will then foreground the historical and contemporary work of Black midwives, operating largely in the US South. The chapter's culminating section will briefly revisit Faulkner's maternal characters, both Black and white, and thus identify Faulkner's neglect in acknowledging these underlying systems of oppression. A coda synthesizing the contemporary reproductive justice movement, as well as highlighting various stories of Black maternity in the twenty-first century US will follow the chapter's conclusion. While having come a long way, reproductive justice is far yet from being fully achieved.

Coined in 1994 by the Southern-based groundbreaking activist group SisterSong, reproductive justice can be defined, in the words of co-founder Loretta J. Ross, as "the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities" (SisterSong). The

organization, serving women of color, specifically seeks to "build an effective network of individuals and organizations to improve institutional policies and systems that impact the reproductive lives of marginalized communities." This, in essence, describes the push to develop true homeplace on a broader scale than the individual. What Ross and SisterSong propose is a collective, communal homeplace where people work together to dismantle and exist free from oppressive internalized systems. In this vein, reproductive justice is also understood as "a human right" and is a movement "about access, not choice," because while choice is essential, "there is no choice where there is no access" (SisterSong). Kimala Price furthers this notion by explaining that the "individualist approach of the pro-choice framework" (42) neglects to tackle larger systemic issues that contribute to reproductive oppression. In essence, the large-spread denial of reproductive justice is more than any one individual's rights. If the larger systemic problems are addressed, individual rights will follow.

While taking into consideration the various economic barriers to achieving reproductive justice, Julia Chinyere Oparah and Alicia D. Bonaparte unpack the ways in which the US healthcare industry complicates the birthing process and denies dignity to Black women in their book, *Birthing Justice: Black Women, Pregnancy, and Childbirth* (2016). Furthermore, in the book's introductory chapter, Oparah states,

> It may be tempting to read [Black women's stories] as cautionary tales about what happens when a patriarchal medical establishment seeks to control women's bodies or as uplifting affirmations of women's ability to take back their power and birth naturally. But this would ignore the complexity of black women's experience of pregnancy and childbirth, which are shaped not simply by violence and coercion by

> patriarchal institutions but also by the multifaceted ways in which gender interacts with interlocking systems of race, class, age, ability, sexuality, and nation. (3)

This chapter will unpack these interlocking systems through the words and stories of maternal Black women in conjunction with hooks' theory of homeplace. One intersectional influence on Black maternity comes from the lived experiences of hooks herself. hooks writes that she was raised hearing stories from her community about "black women who nurtured and cared for white families when they longed to have time and energy to give to their own" (100). The societal forces keeping Black women from their families were intentionally manipulated in order to co-opt the work of Black women and relocate care and energy into white households.

Alongside her discussion of homeplace, hooks further unpacks Black parenting in her essay, "Revolutionary Parenting," also a chapter in the book, *Maternal Theory* (2021). In this essay, hooks furthers the idea that twentieth century feminism was very much focused on white, middle-class women who believed "motherhood was a serious obstacle to women's liberation" (87). Alternatively, Black women in the twentieth century "would not have said motherhood prevented us from entering the world of paid work because we have always worked." The stay-at-home housewife archetype was a middle-class notion, not available to working and lower class women, including many Black women. Furthermore, having been forced to withstand both sexism and racism in the workforce, "black women have identified work in the context of family as humanizing labor, work that affirms their identity as women, as human beings showing love and care." hooks stresses the importance of this familial connection, saying this form of care was "the very gestures of humanity white supremacist ideology claimed black people were incapable of expressing." hooks goes on to implicate the

workforce-based model of feminism used by middle-class feminists in the twentieth century as actually being a hindrance to the feminist movement overall: "Early feminist attacks on motherhood alienated masses of women from the movement, especially poor and/or non-white women, who find parenting one of the few interpersonal relationships where they are affirmed and appreciated" (88). Along these lines, hooks encourages a point of view that acknowledges, "Female parenting is significant and valuable work which must be recognized as such by everyone in society, including feminist activists" (89); however, she asserts that even though this work is important and should not be undervalued, this does not mean that women becoming mothers should be "compulsory," but rather a respectable option. Beyond this, hooks posits that fatherhood should hold "the same meaning and significance as motherhood" (90). hooks undermines the idea that the mother is an innately better nurturer than the father, implicating this bias as being harmful to families as a whole: "By placing sole responsibility for nurturing onto women, [...] society reinforces the notion that to mother is more important than to father." Digging into this idea, hooks asserts that "even feminist theorists [...] are reluctant to cease attaching special value to mothering [as opposed to fathering]. hooks views this as an interesting contradiction because so many twentieth century feminists were thus "will[ing] to glorify the physiological experience of motherhood," but were "unwill[ing] to concede motherhood as an arena of social life in which women can exert power and control" (90-91). In this way, hooks speaks to the simultaneous societal veneration and devaluation experienced by mothers, but especially Black mothers. In accepting 'paternal' in the same way that society accepts 'maternal,' we can begin to move closer to "community-based childcare that would bring children into contact with male childbearers so they will not grow to maturity thinking women are the only

group who do or should do childrearing" (94). And as a result, "the isolated parenting that women do in this society" (95) will no longer be the standard, accepted normal. Here, hooks doubles back on her theory of homeplace, arguing that "ideally, small, community-based, public childcare centers would be the best way to overcome this isolation," thus expressing the need for a communal homeplace, one that does not depend on the physical and emotional labor of one woman.

Shari L. Thurer also recognizes the importance of community in fostering a healthy familial environment, and by extension homeplace, in her essay "The Myths of Motherhood." While working alongside hooks' theory, Thurer's ideas focus on the loss of identity that comes with becoming a mother, due to the aforementioned societal belief in maternal care as supreme: "There is a glaring need to restore to mother her own presence, to understand that she is a person, not merely an object for her child, to recognize her subjectivity" (194). Thurer goes on to unpack the cultural notion of "the ideal mother" and how this ideal is subjectively and "culturally derived" (196). In essence, she maintains that, "the good mother is reinvented as each age or society defines her anew, in its own terms, according to its own mythology." Ketu H. Katrak echoes this notion when she acknowledges, "Rather than glorify motherhood as a personal matter, I analyze it as an institution that is socially, even economically constructed" (1). Katrak goes on to link motherhood as an institution to capitalism, connected in the procreative goal of "reproduction and production." Reproduction as capitalistic production is something that enslaved Black women in the antebellum US South would have been all too familiar with. As hooks, Thurer, and Katrak point out, it is in the patriarchal system's best interest to keep mothers as an abstract, inhuman idol in the eyes of society, as this neglects to account for their humanness and thus

keeps mothers in a state of disempowerment, unable to change the status quo or destabilize dominant power structures. How can an abstract idea, someone who is barely recognized as a person, assert themselves as an autonomous citizen? Keeping this in mind while further unpacking the effects of intersectionality proves to be a valuable investigation of the ways in which the Black mother is devalued both historically and in the contemporary United States.

Laurie A. Wilkie, through referencing the work of Patricia Hill Collins, defines the three main stereotypes perpetuated against Black maternity, as well as characterizes these stereotypes as inherently tied to the antithesis of white motherhood: "The cult of true womanhood emphasized moral purity, modesty, innocence, submissiveness, and domesticity as virtues for white women to aspire to as wives and mothers. [...] "the mythology of white women's virtue and natural maternal endowments was dependent upon the mythology of an equally unvirtuous and neglectful black womanhood" (56). These three main stereotypes are the mammy, the jezebel, and the matriarch. The mammy, a stereotype that was explored in previous chapters, is defined as "an asexual caregiver, [she] is presented as devoted and loyal to the white children she cares for. [...] She is not seen as a reasoned person, and ultimately is seen as, little more than a child herself" (56-57). Devoted to her white family, she is diminished to this role alone – an archetype made to serve the benefits of white society. Essentially, she lives to maintain the white home space, rather than contribute to cultivating her own community's homeplace. The jezebel, on the other hand, "is portrayed as a sexual aggressor, serving as a foil to the passive, almost asexual status designated to the white women in the cult of true womanhood" (58). White society's implication of Black female sexuality had a very targeted, intentional goal behind it: "The image of the jezebel justified planters' expectations of high fertility from slave women and provided them with an

excuse for their sexual terrorism of enslaved women" (57-58). This archetype also serves to undermine Black homeplace by implicating the Black mother, as opposed to white oppression. Finally, there is the matriarch: "The image of a strong black woman who rules her husband and family" (58), and is "assertive and domineering," as well as a "neglectful" mother who is "unusually masculine in [her] behavior" (59). This stereotype perhaps came about due to the effort of Black mothers in preserving homeplace and exists as a kind of bastardization of Black maternal hard work. White families would have seen this as a threat to her subservience, and therefore developed the harmful matriarch archetype in order to undermine Black women's care for their own families.

Keeping these stereotypes in mind, I now move into a discussion of dominant stereotypes associated with pregnancy itself, thus revealing how women's maternity is judged even before they fully become mothers. Marika Seigel investigates societal implications of and beliefs surrounding pregnancy in her book, *The Rhetoric of Pregnancy* (2014). Seigel opens with a discussion of her own experience finding out she was pregnant, detailing her reaction when reading through pregnancy manuals. The manuals, she says, "tol[d] [her] to see [her] pregnant body as a risky body and to undertake a program of self-discipline – under the supervision of a qualified medical professional – that would keep those risks in check" (2). In other words, pregnancy is viewed as requiring supervision by institutional authority. This approach to pregnancy, one of supervision and paranoia, made Seigel feel "disempowered and angry," even though at the time, she was unable to articulate "what was 'wrong' with the manual." She goes on to implicate "the rhetoric of health and healthcare" (6), which she defines as "the banter through which a doctor might attempt to identify with her patient during an office visit to the obvious persuasive intent of the ads for

sleep aids and antidepressants that pervade daytime television to the citations that contribute to the credibility of an article in a medical journal" (6-7). One issue Seigel has with the way pregnancy is discussed within a medical context is the tendency for the reproductive capabilities of a pregnant person's body to be positioned over their personhood: "medical, scientific, cultural, philosophical, and technological discourses and developments work to highlight [the body's] functionality and to downplay women's humanity" (7). This dehumanization would have been further compounded through the intersectional influence of institutional racial disparities in the healthcare industry – and, as a result, would have dismantled homeplace in denying the pregnant person's humanity. Furthermore, Seigel takes issue with manuals that "often give the illusion of empowerment and choice in childbirth but then present those choices in such a way as to ensure women's conformance to the status quo 'just in case'" (8). She quotes the following passage from Jane Pincus' analysis of "childbirth advice books":

> They inform and guide; they also indoctrinate in a subtle way. Often they are confusing and contradictory. We are told that we are strong and capable and then cautioned about all the things that might go wrong. We are advised to fight for that 'natural' birth and at the same time confronted with long lists of tests and interventions to circumvent, somehow, if possible. Almost every mention of a woman's desires and concerns is immediately followed by a discussion of risk and danger. We are counseled to work for change if we are not satisfied, and to do so coolly, politely, in a lady-like manner. (8-9)

These strange contradictions, Seigel argues, "encourage [women] to discipline their own bodies" (9) in order to cede authority to physicians and the medical institution. This effort by

medical professionals, while perhaps well-intentioned, alienates pregnant people from their own experience and by extension, dehumanizes them. When coupling this subtle form of control with the historical subjugation of Black women's maternity, even more troubling implications arise in contemporary rhetoric surrounding pregnancy.

In the book, *Birthing a Slave* (2006), Marie Jenkins Schwartz digs into the beginnings of the medical establishment's study of gynecology, touching on the harrowing experiences of the Mothers of Modern Gynecology: Anarcha, Lucy, and Betsey. All three women were enslaved and repeatedly operated on without the use of anesthesia by surgeon, J. Marion Sims. Sims was able to devise a surgical procedure for treating vesico-vaginal fistula, a type of vaginal tearing that "occurs in the wall separating the vagina and bladder" (234). This type of tearing results during childbirth and can be caused by an obstructed labor, either because "the fetal head is too large, or the pelvis is too small or misshapen, or the baby's position is such that it cannot pass through the pelvis." Monica Cronin provides further information on how fistulas happen: "If the fetus cannot fit through the birth canal, it will become wedged into a position where its skull and the woman's pelvic bones trap the soft tissue, and the blood supply to entrapped tissues is shut off" (7). It goes without saying that this injury is extremely painful and can cause a slew of subsequent health complications. Besides vaginal tearing happening as a result of childbirth, it could also have been caused by pessaries, which were used by doctors to keep a prolapsed uterus in place. Furthermore, misuse by doctors of a number of obstetric tools, such as "forceps, catheters, and the tools of craniotomy" (Schwartz 235), could also cause vaginal tearing. Doctors' use of forceps, a tool inserted into the vaginal canal during delivery, which grabs the fetal head and guides it, was a major culprit, with national instances "of vaginal injury declin[ing] as physicians became more

skilled in the use of forceps." Sims' discovery in how to repair this tearing was a huge advancement in gynecological surgery; however, it came at a horrific cost. Anarcha was only seventeen when she experienced a multi-day labor with no result and was subsequently sent to Sims. In delivering Anarcha's infant, Sims used forceps. Five days later, Anarcha "exhibited signs of recto-vaginal fistula [a tear between the vagina and the rectum], probably the result of prolonged labor due to obstruction but possibly because of Sims' intervention" (237). It was during this time that Sims acquired Lucy and Betsey as patients, who also had developed fistulas during childbirth, despite there being "no cure for the condition" at the time. Sims advertised to local slaveholders to send enslaved women with fistulas to his practice. He then operated on the women, "us[ing] a crude speculum of his own creation" (238) and without pain medication. By his own admission, "Anarcha, Betsey, and Lucy suffered at [Sims'] hands." Anarcha suffered through "thirty surgeries in three and a half years," and when during an operation on Lucy that Sims' sponge adhered to her bladder, he "forcibly pulled it away," causing the young woman extreme agony. Most revealingly, Sims believed anesthesia to be unnecessary when operating on Black women, "[y]et when he began performing the surgery on white women, he found it indispensable" (239). This brutal history is a direct cause of the need to establish homeplace, a space free from white oppression. Anarcha, Lucy, and Betsey should have been treated with dignity, cared for in a loving home environment as they recovered from their postpartum injuries. The brutal, inhumane, and sadistic surgical experiments of J. Marion Sims reveal quite shockingly the disregard with which Black women's humanity was acknowledged by whites and white society. Beyond this, the suffering of these women was seen as necessary for the greater good of white society, who directly benefited from the torture of enslaved Black women.

One group of people who pushed back against the dehumanization of Black mothers would be the Black midwives who served the US South from before the Civil War and through the twentieth century. This community of women worked to provide care to Black, working class, and poor women throughout the South. As recognition for their valiant and humanizing work, Black midwives were systematically suppressed by the US government, beginning in the early twentieth century. Onnie Lee Logan, one of the last practicing lay midwives in Alabama, shares her understanding of the midwife vocation, as well as her experiences as a midwife in the book, *Motherwit: An Alabama Midwife's Story* (1989). In describing the responsibilities of midwives in the early twentieth century, when Logan's mother and grandmother would have been practicing, she recalls,

> Now the midwives in those days – let me tell you about the midwives in those days. When they go on a delivery, they didn't just go on a delivery. They do the cookin and the washin. It wasn't so much of the midwifin. They was there to he'p with anything they could do. He'p with the other smaller chil'rens. My mother wasn't paid hardly anything alot a times. If she was paid at all they might give her co'n, chicken, greens outa the garden if we didn't have any and such like that. There wasn't any money to pay em. (53)

According to Logan, the lay midwife was more than simply a medical professional. She was part of the village in which children were raised. This method of welcoming new members into the community is very much aligned with hooks' ideas on homeplace and parenting – childcare is shared amongst members of the community. Furthermore, this level of care provided by midwives affirms the birthing person's humanity. The midwife is not present to merely birth the baby and move onto the next delivery. She is there to serve the needs of the

family as they adjust to welcoming a new family and community member, addressing the human needs that must be filled. In this way, lay midwives very much operated as human homeplaces, carrying the sentiments of this space to the people they served.

While outlining the ways midwives attended to birthing mothers beyond medical procedures, Logan also details the differences that existed across racial lines, as lay midwives served both the Black community and white families: "My mother was not a licensed midwife. They didn't license em then. Sure didn't. She didn't report any births. I mean she didn't fill out any birth certificates. If it was white she reported to the doctor that was comin. With white my mother always worked in a place where the doctor was comin. Plenty times she done the work befo' the doctor got there" (49). When aiding a white family, the medical establishment was called to intervene. However, as Logan points out, oftentimes their assistance was unnecessary, their presence merely employed to record and document that the birth had happened. Logan also recalls her mother being a wet nurse for white families and vice versa: "if Mother had to be gone on a delivery or up there in town, her baby was carried up there to that white lady. And she fed it from her breast. Fed my mother's black baby from her white breast. They both did that. It was understood. My mother nursed her baby and she nursed my mother's baby" (20). As outlined in previous chapters, when it came to childcare, white southerners would employ Black women to aid in the process, but would continue to harbor segregationist sentiments. Logan goes on to note that lay midwives of the time were often distinguished by the uniforms they wore: "She's get on all those long aprons. I don't care how hot it was [...] Every time I see a granny midwife she be in this form. Her long dress, her long apron, her old coat and lil hat" (49-50). The lay midwife was often marked by this uniform, designating her as being in service to others. This uniform bears resemblance to

those of Black domestics as described by Trudier Harris in the previous chapter. Logan goes on to share that her parents raised her to, “love, share, and give for [her] family as well as anybody else” (21). While clearly a quality that Logan herself is proud of, this does demonstrate the notion mentioned by hooks that Black women are frequently positioned to shoulder the wellbeing of entire communities.

Detailing the experience of another Black midwife operating in Alabama, Laurie A. Wilkie’s *The Archaeology of Mothering: An African-American Midwife’s Tale* (2003) follows the life of Lucretia Perryman, who lived and worked during the late nineteenth century. Wilkie touches on this same idea of the midwife being somewhat responsible for the good of her community: “As a midwife, Lucretia was engaged in what Patricia Hill Collins has dubbed ‘motherwork,’ or mothering done for the good of the racial or ethnic community” (46). Wilkie sees this as being a potential side effect of the plantation slavery system. Due the tendency of the slave trade to separate parents from their children, “[c]ollective mothering and parenting became the norm on most plantations” (65). Notably, Perryman’s experience differs from that of Logan’s because she worked prior to the regulation of midwifery; however, much of her approach to care for the birthing mother was the same. Wilkie writes that, “Midwives did not merely ‘catch babies,’ but trained women to be mothers” (120), noting that midwives would often live with the new mother, “teaching her how to feed, clean, and care for the baby” (120-121). This very much echoes Logan’s own understanding of midwifery during the early twentieth century. Furthermore, Wilkie touches on the spirituality associated with the midwife vocation, saying that “to ignore the health of the spirit would have been a disservice” (121). What changed was not the midwife’s approach to care, but rather the US government’s involvement in said care.

Gertrude Jacinta Fraser investigates real-life historical midwifery communities in her book, *African American Midwifery in the South: Dialogues of Birth, Race, and Memory* (1998). Fraser focuses most readily on a community in Green River County, Virginia, but also brings in commentary from other states in the US South, stating that she "us[es] Virginia as a particular case" but "make[s] a broader set of claims about [...] the South as a whole" (25) because, as discovered in her research, "an African American midwife in Virginia during the first half of the [twentieth] century shared much in common with her counterparts in the South, whether in Florida, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, Arkansas, or Alabama" (26). As well as describing the overall midwife experience across the board in the US South, Fraser also discusses the non-discriminatory care offered by Black midwives, stating midwives "played [an important role] in the reproductive experiences of southern women, both black and white" (1). Another relevant framework for Fraser's research is her focus on "the period from the 1920s to 1950s" (3), which would have been the decades in which Faulkner was writing and publishing; therefore, Fraser's research would have referenced history that happened concurrently with many of the events in Faulkner's novels. Fraser also introduces the idea that as a caretaker, "the midwife was often involved in more forms of care other than just the act of labor" (4), thus establishing the Black midwife as a figure of holistic care, as opposed to enforcing the notion of birth as a individualized, medical procedure. Beyond simply documenting the experiences of the Green River community's midwives during the early twentieth century, Fraser also discusses the fall of the midwifery movement as a result of racial oppression and government overreach: "the struggles over childbirth involved at some fundamental level a dialogue about southern society and everyone's proper place within it" (6). Furthermore, Fraser posits that: "The African

American midwife proved a pivotal figure in this dialogue. She was used to affirm the status quo and also to question its very foundations" (6-7). And now the question remains: how exactly were communities based on midwifery undermined in the early twentieth century?

While not the only source that discusses the destruction of Black midwifery circles, Fraser provides a thorough overview of the oppressive government interventions that lead to the movement's stigmatization and decline. Fraser also notes the difficulty with which she came by much of the information uncovered about the Green River community, spurred on by the legacy of intervention that began in the twentieth century: "silence and remembering were highly politicized acts influenced by the rhetoric of race, shame, and science that for fifty years [at the time of Fraser's research] were so much a part of the public health discourse" (12). Because of this lasting shame, Fraser ran into some contradictions surrounding community perceptions of the midwife, asking: "Was the midwife a figure of shame or pride?" (13). For the most part, amongst the Green River community, "both men and women often portrayed the midwife as caring, knowledgeable, and a figure of great authority on medical and spiritual matters. Yet few people believed that her approach to birth would be useful or even desirable in the present" (15). How then did this contradiction come to be? Fraser implicates the Sheppard-Towner Act of 1921, which the historical record indicates was when "the nation's health care agencies first showed legislative concern for [...] women and for infant and maternal health" (33). While seemingly a great concept in theory, the implementation of this act directly undermined midwife-based circles of care and as a result, disproportionately and negatively affected communities of color. Under this act, "public health nurses [...] directly trained the midwives found to be 'worthy' and eliminated those found to be wanting" (34). According to Fraser, this intervention represented a clear

and direct attempt by the US government "to colonize and civilize African American midwives and mothers" (35). Through this intervention, institutionalized systems of white oppression sunk their claws into Black homeplace through the impediment of midwifery care. Midwives were now made to register all attended births, as well as receive their own certification to perform the profession they had practiced for years, which they had to pay for themselves (36-37). Fraser points out the irony in the government's decision to implicate Southern midwives when, "the African American midwife shouldered the responsibility for a population of women and children who were by any contemporary measure among the poorest and the least healthy in the South" (27). In this way, Fraser acknowledges the systemic flaws in the US's healthcare system as being indicative of larger institutionalized racist practices, intent on providing the least amount of care possible to the citizens that white society cares about the least.

Fraser thus asserts: "Midwifery control and regulation were predicated on the assumption of a social and political hierarchy in which racial difference was the defining factor" (37). This had lasting effects on more than just the midwifery movement, leading to a healthcare climate which was hostile at worst and indifferent at best: "These attitudes did not block health care on behalf of the state's African American citizens, but they kept services to a minimum, and even those must have been given grudgingly." As a result of this institutionalized discrimination, "public health clinics came indelibly to stand for back-of-the-bus care, reserved for African Americans," which thus cemented in the psyche of US citizens "the stigma of blackness and low social status [as] enjoined, so that all but the poorest whites avoided the public health clinic and the midwife." Blackness became synonymous with lackluster care, and therefore, the midwife was unfairly blamed for poor

maternal health outcomes when in reality, these health outcomes were caused due to a variety of symptoms of racial oppression. Furthermore, the midwife, and more specifically, the Black midwife "transgressed many of the rules and expectations of what a woman should be and do" (43). Black midwives pushed back against the less than ideal health care options provided to the Black community, and as a result, were seen as a threat to the US government's mission of eugenic eradication. Midwives also humanized the families they served through their portable use of homeplace, and because of this, did not fit into the overall notion of white supremacy. The US government's lackluster care was not a mere coincidence, it was intentional neglect.

Ruth Hays elaborates on this intentional othering in her essay, "Birthing Freedom: Black American Midwifery and Liberation Struggles," a chapter in *Birthing Justice* (2016). Hays references the work of scholar Jennifer Morgan, as she explains that this othering began during the era of slavery, a time when "slaveholders employed both 'outrageous images and callously indifferent strategies to ultimately [create an] economic and moral environment in which *the appropriation of a woman's children as well as her childbearing potential become rational and, indeed, natural*" (Hays 166-167; emphasis added). The midwifery tradition that developed amongst enslaved Black women originated as a direct result of the slavery system, as "enslaved women combined a variety of West African ritual and medicinal traditions to form a distinctly New World healing culture. Within this culture, midwifery was not considered a trade or vocation but, rather, a calling" (167). Hays also touches on the spirituality of the midwife profession, saying "granny midwives relied almost as much on spiritual guidance as on medical knowledge and experience, and their practice reflected a holistic concern with the well-being of their charges." Part of this holistic care included care

rituals that affirmed the wellbeing and humanity of the birthing mother. Hays describes one such ritual through referencing the knowledge of historians Sheila Davis and Cora Ingram,

> One key ritual, which public health officials would later term ‘fussing,’ is especially indicative of the interwoven spiritual and medicinal aspects of granny midwifery: ‘Fussing involved beautifying a woman’s body in preparation for the transformative event of birth. A woman’s hair was braided and pomaded, her calves and legs greased, her arms and groin talcum powdered, and her person sprinkled with sweet water or perfume’ [...] Fussing also had important, though frequently misunderstood, medicinal purposes. Massage distracts a birthing woman from labor pain, increasing her ability to cope with it, and relaxes her, which speeds up the birth process. Fussing also probably involved massage of the birthing woman’s perineum. Extremely effective at preventing vaginal tearing, this technique has only recently gained mainstream prominence in obstetric practice. (168)

This childbirth ritual, among others, thus “pushed back against the dehumanizing tropes that slaveholder used to justify exploit[ation]” of Black women. It is through practices such as the ones described above that midwives were able to create this transient sort of homeplace, one that followed them wherever they served, existing as a temporary space in time. Hays further notes the relative position of power midwives might have held on certain plantations, that “[b]ecause of their relative closeness to slaveholders, they were able to act as emissaries, carrying the concerns of the enslaved to their owners” (169). While a valuable position to hold, this historical tendency cemented the notion of Black women carrying the responsibility of care for entire communities. Not only did many enslaved lay midwives negotiate care for their community with slaveholders, they were able to operate in a similar

manner when dealing with doctors hired by slaveholders to attend births in the slave quarters. Hays likens them to modern-day doulas, saying, "[lay midwives] intervened, sometimes successfully, when doctors proposed treatments that the birthing woman objected to. In doing so, they resisted the medical subjugation of black birthing bodies, even within the institution of slavery" (170-171). Prior to Emancipation, lay midwives were doing everything in their power to carve out a homeplace amidst brutal human rights violations.

Schwartz also provides further historical evidence of the herbal techniques and healing methods used by enslaved people during the antebellum South, as well as the methods employed by the white medical establishment in undermining traditional medicine. Schwartz opens the book with a declaration that, "slavery helped to further the medicalization of childbirth and the professionalization of medicine" (4), a process which prioritizes certain mothers over others. I bring in Schwartz's research here to provide more detail about some of the medicinal practices and rituals employed by enslaved people, as "most of the healthcare in the quarter was carried out by slaves" (50). Schwartz pulls from a variety of sources, hearing perspectives from multiple southern US states. One informant from Arkansas noted, "Medicines could be made on the home place 'from roots, herbs, flowers, and leaves'" (51). On a plantation in Tennessee, "'an old negro woman on the place' began treatment. Only if her concoctions of roots and herbs did not work would the master call in a white doctor." In this way, a strange juxtaposition took root, wherein these specific circumstances, the authority of the white slaveholder deferred to the authority of the Black healer (although, this deferral would have been most likely rooted in the aversion to paying for a doctor to care for what the slaveholder deemed to be 'property'). On one Kentucky plantation, an older Black woman was reported as having used "herbs such as sassafras roots

and cami weeds to treat sickness" (52). One Louisiana parishioner recalls the enslaved people "gather[ing] a number of medicinal roots and herbs" (62), including "black haw root, cherry bark, dogwood bark, chinquapin bark, black snakeroot, and swamp root." While this medicinal knowledge was extremely valuable to enslaved populations, it was also used against the Black community in order to demonize the relative independence achieved through this expertise. White slaveholders were "fearful that slaves might use knowledge of roots, herbs, and conjure to harm them," (58), in holding this belief, they inadvertently "revealed their fears about the efficacy of these measures."

Now, we have come to the question: how does this legacy relate to Faulkner and his works? While no one person is responsible for institutionalized forms of oppression, the rhetoric used by individuals can reveal much about dominant cultural beliefs, as well as reveal the position of the author to those beliefs. Faulkner's Black maternal figures seem to live in a world that denies their personhood, positioning these women as existing only within proximity to white society. While they are mistreated by their societies, and Faulkner's authorial voice seems to acknowledge this mistreatment, he fails to center the reasons behind *why* this mistreatment occurs due to the systemic influences behind it, nor does he necessarily condemn it.

Furthermore, midwifery is surprisingly absent in Faulkner's texts, barring the implicit midwife role held by Molly Beauchamp. This absence, despite the well-founded prevalence of the lay midwife within Black communities of the twentieth century US South, perhaps could speak to Faulkner's lack of familiarity with Black communities. According to Alicia D. Bonaparte, "black midwives successfully attended almost 80 percent of black and white births in the American South" (25); therefore, their relative absence in Faulkner's work

speaks volumes. Despite Caroline Barr having taken the young Faulkner into spaces of Black community as discussed in the previous chapter, he still missed so much because he himself was not a part of the community. And even if he was indeed more aware of the prevalence of lay midwifery, he chose not to highlight the role in his writing. Even if he had included mention of the Black midwife, his representation would have been inherently inauthentic and likely inaccurate because of his own positionality.

Beyond the lack of acknowledgment of the essential role Black women played as midwives to the Black community and lower-income white communities, Faulkner's Black women characters do little to push back against their societally determined role as subservient to white households. All of the aforementioned characters exist solely in relation to white society, holding roles that are determined for them by said society. Absent from these representations are the roles Black women carved out for themselves during this time period. Faulkner also writes his Black female characters as being unflinchingly loyal to their white employers, a decision that could imply some level of passivity on the author's part at the societal positioning of Black women in the US South. Furthermore, his white female figures do seem to chafe within their societal roles, and yet it is rare for them to perform acts of resistance against these roles in the tangible sense, and even when they do, they are often met with a less than ideal demise. Caroline directs her inability to live up to her culture's idealization of her maternal role inwards, blaming herself for shortcomings and doing little to change based on this turmoil. Her stagnancy in her maternal role would also not have been available to her had she been a Black mother during the same time, as she most likely would have been performing domestic work in another household. Caddy is banished from her familial home, never to reconnect fully with her daughter. The shame inflicted upon her for

her pregnancy would not have carried the same weight if she had been an enslaved Black woman, as through acts of assault at the hands of white men, pregnancies out of wedlock were common. Addie rebukes her role as mother, but instead directs this rage outwards towards her family, as opposed to Caroline's internalization of her misalignment with cultural expectation, and she dies a bitter, angry woman. Dewey Dell grapples with her autonomy, but is stopped by men in power from achieving what she wants. Charlotte exercises her autonomy in a similar way, yet pays the ultimate price through no fault of her own. Eula, despite her agency in selecting a suitor, falls into the same fate as thousands of other women before her, being forced into a marriage due to a pregnancy out of wedlock. While pushing back against their roles, these women ultimately cannot win in the end.

Faulkner's Black women characters do not even really get the chance to push back against their societal roles within the dominant white culture, with the possible exception of Raby. Dilsey is taken for granted by the Compson family, Caroline frequently belittling the work she does and insinuating that despite it all, she still does not do enough. Dilsey also defers to the expectations of white society, at least, when interacting with her white employers. Nancy's predicament in "That Evening Sun" does seem to be the closest Faulkner comes (at least amongst the texts analyzed in this project) to acknowledging the brutal oppression suffered by Black communities at the hands of white society. He even somewhat implicates white bystanders and their indifference to the intersectional racial oppression experienced by Nancy. Even with this seeming self-awareness, Faulkner still writes Nancy as dying at the hands of white society, the narrative perspective never having favored her outlook as opposed to the Compson family's. Molly is reduced to a stereotypical nagging wife from Lucas' perspective, and the story continually focuses on how Lucas has been

inconvenienced by Molly having been removed from their household, rather than Molly's own dehumanization and exploitation in Edmonds' assumed right to her time, labor, and body. Even Raby, who destroys the last remnants of the misdeeds of the Sutpen family, cannot do so without partaking in her own destruction. Her biracial identity becomes the marker of Thomas Sutpen's assault of her enslaved Black mother, rather than the horrid deed itself.

As a whole, it seems that Faulkner allows his white female characters, more so than his Black female characters, to experience friction with their roles as determined by southern white society. This lack of agency has implications beyond the literary – they reflect rhetorical and biased understandings of Black maternity and womanhood by larger white society. Although Faulkner's works are fiction, they do represent a time capsule of very real attitudes held by real people and which persist to this day. While no one person is responsible for the larger cultural connotations of Faulkner's rhetoric, his texts certainly contribute to a rhetoric of oppression directed towards Black maternal women within the context of the US South. To combat this, we must read against the grain and consider these gaps between cultural rhetoric and the historical record in order to better understand how this oppression is justified and employed within white society. We must also uplift Black voices, the only voices that can speak to the authentic experiences of being a Black woman in the US South.

Coda: "A Space Where the Self is Powerfully Remade"

The fight towards achieving reproductive justice persists into the modern era. Women of color continue to be mistreated in a birthing context at a disproportionate rate compared to their white counterparts. According to Griselda Rodriguez, "African American women die from pregnancy-related causes more often than other racial-ethnic groups, and have a fourfold greater risk of maternal death than non-Hispanic white women" (141). More than a simple statistic, these women were real, breathing human beings.

Tatia Oden French "entered a well-respected hospital to deliver her first child" (Gaskin and Gilkey 97), and because the doctor determined her to be overdue, "she was given Cytotec – a drug not FDA-approved for labor induction [...] Ten hours after being administered Cytotec, Tatia suffered severe complications, and an emergency C-section was performed. Both Tatia and her baby, Zorah, died in the operating room." Another harrowing story is that of Tameka McFarquhar, who "bled to death in her [...] apartment several days after giving birth. [...] Temeka's cause of death was placenta increta, meaning that *she was discharged from the hospital with the placenta inside her uterus* and the deaths of her and her daughter could have been avoided with proper medical care" (98; emphasis added). Chuniece Patterson died of a ruptured ectopic pregnancy in the same jail where another woman, Lucinda Batts, died "of the same complications" (101) over ten years prior to Patterson's death. During a C-section, Kalilah Roberson-Reese's breathing tube became dislodged, and she suffered "extensive brain damage" (102) because "medical staff failed to notice." Prior to the surgery, Kalilah had gone to the hospital, "complaining of leg and chest pains and shortness of breath but was repeatedly sent home." Akira Eady "suffered postpartum seizures and heart failure" (103) after giving birth. She "bled heavily after receiving an epidural and

complained of headaches" following her child's birth, but "[t]he hospital released her nevertheless, and she was brain-dead within four days." All of these untimely deaths occurred during the twenty-first century in association with modern institutionalized medical care within the United States.

While each individual story could be understood as isolated cases of medical malpractice, when looking at national statistics on maternal and infant health outcomes, an even bleaker picture takes shape. Nearly ten years ago, a study conducted by the California Department of Public Health determined that amidst rising maternal mortality rates overall within the state at the time, "African-American women [were] three times more likely than women of other racial groups to die from pregnancy-related causes, with 33.8 deaths per 100,000 live births" (Mitchell et al. 519). More recently, a study from late 2020 concluded that rates of shortened gestation, low birth weight, and infant mortality were 1.5-2 times greater amongst African American populations than among white Americans (Christian 319). On top of this, a study from the following year found that despite providing prenatal care (PNC) interventions to both Black and white low-income women, the Black women still suffered a higher rate of preterm birth complications, demonstrating that "adequate PNC alone [...] does not reduce the marked racial disparities in preterm birth" (Thurston et al. 101). The hospitals where these births are taking place exist within the same medical industrial complex that decried Black midwives as unsafe and unsanitary, and serve as a stark contrast to "countries where midwives function as the primary care providers for normal pregnancy and birth" which often have "perinatal morbidity and mortality rates [...] far lower than those [...] experience[d] in the United States" (Bonaparte and Joseph 182). Another recent study explores the numbers behind this statement, concluding that the maternal

mortality ratio (MMR) in the United States, determined to be 23.8 deaths per 100,000 live births is twice the MMR found in the United Kingdom and Canada (Bridges 1239). The study further dispels the notion that racial disparities in maternal health outcomes are caused solely by socioeconomic factors, claiming that “Black women with class privilege are dying at higher ratios than white women with comparable class privilege” (1251). The study also acknowledges maternal morbidity (severe life-threatening pregnancy or postpartum complications) rates being higher for Black women, as well as investigates US regional differences in maternal health outcomes:

> That three to four times as many black women die from pregnancy-related causes as white women hides that there is significant variation in racial disparities in maternal mortality across cities and states. [...] In Fulton County, Georgia, which includes Atlanta, the MMR for black women is ninety-four deaths per 100,000 live births, while the ratio for white women is ‘too insignificant to report at all.’ The MMR for black women in D.C. is one of the highest in the country; meanwhile, the MMR for white women in D.C. is the *lowest* in the country – disturbing statistics that reveal that ‘excellent care is apparently available but is not reaching all the people.’ [...] ‘In some areas of Mississippi, [...] the rate of maternal death for women of color exceeds that of Sub-Saharan Africa, while the number of White women who die in childbirth is too insignificant to report.’ Specifically, in Chickasaw County, Mississippi, 595 black women die from pregnancy-related causes for every 100,000 live births – a statistic that reveals that black women in the county would have a better chance at surviving birth if they lived in Kenya or Rwanda – [...] nations where the MMR is 400 and 320, respectively. (1249-1250)

Considering the above contemporary statistics on maternal and infant health outcomes, the real-life stories of Tatia, Zorah, Tameka, Chuniece, Lucinda, Kalilah, and Akira are unfortunately part of the rule, rather than the exception, when it comes to Black maternal health in the US.

Due to the terrifying outcomes described above, Jennifer C. Nash tackles the notion that "certain mothers – particularly black mothers – [are often used] as symbols of trauma and injury, of pain that can be mobilized for 'legitimate' political ends and social change" (701). However, Nash emphasizes the empowering aspects of Black motherhood: "It is in this cultural moment that black motherhood is both the space of crisis and loss as well as the space of redemption, a powerful and densely loaded site of political meaning" (703). For each of the devastating stories above, there exists another of new life, growth, and connection, "a space where the self is powerfully remade through the sacred bond between mother and child." Biany Pérez shares her experience of natural childbirth: "The path of vaginal and nonmedicated labor and birth allowed me to tap into my inner awareness, the site of power and pleasure known as the erotic" (109-110). After having heard about the traumas that can come with a hospital birth, Mariela Rodríguez decided to experience natural childbirth in her own home, recalling, "It was by far one of the highlights of labor – sitting naked in a kiddie pool in my writing room while we moaned and laughed together at the absurdity of the scene" (115). When it comes to the laboring process itself, she goes on to say, "It felt so good to scream!" (117), and at the end of the natural process, she was able to say, "I pulled my baby out of me. From one world into the next" (118). Stephanie Etienne speaks about her experience as a contemporary midwife, highlighting the reclamatory power in her work: "In an environment where women have experienced grave indignities and often

have very little choice about how their pregnancy or labor is 'managed,' our primary goal is to create space for choice and agency" (125). Christ-Ann Magloire is one of the few OBGYNs who "will deliver a breech baby" (162), thus allowing the birthing mother the autonomy to decide if she would like to experience vaginal delivery, as opposed to Magloire automatically scheduling the expectant mother for a C-section, as the majority of physicians would. Furthermore, she acknowledges that "[m]ost obstetricians treat birth as a disease that requires them to intervene" (163); however, Magloire employs a much more holistic approach to the birthing process. Nevertheless, more work must be done. As discussed in the previous paragraph, these success stories should be much more common, and Magloire's approach to maternal care should be more widespread than it is at present.

We must uplift homeplace. We must push back against the dehumanization faced by pregnant women of color. We must elevate voices with authentic experience, like those shared above. Faulkner and his works can allow us to view a snapshot of how white, male, southern culture was thinking of Black women, community, and culture and in turn, tell us how this culture justified its continued oppression of marginalized women. We must honor the legacy of care established by midwives and support models of care that bridge the gap between reproductive justice and actualized homeplace. Through this, we must always honor the three tenets of the reproductive justice movement – to "have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities" (SisterSong). Homeplace is a safe and sustainable community. As literary scholars, we must read against the grain when encountering marginalized characters represented within canonized white, male texts. We must make room for more Black voices within the literary canon in order to read about authentic homeplace. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) is one such text, but even

more contemporary examples, created within a post-reproductive justice movement context, exist. Brit Bennett's *The Mothers* (2016) explores the life of a young Black woman who had an abortion as a teenager, and now must return to her hometown following the death of her mother. Afia Atakora's *Conjure Women* (2020) follows a Black midwife working in the pre-Civil War US South and also explores mother-daughter dynamics. Nefertiti Austin's *Motherhood So White* (2019) is a memoir detailing the continued stigma faced by Black women when seeking reproductive and obstetric care. We must keep in mind the words and theories of Black feminist scholars and activists. Historical literary rhetoric matters, and through determining its complicated and frequently problematic nature, we can move closer to uplifting the stories and rhetoric of corrective, retrospective modern voices. Literature reveals much about humanity, and in understanding the legacy of our words, we can better understand ourselves.

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Vita

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