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In North Carolina, beaches have been considered “white” territory. These spaces are beautiful, natural landscapes that can provide healing and restoration for many. Yet, when black people enter this space, the dominant (white) culture is somehow surprised. This phenomenon is central to my research which focuses on a black beach community that (re)presents leisure spaces as sites of resistance.

My research study centers on the stories told by the residents of a black beach community, Ocean City, North Carolina. I spent my summers here as a child. This small community encompasses a one-mile portion of Topsail Island, North Carolina. It was founded in 1949 in the midst of the segregated South. And, these narratives present the stones of living under these conditions. In my dissertation I interpret stones metaphorically like the biblical stones of the Israelites. While these stones are each unique, they still represent a living tradition for the individual as well as the collective group because the stones are the stories of living memories. They demonstrate the rich, cultural education that took place within the black community. Their stories reveal how black communities like Ocean City, taught black folks how such spaces were essential to surviving in a dominant (white) society.

This study uses narrative theory in order to present the voices of black folks who are the descendants of kidnapped Africans. This study reveals their voices not only through the African tradition of storytelling, but also acknowledging the cultural literacy of black folks as valued by one another through a sense of community. This epistemology contradicts the dominant (white) culture of possessive individualism. So, their stories

are the stones that need to be told to future generations as a way to provide cultural knowledge as well as identity to the children of kidnapped Africans.

In this dissertation, I consider the narratives of four Ocean City residents. Two are living and two are deceased. The living narrators are the children of the deceased storytellers. Since I am a child of the Ocean City community, I knew all of these individuals and they knew me. While I was unable to ask the questions of the deceased, I still found rich nuances that are revealed in my research. With the two living narrators I asked them to tell me about Ocean City.

I analyzed each of these interviews using narrative research methodology. I identified several components: selectivities (a common trait amongst “trickster” characters), silences (evident in the signifying towards a white, female interviewer) and cultural framework of meaning (important when remembering that Ocean City survived and thrived although its physical and historical location was in the midst of the segregated South).

As a result, of these shared experiences, the narratives represent the continuity of an interpretive tradition. While each narrator tells an individual story, these stories are connected because of the stones or historical memories, namely the oppression of black folks. And, the stones reveal themselves as interpretive traditions.

The significance of this study is that while black folks have made significant social and economic advancements, they have not succeeded in carrying on the interpretive traditions with their children and grandchildren. I find that this is evident in today’s classroom as I teach the descendants of these kidnapped Africans, who seem disconnected from these stories. The legacy of stones as living traditions has the potential to heal all those whose humanity has been denied them in academia. If a

“sense of community” is encouraged in the classroom, then the “hope” for a more inclusive society will prevail.

STONES OF MEMORY: NARRATIVES FROM  
A BLACK BEACH COMMUNITY

by

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To my mother, Jo-Ann Cowan Wall and my husband, Michael W. Jackson who have both told me for years that I should write a book.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Hope W. Jackson, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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## CHAPTER I

### PROLOGUE

My research on Ocean City has taught me more about my great grandfather, Joseph F. Cowan, Sr. than I expected. He was an original owner of the North Carolina black beach community, Ocean City. However, the more I learned, the more questions I had not just about this beach, but about my grandfather and other members of my family. And, since he is deceased, I chose the next likely source, my mother. As the Cowan family archivist, she helped to fill in some of the gaps, but even her knowledge was limited. So, I decided to join an online ancestry website. And, like its commercials on television convey, I was amazed as I read the U.S. Census reports. I learned that according to an 1880 U.S. Census report, my maternal great-great grandparents, Edward and Harriet Cowan were farmers in the rural community of Abbeville, South Carolina (SC). My family archives support this. Still, I just as quickly became frustrated because I found no birth or death records for either of them. So, amazement quickly turned into frustration. U.S. Census records indicate that even the Cowans were unsure of their exact birthdates. Records suggest that Edward estimates March, 1857 while Harriet says March, 1859; but, nothing more specific is provided.

So, I decided to look to the family Bible because I learned that all the important family events were in that Bible, especially births, deaths and marriages. Here, I found one more answer. I learned that Edward Cowan died on March 21, 1908. However, there was no death date for Harriet. Nonetheless, I naively turned to the next logical place, the Vital Records Office for Abbeville County, SC. I found neither birth records

nor a marriage license either. Yet, my great-great grandparents told the 1900 Census worker that they had been married for 24 years. In other words, the state of SC did not acknowledge their births or their marriage. This is extremely disappointing for me as their great-great granddaughter. To me, their birth, death and marriage dates matter. However, to the dominant (white) culture, they don't. As far as the Vital Records Office is concerned, they never existed. Despite what public records show, my knowledge of my great-great grandparents is a (re)interpretation of what those records reflect. They did matter and they did exist. But these gaps in discovering my family lineage speak volumes. They are significant because discovering one's past is directly connected with self-identity. Sadly, this isn't just my story, but the story of many *generations* of black folks.

I believe like all parents, my great-great grandparents had high expectations for their eight children. This is evident because records show that they named two of their sons Lawyer Squire and Governor Moses. These names carry significance because they represent respectable positions in any community; they denote knowledge, authority and prominence. Perhaps Edward and Harriet named their sons that to instill future hopes and dreams in them. After all, they were two of the oldest children. Yet, with the naming of their youngest child, a son, named Effie, I begin to wonder if his name was an early sign of disillusionment at what they could realistically provide for their children. Coincidentally, Effie Cowan was my maternal great grandfather otherwise known as Joseph Franklin Cowan, Sr.

Edward and Harriet also appeared to own considerable amounts of land; land titles show that this fluctuated between as high as fifty acres and as few as two. They appeared to be active in a local black church called Saint Peters AME Church too. I

found several church programs from their Sunday worship services; this is also where they were buried. And while landowners usually inherit certain privileges, U.S. Census reports show that both Edward and Harriet answered *no* to two important questions. Can you read? And, can you write? I imagine their illiteracy is because they were likely slaves.

Census reports of 1880 and 1900 reveal that most of their children, who remained at home, were farm laborers. However, two sons indicated other occupations: butcher and hotel porter. Nonetheless, the U.S. Census reports also confirm that while Edward and Harriet were illiterate, so were their children too.

Commonly during the late 19th to early 20th century, northern missionaries came to the rural South assisting former slaves in their acclimation to their newfound freedom. In doing so, they offered educational opportunities to many black people, especially the chance to read and write. Since the black church was the heart of the black community where newly freed black people congregated celebrating freedom and God, missionaries probably visited Saint Peters AME Church. And, I imagine that a missionary probably provided them with information on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) founded for former slaves and their children. This is important in a historical context because the oldest HBCU, Cheyney University was founded in 1837 prior to the Civil War. While the other two HBCUs mentioned in my research were founded afterwards, Shaw in 1865 and Howard in 1867.

As a result of this presumed missionary visit, my grandfather, Effie Cowan, became a student at Shaw University. Family archives show that somewhere from Abbeville to Raleigh, not only did he become a student, but he changed his legal name too. Initially, I thought perhaps he wanted to rid himself of the “disillusionment” stigma,

especially with a name like Effie. However, my mother pointed out to me that Effie could quite possibly be a girl's name too. Nonetheless, 1910 U.S. Census records indicate his name is Effie, but by the time he graduated from Shaw in 1918, his new name was Joseph Franklin Cowan.

Furthermore, while attending Shaw, my great grandfather had several life changing experiences. He changed his name; and, he also met his first wife, Flossie Mae. She majored in Education and received her degree from Shaw too. My family records indicate that she was pursuing summer courses at Columbia University in Education after finishing Shaw. Joseph and Flossie Mae married in 1922. It was also during his time at Shaw that he decided to become a medical doctor. Sadly, Shaw University's medical school closed in 1918; this was the same year he graduated with his Diploma from the Academy (Gavins, 1998). Even so, he still managed to fulfill his dream and matriculated to Howard University's School of Medicine earning his medical degree in 1926.

Unexpectedly, in May 1927 while probably doing his residency at Harlem Hospital, Flossie Mae died shortly after giving birth to their son, Joseph Cowan, Jr. I believe this death was extremely traumatic for him. My mother has told me stories about my grandfather being left with aunts until he was two years old. As a young father, recent widower, and new doctor, Grandpa was unprepared to be a single father, especially during the 1920s. So, shortly after Flossie's death, he remarried and then sent for my grandfather to join him and his new wife, Annie Mae Williamson Cowan. Grandpa and Annie, or Mama as we called her, never had children.

Mysteriously, I did not learn about my maternal great grandmother until I was an adult. After Grandpa died, my family began cleaning out his house. In the basement,

they found a trunk. In it were photographs, jewelry, and many other personal items that had a name on them, Flossie Mae Thomas Cowan. While we questioned who she was, after looking at a photograph, we realized that she was my grandfather's biological mother. Her photographs looked just like me and my mother. She bore the same facial structure and thick hair. Since Grandpa was deceased, we knew there would be no any additional answers because at that time, Mama had Alzheimer's. So, we were left to imagine that he kept her things out of a sense of love. Yet, he remained secretive about her because of his sense of grief.

I have always found Grandpa's story intriguing. While he was a doctor, his profession didn't prevent him from suffering the residual effects of slavery. Like many black folks, he was unsure of his birthdate because he had no birth certificate. Only after applying for Social Security was he able to confirm his birthdate. And, to do so he requested U.S. Census records for proof of it. For years we celebrated his birthdate as September 27, 1899, yet U.S. Census records show it as February 4, 1896. I ask myself how this is possible. And, the answer quickly emerges as the silencing done to people who were already historically oppressed.

I trust Grandpa realized that if he had remained in Abbeville, farming would have been his only future. I imagine his parents realized it too, so they encouraged him to leave. Because he valued what his parents provided for him, I believe that he returned to a community similar to his homeplace because he loved what his parents provided for him during his childhood, a loving community. He intentionally chose a rural area to practice medicine and raise his family instead of remaining in a metropolitan area.

After his residency, he moved to rural Wilson, NC. I expect he knew that many of his patients would be unable to pay him, yet he consciously chose Wilson to practice

anyway. I believe this is not because he wanted to the title of being the only “Negro” doctor in the county, but instead he wanted to go to an area to aid black people who may not have received medical help otherwise (Gavins, 1998). And, he lived in this all-black community with a small office in a house down the street from his home for the remainder of his life.

Recently, I met an older black man from Wilson, NC named Gary W. I told him my great grandfather was from Wilson and I asked him if he knew Dr. Cowan. A huge grin spread across his face and he began sharing stories with me about “Doc.” He changed his voice to mimic Grandpa and even imitated his facial expressions. I laughed and realized that he probably knew him quite well. Gary shared that Grandpa was his mentor. He said that he greatly looked up to him because while he took care of him medically, he also guided him socially. Only after doing this research did I realize that being a black doctor in a rural black community was much more than providing black folks with medical assistance. It was also about being a community leader who inspired, especially the black youth. In Grandpa’s obituary it reads “his interest and concern for black youth inspired many to pursue professional careers, including medicine.” Gary’s story proves that Grandpa’s interest and concern extended beyond professional titles, but also into the living traditions of the black community.

I believe this same spirit that called him to provide aid to the black people of Wilson, also motivated him to participate in an all-black, beach community on Topsail Island, NC too. It was called Ocean City and he built a home there in 1951. On October 15, 1952, Hurricane Hazel destroyed it along with most of the Ocean City homes. Yet, he, like many other residents, (re)built his home.

While I don't remember Grandpa or Mama at the beach, I do remember my



Figure 1. Honey surf fishing.

maternal grandfather there, Joseph Cowan, Jr. And, Honey, my name for him, loved to fish. Many of my memories of him at Ocean City are surf fishing and pier fishing. He'd always walk around with this khaki fishing hat on with little hooks and lure fastened to it. Figure 1 shows Honey surf fishing with that same hat I described on his head.

Honey was amazing because not only was he a wonderful grandfather, but he was fun! I adored him. He loved doing things outside and that's where you wanted to be at the beach. In Figure 2, Honey and I are seated on the front steps of our beach home. I'm probably about four years old in the picture seated in front of him. If asked what his favorite things were



Figure 2. Honey and I posing for pictures on our porch steps.

he'd probably say, "Family and fishing." Ocean City is where I saw him enjoy both, especially fishing. I mean, who ever heard of someone fishing all night long! I hadn't until Honey showed me otherwise. He usually fished all night at the Ocean City Fishing Pier.

The Ocean City Fishing Pier was a prominent symbol of the Ocean City community. Honey spent a lot of time on this same pier and wherever he went, I went. I remember him "teaching" me how to pier fish. And, I didn't learn much because I always feared the pier. I was intimidated by its length because it stretched far out into the ocean (see my picture with the Ocean City pier in the background in Figure 3), but Honey always said the best fishing was from the end of it. He'd cast his line far out there, but I

couldn't because of my small stature. So, he tried to teach me an alternative way, but that required me standing on the railing of the pier and leaning over that same railing to cast my line. Needless to say, I kindly refused, so I usually tagged along with him to help or watch.



Figure 3. Me as a teenager at the beach.

One day, I realized that while we were out towards the end of the pier, I could feel it moving. It slowly swayed from side to side with the ocean tide and winds. I was terrified. I thought it was falling down. Honey just laughed and calmly explained why all piers did this. He said, "Hope, the pier must move with the currents of the ocean. If it remained fixed, it wouldn't survive the strength of the water."

It wasn't until recently while doing this research that I understood the depth of his explanation. Perhaps even back then, Honey was trying to teach me a life lesson using the pier metaphorically. However, it wasn't until I became an adult that I grasped his meaning. Like the pier, no one can remain fixed without self-destruction. While doing this research, I thought I knew about Ocean City. And, I did, but this study has changed me. What I thought I knew, I (re)learned. And, by doing so, Ocean City's beauty and significance has intensified for me.

## CHAPTER II

### FOREWORD

#### My Ocean City Story

When I was a child, going to Topsail during the summers was what you did. And once we crossed the drawbridge, the air conditioning in the car was turned off and the windows were opened to let in the fresh, salt air. I remember inhaling deeply and thinking, “We’re almost there.” As we pulled up to our family home, my father was always the first to exit the car and enter the house. I would begin collecting bags and luggage following behind him. He’d go to the circuit panel and flip the power on. Then, he’d get a long, iron tool and make his way outside to turn the water switch on in the yard, so we would have water in the house.



Figure 4. The street view of our Ocean City home.

I would make my way upstairs, put the bags and luggage down and begin to help my mother open the front door and windows. My favorite part, of course, was opening the front door that led to the screened porch facing the ocean. After doing that, I could freely exhale and take in the smell and beauty of the ocean water. This was Ocean City and during many summers, it was my home away from home.

I have encountered many people who think of North Carolina (NC) beaches as “whitewashed.” They share their beach experiences with me and casually mention how

surprised they are to hear my story. Commonly they say, “I never knew black people went to the beach.” I laugh because I have heard this more times than I can count. However, as a child, I found this statement strange; but as an adult, I realized that the assumption was that black people did not visit NC beaches. Not only did we not visit, but we definitely didn’t *own* property there. As I would try to explain how Ocean City was a community of black folks, looks of disbelief usually followed. Jacqueline Jones Royster (2000) refers to a similar reaction in her book *Traces of a Stream*. In it, she describes encounters with individuals after sharing her research on black women as, “indignation or embarrassment, or sometimes with a sense of what I have come to call deep disbelief . . . [saying] ‘I’ve never heard of [this].’ I have been compelled to tolerate this reaction as a truth” (p. 3).

However, my experiences at Ocean City are my truths because they are my lived experiences, my historical memories. Morrison (2008) writes, “facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot” (p. 72). While the dominant (white) culture may not see the significance in Ocean City, clearly the significance is in the *lack* of knowledge about communities like this one. Many people I encounter don’t think that black people visit the beach, fish there or own property there. Ocean City represents a (re)interpretation of “normal” perceptions told by its narrators. So, along with my own experiences, my research focuses on the language of Ocean City residents and (re)creating knowledge through the stories of these community members. And, these stories demonstrate how people (re)interpret and in the process (re)make meaning. They present alternative ways of knowledge.

### **Ocean City: More Than a Geographical Location**

Each of you is to take up a stone . . . to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' [T]ell them . . . [t]hese stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever. (NIV, Joshua 4.5-7)

My dissertation presents stories from the residents of a black beach community, Ocean City, North Carolina. These stories represent more than simple tales; they are the lived experiences told by the narrators who are (re)interpreting meaning through their living memories. As a result, their stories become living traditions that can be passed to future generations. Ocean City is much more than a geographical location, but a community with its own interpretive traditions, the historical memories of happiness that black folks were able to create despite living in the segregated South.

Although Topsail Island is twenty-six miles long, most people are unaware that Ocean City encompasses a one-mile stretch of the Topsail ocean and sound shoreline. I explain to people that I vacationed here for most of my life and they are shocked. Not only are North Carolina beaches perceived to be “white spaces,” but many question why would black people want to go the beach? My research addresses these and other “misconceptions” about black folks. And, so these stories of Ocean City (re)interpreted possibility for black folks as they were passed from one generation to the next. As a result of such (re)interpretation, possibility was unseen by the dominant (white) gaze. As such, the “unknown” represented hope for black folks.

My storytellers know that I am a child of Ocean City. As such, I believe that I am uniquely positioned as both listener and participant in this community. These storytellers allow me in because I already have “access to that interior life” (Morrison, 2008, p. 71). As the storytellers talk, I am invited into their story as a participant because of my

familiarity with Ocean City. So, I believe that “I must trust my own recollections,” but “I must also depend on the recollection of others” (Morrison, 2008, p. 71). Together, our stories reveal both individual and group identity. “It’s kind of a literary archeology: on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to (re)construct the world that these remains imply” (Morrison, 2008, p. 71).

Yet, I found it difficult to analyze my own Ocean City story. Initially, I guessed that perhaps it was because I am an educator and in positivist “scholarship” objectivity is encouraged, while subjectivity is discouraged. Then, I realized that it isn’t just me as an educator, but it is also about traditional education that silences the voices of the “oppressed.” I was “seldom invited to participate in the discourse even when [I was] the topic” (Morrison, 2008, p. 71). And, after (re)reading Toni Morrison’s “The Site of Memory” essay, I realized she, as a black woman, encountered the same issue. However, we both realized that “storytelling is the way to put shards together, to (re)construct identity, community and tradition” (Casey, 1995-1996, p. 216). Not only that, but my in my study I (re)define “scholarship” through narrative research.

Reversing the academic trend toward a deterministic economic analysis of education and reproductive cultural studies of schooling, the new narrative research documents the creative ability of ordinary people to construct “free space” (Evans & Boyte, 1986) in an aesthetically, ethically, and politically bankrupt world. (Casey, 1995-1996, p. 214)

Thus, my (re)interpretation of Morrison’s essay helped me to (re)acknowledge my story. I was able to appreciate not just others’ Ocean City stories, but my own too. So, my story as a researcher and as a participant is my text as well as my truth. Morrison (2008) writes that a text

should be beautiful, and powerful, but it should also work. It should have something in it that enlightens; something in it that opens the door and points the way. Something in it that suggests what the conflicts are, what the problems are. But it need not solve those problems because it is not a case study, it is not a recipe. (pp. 58–59)

And I believe I have revealed black folks' truth in my study. All of the texts in my dissertation share experiences about black people at the beach, but more importantly, tales of black folks' traditions as well. Moreover, my analyses are "my route to a (re)construction of a world, to an exploration of an interior life that" are omitted by the dominant (white) culture, but still reveals Ocean City's "truth" (Morrison, 2008, p. 74).

Today, North Carolina can be described as a progressive state because of its history with race relations. However, North Carolina has come a long way. The historical context of both North Carolina and Wilmington is important when discussing Ocean City. Ocean City was founded only fifty-one years after the 1898 Wilmington Race Riots.<sup>1</sup> This fact remained central in my study.

While North Carolina had fewer large plantations than other states in the south, it still produced a significant amount of the cash crop, cotton. These large plantations usually owned twenty or more slaves and these planters dominated the state politics of NC because of their larger slaveholdings (Foner, 1988). While small farmers, yeomen, were unable to have as much political authority because of smaller slaveholdings and non-production of a cash crop (Foner, 1988). Nonetheless, "slavery affected society everywhere in the South, and even mountaineers shared many attitudes with planters, beginning with a commitment to white supremacy" (Foner, 1988, p. 12).

And Wilmington was affected by these racist sentiments and political attitudes, mainly because these crops grown were transported through NC's major port city,

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, "The Wilmington Connection."

Wilmington. After Reconstruction, Wilmington's race relations were more civil for black people because of its bi-racial political, local governance. However, a white culture of fear regressed Wilmington and North Carolina politics. White fear triggered the 1898 Wilmington Race Riots. As a result, black folks suffered dispossession and murder at the hands of white people. This event caused the repression of the socio-political voice of black folks for decades afterwards.

Nonetheless, some black people remained in Wilmington. And while their voices were silenced in local governance, they remained strong within the black communities. These black folks knew that within their black community, they mattered. By (re)telling the lived experiences of the 1898 Race Riots to the black children, the community learned to (re)make their own histories. While dominant (white) culture refers to the Wilmington Race Riot as being started by black people, the stories of the survivors (re)interprets those events. Gavins (1998) writes, "William Childs was a pupil at Wilmington's Peabody School in the 1920's . . . [He said,] 'There was . . . a lot of information about it. But they [black survivors] did not like to talk about it.' Consequently [Childs] . . . heard little about the "*white revolt*" (p. 196). Black Wilmingtonians overcame the horror of white violence by surreptitiously getting an education, opening their own businesses and recognizing the possibility in the unseen. And, I believe because of their ancestors' lived experiences, they believed in the possibility of Ocean City.

Ocean City's founders realized the significance in what had long been denied to them, oceanfront access. So, when the opportunity to create a black beach community became more than "what if," they seized it. However, the historical context of Ocean City's founding in 1949 in the segregated South could not be overlooked. And, the stories of these Ocean City residents demonstrate not only the role of Ocean City as an

interpretive community, but their individual roles in the (re)interpretation of this too.

These storytellers reveal that they did not participate simply for themselves, but they did so to (re)interpret the possibility for future black generations too; and, these are the “stones” of Ocean City.

One question that someone asked me before I began researching was: What is the significance of this beach community? Is its story still relevant? More personal questions for me were: How has it survived in a post-segregation society? How is it still threatened? How can it continue to survive in today’s society? So, I decided to not only ask myself these questions, but also to pose these questions to the texts.

In Chapter I, I discuss the historical context of Wilmington and Ocean City. I reveal how many original Ocean City owners were black Wilmingtonians whose ancestors had survived the 1898 Wilmington Race Riots. This is quite significant when placed in the context of Ocean City’s founding of 1949. Further, I also discuss several leisure spaces for black Wilmingtonians in geographical proximity to the ocean. I not only reveal the role of race, but also economics.

In Chapter II, I highlight the origins of three black beach communities: Martha’s Vineyard, Shell Island, and Seabreeze. I juxtapose these black beaches and explain the myth of beaches being white only as well as for exclusively for the wealthy. Further, I reveal Ocean City as an alternative, black space because of its origins as well as its role as a true black *beach* community. I demonstrate that Ocean City welcomes all black folks with its “sense of community.”

In Chapter III, I begin my analyses with Caronell Chestnut, one of the founders of Ocean City. In my analysis, I reveal a rich story that she shares about Ocean City. However, I also realize the importance of the dialogue between Chestnut and her

primary interviewer, namely the white woman who I call “Miss Anne.”<sup>2</sup> Their dialogue reveals itself as banter similar to the dynamics of black and white women of the white feminist movement. I also emphasize the importance of rhetorical listening for a narrative interviewer which “Miss Anne” reveals herself not to be. In the process, I reveal Chestnut through her language as a black feminist who continues to emphasize not only the collective story of Ocean City, but also the African ancestral voice of black women within black communities as mothers and othermothers.

In Chapter IV, I analyze the language of Dr. Leroy Upperman. My analysis reveals him as a trickster character found in many African and slave folktales. At times, he seems to enjoy “playing” with his white interviewer through signifying and utilizing “the joke.” And my reference to “the joke” specifically references black humor or “laughing at the man” (Levine, 1977, p. 300). Levine (1977) furthers explaining black laughter as jokes that trivialize nobility while simultaneously advancing the inferior which is usually a black person. Many times Upperman’s language says one thing, but I (re)interpret him to mean another. And, when Upperman’s white interviewer appears to misinterpret his meanings, he corrects her by using his own knowledge of her Canadian culture to emphasize the importance of listening and learning.

Finally, in Chapter V, I interview and analyze the stories of Linda Upperman Smith and Kenneth S. Chestnut, Sr. Both are second generation Ocean City residents and the children of Dr. Leroy Upperman and Caronell Chestnut. The two of them spent summers at Ocean City. My analyses demonstrate they valued Ocean City as a “safe” space where they could breathe freely. Smith and Chestnut emphasize Ocean City as

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<sup>2</sup> I call the female interviewer “Miss Anne” because of the way she communicates with Caronell Chestnut. The name Miss Anne is a reference to white women who historically have oppressed black women and in my analysis, I believe Diane Logan or “Miss Anne” is attempting to oppress Chestnut. See further explanation in Chapter III.

safe from the “outside” segregated society. My analyses highlight specific examples of inside/outside from both of them where I believe their double consciousness is revealed. Finally, their language shows the importance of Ocean City's history and culture remaining both known and preserved by future generations. And, this storytelling tradition represents the historical memories, or stones of Ocean City.

### **Narrative Research**

In my study, I use narrative analysis and define it as the process of collecting and analyzing of people's stories. Reissman (1993) writes, narrative research “refers to talk organized around consequential events. A teller in a conversation takes a listener into a past time or ‘world’ and recapitulates what happened then to make a point” (p. 69).

Moreover, narrative analysis is an alternative research method that allows answers to the traditional questions posed by the dominant (white) culture. In my study, the language of these stories becomes more about interpretation rather than information. Those who are usually ignored and silenced, i.e., black folks are now heard by their narratives. The stories of these Ocean City residents provide a space that shows that their words do matter.

Casey (1993) writes,

Rather than interrogating a narrative using concepts from an academic discipline, researchers are now discovering that they need to attend to its internal patterns of priorities . . . [each story] is highly constructed text structured around a cultural framework of meaning . . . the principal value of a narrative is that its information comes complete with evaluations, explanations, and theories and with selectivities, silences, and slippage that are intrinsic to *its* [emphasis added] representations of reality. (p. 234)

The black community's cultural framework of meaning is essential in understanding Ocean City's significance. Ocean City was established by blacks during the period of

segregation in the south. This is Ocean City's cultural framework of meaning. The Ocean City narrators reveal what it was like for them to live under these conditions. These storytellers share their concerns, joys, and sadness through their lived experiences. And, by collecting these stories, I have provided a space for their voices to be heard. And my analyses reveals that "[black folks] were . . . [likely] beaten down, but they were not broken, and they actually managed to accumulate strengths and to (re)create themselves . . . they emerged . . . more whole than anyone could ever have expected" (Royster, 2000, p. 113).

In my analyses, we can hear these black survivors of the segregated South through narrative analysis. While narrative analysis is collecting and analyzing stories, it is necessary to understand that these stories are told by a historically oppressed people. These black folks are descendants of kidnapped Africans. So, many of the nuances identified in their stories represent specific characteristics that are unique to their African ancestors. I believe these characteristics are a result of their African ancestral voices. In my study, these narrators' language includes, black humor, "signifying," a "sense of community," along with "othermothering" in their stories. These black cultural nuances provide a rich, perspective that addresses several critical factors in black cultural literacy (Casey, 1993, p. 20). And, by acknowledging these, I recognize a connection between these characteristics and narrative terminology.

For example, Casey (1993) writes that "the principal value of a narrative is that its information comes complete with evaluations, explanations, and theories and with *selectivities*, *silences*, and *slippage* that are intrinsic to *its* representations of reality" (p. 234). In my analyses, I indicate how these storytellers used both components of narrative theory with African American discourse. I believe that these narrators use

selectivity, silence as well as slippage as tools for survival in the segregated South. Selectively, they tell about different experiences of enduring various hurricanes at Ocean City. Although they do describe the devastation of these storms, they highlight their resilience to always (re)build. And, their choice to (re)build represents their determination to survive despite the fact that they knew whites didn't want them to.

Ocean City residents also demonstrate silence and slippage. The first generation Ocean City elders use silence by (re)interpreting how to answer questions of their white interviewers. When Caronell Chestnut is asked about what racist resistance she encountered while establishing Ocean City, she doesn't answer in the "traditional" manner. Instead, she hesitates and smiles. And, both are done silently. Finally, Chestnut does answer, but she does so indirectly by signifying,<sup>3</sup> another feature of black people. Her indirect response to the resistance (re)constructs the question by silencing it making the (white) gaze power-"less."

Chestnut also employs slippage by indirectly answering with a contradiction, another example of signifying. Since this was a black, beach community founded in 1949, the vandalism was likely done by whites who did not want blacks there. I know that Chestnut knows this and so does her white, female interviewer. However, Chestnut "flips" the expected answer and this is the contradiction. Instead, she discusses the backlash that a *white* man, Edgar Yow, endured while helping to establish Ocean City. Thus, Chestnut demonstrates to her white interviewer that the vandalism was insignificant because we still "got ovuh" (Smitherman, 1986). In the end, we, the black folks, won because *we* are still here.

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<sup>3</sup> Signifying is an African American oral tradition of using language to convey an element of indirection or infer a hidden message. See Kernan-Mitchell (1973).

My dissertation analyzes four individual texts of first generation and second generation Ocean City residents. The first generation homeowners, Caronell Chestnut<sup>4</sup> and Dr. Leroy Upperman, were collected by others. This becomes evident and significant in my analyses. Both interviews were done in their Wilmington homes. Today, both are deceased. Caronell Chestnut's story was a videorecording facilitated by CreatiVideo Productions, one woman and one man. It is approximately thirty minutes of rich, verbal interplay between Chestnut and her interviewers.

Dr. Leroy Upperman<sup>5</sup> was interviewed as part of the *Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South* through the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. He along with other black Wilmington residents who were major participants in improving the race relations in Wilmington, NC were chosen for this project. Upperman's interview is lengthy, approximately two and a half hours long.

The second generation Ocean City homeowners were the children of Caronell Chestnut and Dr. Leroy Upperman, respectively. I interviewed Kenneth S. Chestnut, Sr., son of Caronell Chestnut, and Linda Upperman Smith, daughter of Dr. Leroy Upperman in their Ocean City homes. I felt that analyzing Chestnut and Smith while juxtaposing them with a parent would provide meaningful results for my analyses, and it did. Chestnut and Smith were both asked "Tell me about Ocean City." This unstructured, open-ended question "[gives] greater control to the respondents" (Reismann, 1993, p. 55). And, as they freely shared their stories, I "listen[ed] with a minimum of interruptions"

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<sup>4</sup> Material from the N.C. Division of Archives and History "Courtesy of the North Carolina State Archives."

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Leroy Upperman's (Box MT14) narrative was obtained through Duke University Library's "Behind the Veil: Documenting the African American Life in the Jim Crow South" Oral History Project.

(Reissman, 1993, p. 34). And, as I listened, I collected their responses with an audio recorder.

While the first generation narrators proved to be challenging, I believe it was because I was not their interviewer. However, I did interview the second generation residents. I imagine that I was able to discern various nuances in all of their stories because of my story-centered, researcher-centered approach coupled with my own shared experiences of Ocean City. My aim is to *allow “culture [to] ‘speak itself’ through [these] . . . individual[s]’ stor[ies]”* (Reissman, 1993, p. 5).

I cannot ignore my personal connection with Ocean City; I embrace it. I chose this community to be the central landscape for my dissertation because “[t]his is my historical life” (Morrison, 2008, p. 66). It is my story too. Today, my family still remains landowners there.

### **The “Stones”**

I use narrative theory when I teach African American literature at a Historically Black College (HBCU). I teach from a story-centered approach. I welcome my students’ experiences while analyzing literature. I believe that today’s education tries to separate lived experiences from the text. And, learning is difficult enough, especially if those connections between text and personal experiences are not encouraged. So, just like how I (re)interpret this in my classroom, I apply the same pedagogy to my dissertation. Like my students connecting to the literary authors we read, I am “connected” to the Ocean City storytellers and that relationship colors my interpretation of “the story itself” (Reissman, 1993, p. 1). Using this “approach g[ives me and my students] prominence to [my and their own] human agency and imagination” (Reissman, 1993, p. 5).

I was challenged since these were four different men and women of two generations, so their stories would obviously be different. Yet, I was able to establish patterns based on similarities as well as differences. Sometimes their voices represented an individual and at times, their voices represented a collective too. Sommer in Casey (1995–1996) writes,

[S]ingularity achieves its identity as an extension of the collective. The singularity represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole. (p. 221)

All of my storytellers referred to Ocean City by emphasizing its “sense of community.” And, this patterned, collective “sense” represents an interpretive community. Its legacy should still be shared; Smith and Chestnut recognize that Ocean City will never be an all-black, beach community again. They both emphasize that Ocean City’s text should be passed down from one generation to the next. I believe the significance in these traditions dates back to the history of black folks as kidnapped Africans. And, as such, the only “thing” *we possessed was our stories*, our traditions. I juxtapose Ocean City’s interpretive traditions with the biblical stones of the Israelites. These living memories demonstrate the survival of a people.

### **Transcription (Re)making the Researcher**

For my transcriptions, I chose a basic and simple approach. I typed and when I heard pauses that sounded like final statements, I added final punctuation marks. And, when my narrators chuckled or laughed softly I used (chuckle or laugh) or laughed loudly with (LAUGH). I also indicated in my transcriptions when a narrator made me laugh too. I noted a slight pause as (pause) as well as significant pauses with (PAUSE). Reissman identifies transcribing to photography. “Simply stated, we are interpreting and creating

texts at every juncture, letting symbols stand for or take the place of the primary experience, to which we have no direct access” (Reismann, 1993, p. 15). Therefore, the transcriptions are also my interpretation of what I heard and recalled.

I transcribed the shorter stories, and hired an online transcription service for the longer narratives. In order to preserve the integrity of the stories, after receiving the transcriptions, I listened to them while reading the transcriptions and added any verbal nuances that emphasized certain “common verbal patterns” (Casey, 1993, p. 26). These nuances further added to my interpretation of language used by the storytellers.

Through my reading and (re)reading of these texts, my perspective continuously fluctuated and was (re)made. Moreover, my interpretation as well as my (re)interpretation of the text intensified. What initially may have seemed like a storytelling event became something much more for me. This process involved not only reflection, but by encouraging continual (re)interpretation, it remained fluid and never ending. This is important because by using this methodology, not only was I continually (re)made in this process, but through my (re)interpretation, so were the living traditions of the Ocean City community. And, this is indicative of what an interpretive community is. And, the significance of this process is that it remains always evolving.

### **Dissertation Overview**

If today’s classrooms were to embrace learning by encouraging stories that revealed living traditions, such as the ones revealed by these Ocean City narrators, students could learn to appreciate one another. In turn, they could become liberated through shared experiences of the past and renewed by the possibility of the future. Their learning would never be finished because dialogue would always be present. And, Ocean City affirms that a key to transforming education is historical memories. Bakhtin

in Casey (1993) writes, "There is neither a first word nor a last word. The contexts of dialogue are without a limit. They extend into the deepest past and the most distant future . . . for [meanings] will always be renewed" (p. 23).

**CHAPTER III**  
**“THE WILMINGTON CONNECTION”**

**Stories of the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot**

Lucille Williams, a Wilmingtonian, owned property at Ocean City. Born in 1907, she was raised in Wilmington. Her father arrived in Wilmington six months prior to the infamous 1898 Wilmington Race Riot. When interviewed for the Duke University’s “Behind the Veil” Oral History Project she recalls the stories she heard as a child,

I had some old friends who talked about it. . . Carrie Garrison, she’s passed now. Talked quite a bit about it to me. . . . She was an adult when the Riot occurred in 1898. And my father was here, but he never talked about it.

Well—(hesitation). There was a newspaper then that Negroes that was ran by a family named the Manleys. And, I understand—(hesitation) something was written about some colored man being friendly with white women and the Manleys answered them in their paper about white women that were courting Negro men. And, of course, the Manleys had to leave town because of what they said in that newspaper. And, when the Riot occurred, (hesitation) Negroes that had had some plan [or voiced concerns regarding motives for] . . . the riot had to leave town. And, Judge George Armond Scott of Washington DC I’m told—that those Negro men had had some part in starting the riot—had to stay in the cemetery overnight to get out of town.<sup>6</sup>

Prior to November 10, 1898, Wilmington was “. . . the largest and most important city of the Old North State . . . Wilmington was [also] was one of the best cities for blacks prior to the massacre of 1898” (Prather, 1998, p. 16). Many prestigious blacks held local political offices. “In 1897 . . . there were three blacks on the ten-member board of aldermen, the city’s most important elected body” (Prather, 1998, p. 16). Also, black

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<sup>6</sup> Mrs. Lucille Williams’s (Box MT14) narrative was obtained through Duke University Library’s “Behind the Veil: Documenting the African American Life in the Jim Crow South” Oral History Project.

people were successful business owners in Wilmington enjoying, “complete monopoly . . . in the barber trade: twenty of the twenty-two barbers listed in [Wilmington’s] city directory were black” (Prather, 1998, p. 17). Not only were they businessmen, but also skilled artisans such as “mechanics, furniture makers, jewelers and watchmakers, painters, plasterers, plumbers, blacksmiths, stonemasons, brickmasons and wheelwrights” (Prather, 1998, p. 17). These industrious citizens made up a majority of Wilmington’s population totaling 11,324 out of Wilmington’s city population of 20,055 (Prather, 1998).

Like many scholars, I would argue that Wilmington’s economic status was stable because of its progressive politics. The racial divide had been forfeited for the economic strength for all races of all of its citizens. Many citizens were politically active and most blacks were registered as Republicans. Under the Reconstruction era, Wilmington residents also benefited from its location as a sea port. This brought jobs, businesses and other stabilizing economic growth factors to the city. More importantly, while many were African American, approximately 44% were white, benefiting from Wilmington’s growth during the late 19th century. “Country folk referred to [Wilmington] as ‘the big city’ and admired its electric lights and streetcars at a time when North Carolina was still a predominantly rural state . . .” (Prather, 1998, p. 16). And, these individuals weren’t just Blacks, but also white men who were Populists and believed that in order for the U.S. to progress, “. . . class interests [superseded] . . . racial solidarity and formed a working alliance with the Republicans, the preponderance of whom were Blacks” (Prather, 1998, p. 18). Hence, Wilmington became the hope of possibility through interracial political collaboration as well as elite class solidarity. And, if racial

discrimination could be eradicated in a city like Wilmington, then perhaps such progressive tenets could disseminate into other facets in society across the U.S.

However, many white Democrats saw Republicans and Populists as threatening. Elite whites began to see their way of life being threatened. They didn't want equal distribution of wealth, especially with black Wilmingtonians. After all, these men were former slaveholders as well as direct descendants of slaveholders. Stephen Kantrowitz (1998) writes, "Though the slave system rested upon a bedrock of violence, masters primarily sought the orderly production of rice and tobacco and cotton; they wanted to work their slave laborers, not kill them" (pp. 98–99). Kantrowitz continues by alluding to the plantation system in the imagination of the slaveholder as a large, extended family with the slaveholder as the father and the slaves as his children.

[S]laves were essentially childlike, incapable of higher reasoning. . . . Such 'children,' they declared, needed the combination of kindness and discipline that only a 'parent,' usually a father could provide . . . [Thus,] the plantation household became, in his imagination, a peaceable kingdom in which subject and sovereign alike had important roles to play. . . . Though many slave holders liked to think of themselves as patient and benevolent patriarchs, the terms of their patience and benevolence were not up for negotiation . . . . The reciprocal terrors of punishment and insurrection [as well as violence]—not paternalist myths of reciprocal obligation—lay at the heart of antebellum Southern life. (pp. 99–100)

This belief was more than a philosophy; it was a way of life ingrained in the culture of the antebellum South. And, Wilmington's progressive political nuances shook this reality to its core. Prior to November 1898, all Wilmingtonians,

[B]lacks and whites more commonly walked the same streets, lived in the same neighborhoods, and patronized the same shops. Blacks also held considerable political power. In 1897, for example, almost one third of the ten-member board of aldermen were black . . . . Other public offices held by blacks included justice of the peace, deputy clerk of court, superintendent of streets, and even coroner (Prather, 1998, p. 16).

For white Democrats, blacks were going too far when they believed that like children, they would ever be equal to their parents (i.e., the white Democrats). So, like the patriarchal, Southern antebellum slaveholder, these Democrats implemented a strategy to exact their dominance, even if fear or violence was required. Consequently, a white supremacy campaign began under the auspices of eradicating Negro domination while restoring “[g]ood white government” with the cooperation of these white elite Democrats (Prather, 1998, p. 20).

In order to dismantle the racial cooperation of the Fusionists, these white elite Democrats begin propagandizing their opposition to “shar[ed] government” (Prather, 1998, p. 21). Rhetoric insinuated

that evil times had followed as a consequence of turning over local offices to blacks: ‘Homes have been invaded, and the sanctity of woman endangered. Business has been paralyzed and property rendered less valuable. The majesty of law has been disregarded and lawlessness encouraged.’ Such conditions were ‘wrought with a combination of Republican and Populist leaders.’ The Democratic Party promised to correct these abuses and restore security once more to the ‘white women of the state.’ (Prather, 1998, p. 21)

Such propaganda was spouted all over North Carolina to instigate a fury of white supremacy. White elites made appearances at political rallies, dinners and other social events stating,

The Anglo-Saxon planted civilization on this continent and wherever this race has been in conflict with another race, it has asserted its supremacy and either conquered or exterminated the foe. This great race has carried the Bible in one hand and the sword in the other. (Prather, 1998, p. 26)

Dixiecrats were issuing threats of violence against anyone who stood in the way of their agenda. Moreover, they had a cavalry of white supremacists, known as the Red Shirts to enforce the threats made.

Red Shirts terrorized blacks and their white allies across the eastern part of North Carolina. . . several citizens have been intimidated and terrorized by threats of violence to their persons and their property until they were afraid to . . . cast . . . a vote at the ballot box. (Prather, 1998, p. 27)

Likewise, this violent intimidation was enough to discourage Republican and Populist candidates from seeking new offices as well as re-election in current ones. So, unsurprisingly, Democrats “won,” local and state political offices; they issued an ultimatum to the successful black businessmen of Wilmington stating that “Interracial politics end [and that the black] newspaper ‘ceased to be published’ and ‘its editor banished from the city’” (Prather, 1998, p. 30) giving the African American leaders twelve hours to respond.

When these newly “elected” white Democrats didn’t receive a timely response, they amassed a lynch mob and proceeded to burn black businesses and homes while simultaneously murdering blacks in the streets of Wilmington. Thus, in November 1898, “Armed columns of white business leaders and working men seized the majority-black city of Wilmington by force . . . two days before the massacre, Democrats captured Wilmington’s elections by fraud and the threat of violence” (Tyson & Cecelski, 1998, p. 4). To date, no accurate number of these unfortunate victims is known. Eyewitness accounts provide a death toll range from seven to 100 dead blacks.

Those Blacks who survived did so because they hid in the swamps, cemeteries and woods of Wilmington (Gilmore, 1998, p. 86). Once the mob had disbanded, many blacks chose to leave. Lucille Williams states, “The Manleys had to leave town . . . [and] Judge Scott never returned to Wilmington until I was teaching in a new school.”<sup>7</sup> A new Wilmington had been born out of terror and murder. This new Wilmingtonian culture

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<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Lucille Williams’s (Box MT14) narratives were obtained through Duke University Library’s “Behind the Veil: Documenting the African American Life in the Jim Crow South” Oral History Project.

celebrated white supremacy and kept blacks muted in an atmosphere of silence and subordination with the threat of death looming in the air.

Despite that, many Blacks remained and learned to “accept” the new life resulting from the politics of the Dixiecrats in the segregated South. After the massacre, the Republicans progressive political power was no match for the racist Dixiecrats signaling the emergence of a newer kind of dominant (white) culture. These powerful Democrats manipulated, “white solidarity into a litmus test of manhood and honor that white men dared not fail . . . [in the] intimidation of both blacks and whites . . . [where] [f]ew communities escaped racial terrorism” (Tyson & Cecelski, 1998, p. 5). This was the new Wilmington—one that meant Blacks (re)learning how to survive in a place they called home—now located in the heart of segregated South.

### **Effects of the 1898 Wilmington Massacre**

The 1898 Wilmington Massacre was felt by Blacks nationwide. While Democratic whites called it “justice”; many suspected otherwise including white North Carolinians, but simply concluded that this new political entity had to be legitimate because it was “organized by the most powerful and affluent people in North Carolina,” white elites (Haley, 1998, p. 208). The violence of the massacre demonstrated to Blacks that they weren’t protected under the 14th amendment of the U.S. Constitution because not state or federal intervention occurred in Wilmington. Many letters were written to President William McKinley as well as to the NC Governor Daniel Russell protesting the events of November 10th, but both politicians responded with silence.

Moreover, “White clergy and the religious press anointed the Wilmington revolution and encouraged white North Carolina to go even further by disenfranchising black voters” (Haley, 1998, pp. 208–209). “The News and Observer asked ‘sensible

Negroes' to support the amendment" aimed at blacks who didn't vote for their own disenfranchisement (Haley, 1998, p. 219). So, newly elected North Carolina legislators followed through with many clergymen's suggestions and by 1900, the U.S. Constitutional 15th amendment had been repealed by the NC legislation "and white supremacists interpreted its passage as a permanent memorial to the campaign of 1898" (Haley, 1998, p. 219). The state of North Carolina had revoked the federal rights of its black citizens.

After the Wilmington campaign's success, other southern states planned to disenfranchise their black citizens as well. Unsurprisingly, the same individuals who were 'successful' in NC, consulted with other states on how to also conduct successful strategies against their black citizens advising "Georgians to be well armed and prepared to use violence similar to that in Wilmington" (Haley, 1998, p. 220).

Unsurprisingly, Georgia followed a similar pattern with the 1906 Atlanta riot as well as the disenfranchisement of black voters in Georgia (Haley, 1998, p. 220).

The Jim Crow subjugation of black North Carolinians not only included suffrage, but service on juries, transportation services, as well as establishing segregated schools. The effects of 1898 Wilmington resonated throughout the state of North Carolina systematically dismantling the democratic citizenry of its black residents. The despotism of the segregated South was now a permanent facet of NC culture that included colored and white signs as constant reminders of inferiority. Kenneth Chestnut provides a story of Jim Crow living when he states, "I remember when I was a kid, and I must've been six years old, or something like that, but I knew I was in the segregated South. I knew that much. I knew I couldn't go to Woolworth's and get a hotdog" (personal communication, 2013).

Recalling her youth in Durham ca. 1910–1926, activist Pauli Murray declares:

We were bottled up and labeled and set aside—sent to the Jim Crow car, the back of the bus, the side door of the theater, the side window of a restaurant. We came to know that whatever we had was always inferior . . . It seemed as if there were only two kinds of people in the world—They and We—White and Colored. The world revolved on color and variations of color (as cited in Gavins, 1998, p. 193).

These designations of inferiority reminded Blacks of their subservient positions within society no matter their occupation, education, or economic status. Dr. King denounced segregation by writing, “All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority” (King, 2004, p. 1900). Once again, Blacks were treated like animals or second-class citizens.

### **Surviving in the Segregated South**

Despite Jim Crow, “[Blacks] have been persistent and imaginative in devising ways to demand recognition of their humanity” (Chafe, 1998, p. 281). Survivors of the Massacre remained determined to be seen as deserving of the same rights and opportunities as their white counterparts. They managed to (re)assemble some sort of life for themselves as well as their families. Many were able to find skilled work because white laborers weren’t as good as the black workers they replaced. Local white business owners complained that white laborers “were not as hard working, tractable or literate as blacks” (Honey, 1998, p. 177). As a result, the demand for the black labor force was re-invigorated. Such employment opportunities provided blacks with the ability to support their families, but without political voice (Tyson & Cecelski, 1998).

[Nonetheless, they] . . . responded to Jim Crow by pursuing an array of community-building activities to soften segregation’s harshest edges and build

autonomy and self-respect. Within 'autonomous institutions'—including family, education, religious cultural expression, labor, business, and politics—blacks built a sense of hope. (Gavins, 1998, p. 194)

Furthermore, I argue that Blacks always recognized their citizenship as Americans, especially these Wilmingtonians. And, as American citizens, they believed in the fundamental, democratic principle of landownership.

Blacks recognized that property and education were key tenets to improving the African American community. Mitchell (2001) delineates,

[Within] African American communities . . . [L]andownership promotes community well-being. [It] has been correlated with increased civic participation, psychological well-being, and an enhanced sense of community . . . [L]andownership can also benefit families and communities regardless of any measurable economic benefits to particular individuals. Even those extended community members who 'return home' . . . may draw psychological strength from the very existence of the rooted community. (p. 539)

Rouse (1996) indicates that many Blacks believed this and advocated for black landownership.

Margaret Washington [Booker T. Washington's wife] demonstrated a commitment to the mass cultural value of "black self-determination" and supported the attainment of black economic independence through property ownership . . . It was vital that blacks become economically "free and clear," and "outright" landownership was the first step . . . It is difficult to understand southern African-American culture without grasping this concept of personhood through land-ownership. (Rouse, 1996, pp. 33–34)

In each of the stories I obtained, the subject of landownership is mentioned. One narrative in particular stood out to me because her father was a survivor of the 1898 Wilmington Massacre. Yet, she reveals that he didn't cower to the tenets of segregation regarding keeping blacks "in their places." Mrs. Williams explains, "After slavery, my father bought one of the first lots that was the Love Plantation. He built the first house

and we were the first family to live in Love Grove” (personal communication, 1993). Landownership remained important to Lucille Williams’s father who survived the events of November 10, 1898. “A major priority of [Mary] Washington’s was to teach the . . . [blacks] how to move from physical freedom to individual or group economic and cultural liberation through landownership” (Rouse, 1996, p. 34). And as Williams tells this story, you hear her sense of pride in her father’s accomplishment. She emphasizes that he realized and understood the difference between renting and homeownership. This tenet is evidence of not only her father’s recognition of the value of homeownership, but of its liberating qualities—certain social and economic freedoms.

For many in the African American community, landownership wasn’t just about material possession, but about the social justice that it represented. Gilbert, Sharp, and Felin (2002) write

. . . studies have shown that other advantages of landownership include increased personal pride, higher educational achievement of children, and an overall better sense of well-being. Property ownership, in other words, goes hand in hand with active citizenship and social independence. (p. 2)

Under segregation, black landownership represented a blatant resistance to an oppressive socio-political system that told blacks what they couldn’t do. Landownership was a direct paradox. Instead of having no voice in the community, it provided them with an avenue for their voices to be heard—collectively.

Likewise, Leroy Upperman recalls a similar story about property ownership and his father. He states,

My father was a hardworking man . . . saved what little money he had and invested it in a few houses and so forth . . . my father was industrious. He saved his money and he bought several houses that he used to rent out. He wasn’t

wealthy, but he was kind of tight. And, when he died, he was able to leave each child [of his five children] a house. (personal communication, 1993)

Like Williams's father, Dr. Upperman's father recognized the independence that accompanies not only his homeownership, but *his children's* as well. While Upperman acknowledges that his father wasn't wealthy, he was *rich in knowledge*. His ability to be thrifty provided a means for his children to become self-reliant.

Schultz (1998) explains for the first time, Blacks could realize their dreams through homeownership;

With pride as well as thrift to motivate them, many black landowning families became adept at supplying their own needs . . . In addition to the individual self-sufficiency of scattered black landowning families, [this provided] . . . a more meaningful independence, one that undergirded a strong sense of pride. (p. 308)

Both Williams and Upperman's language in their storytelling provides the metaphor, homeownership in the African American community.

Lester Salamon (1979) writes,

[Southern Blacks recognized that] . . . the acquisition of land meant something far more than economic viability: it meant independence, security, the opportunity to develop pride in ownership and to enjoy a measure of control over one's destiny—in a word, escape from the debilitating dependency and degradation of [Jim Crow]. (p. 152)

Not only is this authority realized by Wilmingtonians, but other Blacks too.

Lorraine Hansberry demonstrates this realization in her play, *A Raisin in the Sun*. Critics argued that her play was not only insight into the internal trials and tribulations within the African American family, but also about external factors that affected them. And, one of those tenets that Hansberry highlights is the impact of homeownership in African American culture. Matthews (2008) writes that her play was about emphasizing

“the necessity of [blacks] finding a solid home where one might house and express oneself; at the same time, *Raisin* insists that individuals must be willing to join with other voices and the larger community in order to change oppressive social systems” (p. 558). While Wilmingtonians may have submitted to the dominant (white) culture, the importance of landownership still resonated deeply for its black citizens.

### **NC’s First African American Beaches**

When reading and hearing about Jim Crow from firsthand experiences, I honestly did not understand how much racism permeated into every aspect of everyday living for blacks. So, as I read Andrew Kahrl’s (2012) *The Land Was Ours*, I was stunned. In his book, he highlights how segregation was evident not simply in homeownership, but also in places of leisure. Not only did blacks have to deal with the intimidation of daily activities, but also while attempting to relax from those as well. Today, it is difficult to imagine how dangerous it was not only to live in the segregated South, but to attempt to vacation in it as well. Kenneth S. Chestnut, Sr. reminds me of this during his interview when he reminisces about Ocean City.

I remember when I was a kid, and I must’ve been 6 years old, or something like that, but I knew I was in the segregated South. I knew that much. I knew I couldn’t go to Woolworth’s and get a hotdog or you know. My dad and I were riding with Mr. Yow coming up [to Ocean City] and I don’t even remember what it was for but he stopped at the Mermaid which is just where that bar or restaurant—it’s on the other side of the north Topsail side. So I was out in the car and [Mr. Yow] went in. And, I was just standing there because I knew that I didn’t go in there. And he said, ‘No. Come on in.’ And, I said, ‘I don’t know about this . . . (shaking his head his head from side to side)’ And, he said ‘No, no. You come on in.’ And, I went in with him and he said, ‘What do you want?’ And I said, ‘I want a soda or a cherry orange or whatever it was.’ But he told them ‘Give him what he wants.’ (gesturing) And—you know, it’s an ordinary thing, but it’s not. (personal communication, May 24, 2013)

The actions of 1898 Wilmington infiltrated blacks' way of life for 365 days a year, including the summer months. Commonly, this dominant (white) culture would not accept blacks' presence in social spaces. "In 1933, Wrightsville Beach passed a series of ordinances that prevented blacks from walking on the beach, the boardwalk, or even in front of the white cottages facing the ocean" (Karhl, 2012, p. 158). Today, this is unfathomable, but during the early 20th century, it was normal in the segregated South. Karhl (2012) writes,

The presence of black professionals enjoying their own leisure entertaining at Shell Island sent whites in Wrightsville Beach into a panic. In a very real sense, they feared that its opening would wash all that they had worked to build, and the image they hoped to project, out to sea. (p. 159)

The famous author Ann Petry even had a similar story to tell. Petry (1946) writes, "The man looked at me and said, 'No niggers allowed on the beach . . . I'm the guard here . . . And there ain't no niggers allowed on this beach. It's writ [sic] in the rules'" (pp. 63–64).

Obviously, these stories exemplify why if anyone needed a vacation from the oppressive day-to-day routine of Jim Crow, it should be blacks. Just like anyone else, blacks of segregation needed time to rest and rejuvenate themselves in their quest for survival in the segregated South. Unfortunately, for blacks the solution wasn't an easy one.

DuBois (1937) writes, "Where as a colored person can I go? If I go among white people, how much rest is there going to be?" (para. 5). So, two dominant issues begin to emerge: the desire to occupy space in areas of recreation and leisure along with the yearning to *own* land within these spaces representing a fundamental democratic principle. Fortunately, Wilmingtonians lived in a seaport with a geographical close proximity to the Atlantic Ocean. Not far from Wilmington, blacks were able to own

oceanfront/waterfront land. However, these landowners didn't sell to other blacks. So black landownership though limited, did occur. Instead of selling to other blacks, these black landowners chose to allow other blacks to temporarily access or occupy these spaces. Finally, blacks were able to occupy and enjoy all the comforts of oceanfront recreation every day of the week. However, both occupying as well as owning these spaces would not go disregarded by the dominant (white) culture.

### **Shell Island**

Shell Island was the first known NC African American beach community founded in 1923. Its similarities to Wilmington are ironic. Like Wilmington, Shell Island's heyday was led by "a biracial group of professionals and businessmen in Wilmington [that] collaborated to create a resort for blacks on the island" (Edwards, 2003, p. 18).

C.B. Parmele and Thomas H. Wright, the white president and vice president of Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina's Home Realty Company, collaborated with a group of black doctors, lawyers, and ministers to purchase Shell Island, an uninhabited barrier island to the north of Wrightsville Beach that local blacks had used as a bathing beach for decades. (Karhl, 2012, p. 158)

The plans included a resort development, 14 streets, 270 lots, a pavilion, a bathhouse, along with a restaurant and landing pier (Karhl, 2012, p. 158). These owners even obtained transportation for their guests to and from the island via a ferry service. Shell Island purportedly attracted guests from states all along the Eastern seaboard (Kahrl, 2012). During its grand opening, several thousand were reported to be in attendance. Unquestionably, Shell Island was an instant success. Supposedly, guests were frequently turned away because of rooms were filled to capacity (Karhl, 2012).

Such success sounds eerily familiar to Wilmington's pre-1898 achievements under a bi-racially led group of aldermen. However, the dominant (white) culture during

the late 19th century would not allow achievements of black landowners or businesses to circumvent the whites' successes. After all, such attainment could threaten the image of the dominant (white) culture's superiority or the "nostalgia for the antebellum [S]outh" (Prather, 1998, p. 21). And, it would also contradict the expectation of submission and inferiority by blacks. And, similar to the statewide white supremacy campaign of 1898 that entailed a strategy of racist propaganda along with violent action, rumors begin to inculcate a culture of fear amongst local whites (Kahrl, 2012; Prather, Sr., 1998). This fear of Shell Island begin with the

circulat[ion of] rumors that Wrightsville Beach had been ceded to the 'colored race' in order to boost their own future growth prospects . . . [Moreover, whites] in the upper end of the state . . . beg[an] to talk of other resorts for their summer vacation [in lieu of Wrightsville Beach]. (Kahrl, 2012, p. 159)

Sadly, these rumors manifested themselves into actual fears.

So, the fears of losing a dominant (white) culture trumped the success of local businessmen, both black and white. Within the first couple of years, "The facilities on Shell Island suffered a series of fires 'of undetermined origin'" (Kahrl, 2012, p. 159). Like Wilmington, Shell Island had succumbed to the violence instigated by the segregated South. While its white investors realized the financial potential from black vacationers, this was "underscored [by] the perceived threat black leisure *space* [or landownership] posed to the regional economy" (Kahrl, 2012, p. 159).

Sadly, although Shell Island was very successful, its demise was similar to the black community of Wilmington where "[the] lynch mob burned [the colored newspaper building] to the ground, igniting several other structures" (Gilmore, 1998, p. 85). Shell Island was destroyed by fire in 1926. And, while arson was suspected, it was never 'proven.' While few doubted the origins of the fires, "investors cut their losses and, in the

winter of 1926, abandoned the island” (Karhl, 2012, p. 159). What an ironic twist for Shell Island—a place of tranquility where gentle sands blow and ocean waves lap soothingly for vacationers. Yet, its demise disconcertingly resonates like violence of the 1898 Wilmington Massacre. After the violence in Wilmington on November 10th, Blacks, similar to the Shell Island investors, fled “cutting their losses” while abandoning their homes and businesses. Such violence is a clear indicator that the power and threat of violence by the (dominant) white culture is more than a threat, but in the segregated South, a potential reality.

### **Seabreeze**

After the Civil War, many southern plantation owners left their homes as a sign of defeat of not only the war, but of idealistic notions of a belief system that was forever lost with the Confederacy.

[T]heir properties in ruins, and their coastlines blockaded, plantation owners in the Lower Cape Fear River region fled the area . . . In their place, freed [blacks] poured in, applying their own knowledge of the land and water to carve out a measure of autonomy . . . giving rise to increased black landownership . . . and secur[ing] their freedom through land acquisition. (Kahrl, 2012, p. 155)

In the midst of this turmoil, a black couple, Alexander and Charity Freeman were free blacks who had already resisted the white (dominant) culture’s expectations of citizenship rights for blacks by naming themselves. Shakur (2001) explains, “It wasn’t until I was grown and began to read Black history that I discovered the significance of the name [Freeman]. After slavery, many Black people refused to use the last names of their masters. They called themselves, ‘Freeman’ instead” (p. 23).

And, with this same type of diplomacy, the Freemans also took advantage of this early white flight from NC’s coastal lands. And, as a result, they “accumulated 180 acres

along the Myrtle Grove Sound in coastal North Carolina” (Karhl, 2012, p. 155). The Freemans recognized the value of black landownership. Mitchell (2001) writes,

Compared to other resources, land remains a particularly potent safeguard of individual liberty. Like no other resource, land can provide a physical haven to which a ‘beleaguered individual can retreat.’ Just as land can shelter the ‘beleaguered individual’ it can provide a physical base for groups trying to improve their collective lot. (p. 539)

The Freemans taught this philosophy to their son Robert Freeman, Sr. and he embraced it.

During the early 20th century, Robert Freeman, Sr. was one of the largest landowners in New Hanover County. The legend of his talent for land acquisitions states, “He never went to school—couldn’t read or write—but he had a lot of sense . . . [and] He bought a lot of property” (Karhl, 2012, p. 155). The landholdings he amassed were over 5,000 acres. Freeman, along with other “black coastal landowners worked to develop a subsistent household economy based around fishing and small farming” (Kahrl, 2012, p. 156). And during Freeman’s lifetime, he even donated some lands for a small church as well as for a religious campground. Freeman realized that landownership provided him and his family as well as the black community with the opportunity to maintain a significant degree of independence from the dominant (white) culture.

Unfortunately, after Freeman’s death, his family didn’t feel the same way about maintaining the agrarian family business. So, “With the rise of coastal leisure economies, the commercial potential of waterfront property grew as families’ ability (and . . . desire) to maintain subsistence economies and independence from white-controlled capital markets shrank” (Kahrl, 2012, p. 156). So, about a decade after his death, his

“siblings sold 772 acres of the Old Homestead site to [the white] . . . Southern Realty and Development Company” (Kahrl, 2012, p. 157).

Now, while the heirs of Robert Freeman, Sr. may have benefited from the financial gains of selling this land, they lost so much more in the process. Instead of the sale of the acreage benefiting blacks, it helped to do what hadn't been done before in New Hanover County. It denied blacks accessibility to lands that had been in the Freeman family for three generations. This business transaction gave developers a large portion of the land south of the Freeman's remaining estate which eventually became the Carolina Beach Corporation. And, this newly formed corporation further polarized the local community by exhibiting its racist intentions. The owners of the Corporation determined that a system of segregation must be maintained in order for the new Carolina Beach community to thrive and become a financial success. And, in order to capitalize on lot sales, they were willing to stipulate in each deed covenant for all lots who could own land within the town of Carolina Beach. Deed restrictions included provisions “that prevented the sale or lease of lots to ‘any Negro or person of African descent or other persons of color’” (Kahrl, 2012, p. 157). Not only were blacks not allowed to own or lease the properties, but “[they] were allowed on the beach strand [only] on Mondays” (Edwards, 2003, p. 16). So, while blacks could occupy these spaces on a specified day of the week, their elimination from landownership indicated that they were only to remain in these leisure spaces, temporarily and not permanently. Another descendant of Robert Freeman Sr., his son Bruce Freeman indicates:

[Back then] white folks could go down all week [to Carolina Beach] but the black folks only on Monday . . . after the years went on and the white people folks began to come in and build homes then that eliminated the blacks folks going to Carolina Beach to play. (Edwards, 2003, p. 19)

Southern whites realized the potential income for these leisure spaces if there were certain guarantees in place for potential white buyers where sandy, white beaches would remain “whitewashed”; moreover, if white landowners violated this regulation, “then said lands [would] immediately revert to the party of the first part, its successors and assigns” (Edwards, 2003, p. 21). The remnants of the 1898 Wilmington Massacre continued to be true as black disenfranchisement continued. In the segregated South, Carolina Beach exemplified yet another successful white supremacy campaign. Thus, indicating the capitalistic appeal for more notions of the nostalgic antebellum South remained at the forefront of the dominant (white) culture’s minds.

While the interviews of the Freeman family don’t clearly indicate this, my research indicates that Carolina Beach was a painful lesson learned not just the Freemans, but by the black community as a whole. I believe in their haste to dispose of lands they no longer wanted to care for, blacks would be much more vigilant in all future land transactions to ensure that such blatant racist restrictions wouldn’t happen again. At the same time, the Freemans finally recognized the value that the dominant (white) culture had for years chosen to ignore, the value of coastal lands, more specifically, lands that they owned. Moreover, with Florida’s land boom of the 1920’s, any coastal property was seen as a developer’s dream for capitalizing on land near the coveted ocean. So, in future land deals, the Freemans didn’t completely relinquish their property rights, but chose to remain as landowners albeit, investors by forming corporations with local businessmen. An example of this is visible in the land to the north of Carolina Beach; it remained Freeman family-owned. Like Robert Freeman, Sr., several of his relatives realized,

[P]otential riches to be made from refitting and marketing its waterfront property to those black citizens who had been turned away from white-only leisure spaces and whose efforts to acquire land and develop places of their own had ended in disappointment or disaster. (Karhl, 2012, p. 161)

Two of Robert Freeman, Sr.'s children recognized the ways their family's land could be sold for commercial and residential usage while becoming partners with the buyers simultaneously (Karhl, 2012). So, another summer resort opened in 1924 for blacks known as Seabreeze. "Tom and Victoria Lofton, a prominent black couple from Wilmington, completed construction on a twenty-five room, three-story hotel, restaurant, and dance hall" known as the Russell Hotel (Kahrl, 2012, p. 161). And, its success was evident. Kahrl (2012) explains, "By the late 1920's, weekend crowds at Seabreeze numbered in the thousands, and the resort attracted numerous conventions of black business and civic organizations" (p. 161). This commercial project demonstrated how Africans Americans not only utilized these coastal lands for farming and fishing, but also as business ventures too. Seabreeze not only housed the homes of the Freeman family, but also became income for some of them as well.

Seabreeze developed into a mix of commercial properties and private residences nourishing a vibrant seasonal economy . . . [and] [a]cross the [Myrtle Grove] [S]ound the dunes, grasses, and beaches facing the Atlantic Ocean remained undeveloped and were treated as communal space shared by the Freemans and the rural black population alike. (Karhl, 2012, p. 162)

While Seabreeze's physical location wasn't oceanfront, it faced a large body of water known as the Myrtle Grove Sound. To those who like many rural blacks had never seen a large body of water other than small ponds and lakes, it was a place that exhibited beauty within a racist and segregated society. However, Lulu Freeman Hill, the daughter of Robert Freeman Sr. was fortunate enough to be exposed to such natural

beauty during her childhood. After her father's death, she was one of the heirs to the Freeman lands that included both Seabreeze and another large portion of land known as Freeman Beach. Still, like many seeking refuge from the segregated South, she and her husband, Frank relocated to New York soon after their marriage.

Unfortunately, they realized that racism permeated both northern and southern cultures—including employment. So, after unsuccessful attempts at steady employment, they returned to the Freeman homestead in North Carolina with dreams of making something of Lulu's landholdings. Sadly, the Hills had to rectify issues of clear title involving the concept of 'heirs' property'<sup>8</sup> with a local white developer, Home Real Estate Company<sup>9</sup> who was hoping to capitalize on building the Freeman lands for commercialization for whites, not blacks. They were able to do so through comparing land-grant maps to property surveys proving the property was given to Lulu Freeman Hill by her father, Robert Freeman, Sr. (Karhl, 2012, p. 171).

### **Freeman Beach—"Bop City"**

For decades, Seabreeze had already been established as a place of refuge for NC blacks in the segregated South. So, the Hills decided to promote their landownership portion of the Freeman lands further "develop[ing] it for black people" (Karhl, 2012, p. 170). And, after six years of legal battles and depleting their life savings, on July 4, 1951, they left Seabreeze with many others—crossing on foot through the Myrtle Grove Sound onto Freeman Beach where they saw "a gleaming, white cement structure, replete with a dining room covered in seascape murals that doubled as a

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Karhl, *The Land Was Ours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2012), p. 162

<sup>9</sup> In 1940, Ellis Freeman sold his shares of the Freeman estate to the Home Real Estate Realty Company as settlement for a defaulted loan. These shares gave white developers access to the 'heirs property' as shareholders so they could seize ownership of this prized beachfront for development for whites (Karhl, 2012, p. 164).

dance hall, locker rooms, showers, kitchen, and a takeout window, facing the Atlantic Ocean” for all Blacks to enjoy (Karhl, 2012, p. 171). Here, they celebrated their victory of providing “the only viable alternative in New Hanover County for black ownership of leisure property at the shore” (Edwards, 2003, p. 21).

Assata Shakur, Frank and Lulu Hill’s granddaughter describes her memories of Freeman Beach stating, “All kinds of people would come to the beach . . . some with little money and some you could tell were real poor” (as cited in Karhl, 2012, p. 171). Picnics on the beach would be had by all, rich and poor, young and old, but with a sense of safety in enjoying the beauty of the ocean. Billy Freeman states, “[It] had a therapeutic effect on us as a people” (as cited in Karhl, 2012, p. 173). Blacks danced, ate, and partied on the beachfront. On the weekends, usually live entertainment was provided by musicians from Bobby Blue Bland to James Brown earning Freeman Beach the nickname of Bop City (Kahrl, 2012, p. 172).

However, Snow’s Cut as well as the Intercoastal Waterway, both manmade waterways mandated by the state of North Carolina as well as the Army Corp. of Engineers respectively, increased the size of Myrtle Grove Sound by causing major soil erosion on Freeman Beach. As a result, the sound waters became wider and deeper making it dangerous to continue crossing from Seabreeze to Freeman Beach hazardous. Thus, the only way to access Freeman Beach or Bop City was to drive through the segregated Carolina Beach. Black beach patrons were harassed by local police and if stopped, were fined outrageous amounts for ludicrous reasons. So, to accommodate black beachgoers, the Hills’ implemented a ferry service from Seabreeze to Bop City for its patrons for a fee (Karhl, 2012). And, as Bop City’s popularity grew, Carolina Beach residents grew angry at its close proximity to their pristine, whitewashed

beaches. “White people [would] . . . keep people from Seabreeze from going across [the sound] . . . [Or they’d] set the marsh afire . . . but it didn’t stop us from going down there” (Karhl, 2012, p. 174). And, “after suffering repeated damage to the parking lot, the Hills constructed a gate fence at the end of the dirt path leading to the resort” (Karhl, 2012, p. 174).

And, as the Hills begin to implement the next phase of Seabreeze, “selling lots to black families for the building of seaside cottages,” they obtained the services of a white attorney, John Hill (Karhl, 2012, p. 174). Unfortunately, like many local whites, he had an ulterior motive for “assisting” the Hills. Sadly, his own real estate interests conflicted with the Hills intentions of further development. And, instead of assisting the Hills with the ‘heirs’ property’ land dispute between them and the Home Real Estate Company, John Hill filed the lawsuit arguing “Home Real Estate Company was a tenant in common with the Freeman family and held shares in the coastal land” (Karhl, 2012, p. 174).

Previously, the Hills had demonstrated proof in their ownership through land-grant maps and surveys, but John Hill ensured that this evidence that was based on testimonies by current surveyors interpreting the documents in addition to examining the lands would never happen. “John Hill purposely called before the courts a surveyor who had inspected the maps but not the property itself” (Karhl, 2012, p. 174). So, in the midst of the legal battle of establishing clear title with the resurgence of questioning the designation of these lands as heirs’ property,<sup>10</sup> the Hills endured another blow; Hurricane Hazel struck in October 1954. It destroyed all the buildings and severely eroded the land. And, as a result of the ongoing legal dispute, they were ineligible for any disaster relief loans. “Hill’s final application for a permit to rebuild on the former site

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Karhl, *The Land Was Ours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2012), p. 162.

of Bop City, submitted in 1967, was denied on the grounds that erosion and high tides had rendered the site unsafe” (Karhl, 2012, p. 177).

Like Shell Island, Seabreeze and Bop City decimated by the racist ideologies of the dominant (white) culture through threats and actions of violence as well as through intimidation by law enforcement and manipulating legal proceedings, the segregated South remained intact while Blacks’ rights to access leisure property as well as landownership in these leisure spaces was attacked. Wilmingtonians were once again seen as unworthy of these spaces and their counterparts, whites were the superior and entitled ones.

Perhaps that is why a small group of Wilmingtonians chose to begin another NC African American beach community *outside* of New Hanover County. Like pre-1898 Wilmington as well as Shell Island, Ocean City was founded in 1949 by an interracial group of individuals who defied the segregated South’s notions of superiority/inferiority. These individuals learned from the failed attempts of others and instead, went a little further north into nearby Onslow County onto Topsail Island. Ocean City, NC is approximately 45 miles north of Wilmington, NC on Topsail Island in both Pender and Onslow counties. And many of Ocean City’s original residents were from Wilmington—belonging to the legacy of survivors of the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot. My research demonstrates that Ocean City is one of those communities that withstood the violence and oppression of the segregated South through togetherness and collective consciousness of social and racial justice. In the next chapter, I reveal how Ocean City conflates these, demonstrating survival in the segregated South.

## CHAPTER IV

### OCEAN CITY: AN ESCAPE FROM JIM CROW

In the July 1929 issue of *Crisis* magazine, W. E. B. DuBois (1929) writes:

To the [black] folk the problem of summer, rest and change, of vacation and recreation, is a difficult one. There is the matter of cost and time, and absence from regular work, and all kinds of kindred problems. To the American Negro there comes, of course, the additional problem of race discrimination in amusement, and it comes most awkwardly because when one is searching for rest and renewal of strength, this is about the last time that one wants to settle social problems, or indeed to come in contact with them . . . (p. 235)

Martha's Vineyard is probably the oldest of the leisure spaces for blacks. "There is evidence that contact between members of the Wampanoag tribe and European settlers predates the arrival of the English explorer Bartholomew Gosnold . . . [who] 'renamed' it "Martha's" after his daughter" (Nelson, 2005, p. 15). However, records indicate that slaves lived on Martha's Vineyard date back to 1765 (Nelson, 2005). During the early 20th century, an "increasing number of African Americans who came to the island as servants to white families with summer homes, and as the years passed, as homeowners and small-business entrepreneurs" (Nelson, 2005, p. 28). Since then blacks have had a significant present in Oak Bluffs as a place of recreation for blacks who could afford it.

Shell Island established in 1923, was the first known NC coastal leisure space designated as a "Negro resort community" (Karhl, 2012, p. 158). And, while it was idyllic for black families seeking solace from the segregated South, the violence of the

segregated South helped to ensure that its existence was short-lived when it was destroyed by fire in 1926.

Another black coastal community was Seabreeze, NC. Initiated as a family business, Seabreeze was a privately-owned recreational space that was specifically designed for blacks. Opening day at Seabreeze was held on July, 4, 1951. These were beaches where black folks could enjoy recreation. However, each of these spaces had both external and internal parameters that determined their accessibility as well as their durability.

### **Sociological Effects of Slavery**

American chattel slavery is filled with paradoxes and contradictions. White plantation owners considered themselves to be amongst a higher class of people with superior intellect and in turn, “owned” kidnapped Africans and their descendants because these “slaves” were considered intellectually inferior. Their justification was primarily based on the Age of Scientific Racism. Morrison (2008) writes, “David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Thomas Jefferson, to mention only a few, had documented their conclusions that blacks were incapable of intelligence” (p. 69). In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson (1785) writes,

Deep rooted prejudices [of blacks are] entertained by the whites . . . The first difference which strikes us is that of colour. Whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and scarf-skin, or in the scarf-skin itself; whether it proceeds from the colour of the blood, the colour of the bile, or from that of some other secretion, the difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us. And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? . . .

Besides those of colour, figure, and hair, there are other physical distinctions proving a difference of race. They have less hair on the face and body. They secrete less by the kidneys, and more by the glands of the skin, which gives them a very strong and disagreeable odour . . . in reason [they are] much inferior, as I

think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous. (Query XIV, pp. 264–265)

And, as a result, those of self-proclaimed superior intellect established a caste system based on this “scientific research.”

The Age of Scientific Racism not only helped to perpetuate the heritage of slavery on the slave plantations, but in society as well. More specifically, the concepts of superiority and inferiority involving intellect as well as race are most evident in the symbolism of the “big house” on plantations. The house represented a close proximity to the dominant (white) culture (i.e., “intellect,” “sophistication” and “refinement”). The slaves who were privileged to work in or near the “big house” were usually domestics or skilled laborers. Those who worked in or near the big house were typically “exposed” to this sophistication and refinement of the dominant (white) culture. And, through this “divulgence,” they were considered slightly better than field slaves.

However, field slaves were usually not privy to the resources from the “big house.” Accordingly, field slaves endured more physical labor and were viewed by other slaves, those with more access to the “big house” as the lowest of the slave classes. Slave narratives collected by the workers of the Federal Writers’ Project now housed by the Library of Congress support this. One ex-slave, Rosa Starke, who participated in the project states,

De fust class was de house servants. Dese was de butler, de maids, de nurses, chambermaids, and de cooks. De nex’ class was de carriage drivers and de gardeners, de carpenters, de barber, and de stable men. Then come de nex’ class de wheelwright, wagoners, [and] blacksmiths . . . De nex’ class . . . was de cow men and [those] 27dat have care of de dogs. All dese have good houses and never have to work hard or git a beatin’ . . . De lowest class was de common field [slave]. (Library of Congress, 1941c, p. 148)

Not only was the slave caste system evident on many plantations, but other contradictions such as, “[t]he relationship between skin tone and privilege appears to have emerged during slavery” based on proximity to this “big house” (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 761). Slaves with light-brown complexions were related to their owners and in many instances were offspring of the masters; their complexions were usually lighter, closer to white skin. Consequently, “light-skinned blacks were preferred because they were more aesthetically appealing to whites and because of the prevailing racial ideology of that time [which] held that blacks with white ancestry were intellectually superior to those of pure African ancestry” (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 762).

These color complex issues were reiterated continuously by references of lighter skin being closer to white skin and therefore, better. “Not surprisingly, both whites and ‘house niggers’ came to consider the dark-skinned ‘field niggers’ to be less civilized and intellectually inferior” (Graham, 1999, p. 7). And, despite the contradictions of these concepts, a new culture of black elitism (based on skin pigmentation) emerged that delineated light-skinned blacks as better than those with darker complexions. These “elites” became alienated from the ‘field blacks.’ Slave narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project also support this premise. Cato Carter indicates this when he states,

Back in Alabama, Missie Adeline Carter took me . . . to live in the big house with the white folks. I had a room built on the back of the big house, where I stayed, and they was allus good to me ‘cause I’s one of their blood . . . My massa used to give me a lil money ‘long to buy what I wanted. I allus bought fine clothes. (The Library of Congress, 1941a, pp. 202, 204)

Simultaneously, dark-skinned Africans were consciously made to endure a harsher servitude. Darker skin seems to be used against slaves as punishment for an uncontrollable biological occurrence, skin color.

Field hands were disproportionately of pure African ancestry and were assigned to perform physically demanding, menial tasks. They remained largely unskilled throughout their servitude, had less contact with the custom and language of the larger society, and generally experienced the harshest aspects of slavery. (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 762)

This paradox is obvious. While darker skinned slaves were considered only good enough to be field hands, those with lighter skin were accepted because they were closer in physical appearance to their white masters. More ironic is that white owners would lower their “superior” standards to have sex with someone seen as “inferior” to them. As a result of these paradoxical relationships, mixed race children were born into slavery. And, surprisingly, these children were usually better cared for than the darker children, despite their slave status. More contradictory is that slave owners would better treat their children, while having no moral qualms about owning them either. Mary Reynolds says,

[T]his yaller gal [has] . . . a mess of white young’uns . . . Onct two of [white young’uns] goes down the hill to the doll house where the Kilpatrick chillum are playin’. They wants to go in the dollhouse and one of the Kilpatrick boys say, ‘That’s for white chillun.’ They say, ‘We ain’t no niggers, cause we got the same daddy you has, and he comes to near every day and fetches us clothes and things from town . . . He is our daddy and we call him daddy when he comes to our house to see our mama.’ (The Library of Congress, 1941b, p. 242)

Not only were the offspring of the white masters well taken care of, but their mistresses were too. Many times, the mistresses were also lighter skinned. These women, known as mulattoes or octoroons were viewed as more attractive than their darker counterparts. Keith and Herring (1991) write, “[W]hite males were more likely to select fair-skinned female slaves over darker ones for sexual unions” (p. 762). And, as a result of their biological physical attributes, despite being slaves, these light-skinned

slave women with “white blood” were usually better taken care of than the field slaves.

Mary Reynolds indicates,

Once massa goes to Baton Rouge and brung back a yaller gal dressed in fine style . . . He builds her a house ‘way from the quarters . . . [We] knowed the doctor took a black woman quick as he did a white and took any on his place he wanted, and he took them often. (The Library of Congress, 1941b, p. 242)

### **Complexion and Access to Resources**

Despite the ugly truth of class division amongst the slaves, it existed. Not only was there a distinction of skin color, but that selectivity provided light-skinned blacks with access to resources that field slaves usually did not have. By working in or near the “house,” slaves were more prone to obtaining a skill or trade by exposure to the customs of the dominant (white) culture.

Slave masters assigned them to the more prestigious and socially desirable service positions (e.g., cook, butler, coachman, personal companion and the like). Training for skilled occupations was often reserved for the children of these personal servants. Possession of a skill was not only esteemed and a source of pride among slaves, but it often conferred other privileges such as the opportunity to work as a free laborer, save money and purchase one’s freedom). (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 762)

And, such skilled laborers would have more access to opportunities to hire themselves out in order to earn money. Frederick Douglass, a mulatto slave, writes, “[V]ery soon, [I] learned the art of using my mallet and irons; [I] learned the trade of caulking.] In the course of one year . . . I was able to command the highest wages given to most experienced ca[u]lkers” (Douglass, 2004, p. 439).

Not only were these light-skinned slaves more privy to skills to assist them with employment, but they were more likely exposed to the opportunity of an education as well. As the offspring of white slave owners, these blacks were “[o]ccasionally,

[afforded] the opportunity to learn to read and write” (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 762).

Alexander furthers, “[I]t was far more likely that the house slave would learn to read, be introduced to upper-class white traditions, be permitted to play or interact with white family members than would a field slave” (Graham, 1999, p. 7).

Frederick Douglass (2004) states, “[My white mistress] very kindly commenced to teach me the A, B, C. After I had learned this, she assisted me in learning to spell words of three or four letters” (p. 409). And, for Douglass, this learned literacy exposed him to the truths of chattel slavery. He writes “The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers . . . I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy” (Douglass, 2004, p. 413). Such skills would not only provide blacks with the technical, but also the social literacy to navigate “[t]hrough their daily contact with whites . . . [by being] exposed to the cultural views and practices (e.g., speech, dress, and mannerisms) of the larger society” (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 762).

Many realized the abhorrence of slavery, but learned how to survive under the peculiar institution and for many mulattoes, this survival revolved around freedom. “As children of slave masters, mulattoes were more likely than other slaves to be manumitted or permitted to purchase their freedom . . .” (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 763). And, since this was a common phenomenon, such knowledge would ensure that “once emancipated . . . former house servants were better prepared than former field hands to negotiate with whites and lessen attempts at exploitation by them” (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 762). Moreover, with access to other socio-cultural practices that were common to whites, light-skinned blacks begin to absorb the tenets of their white owners.

### **The Privilege of Property through Elite Employment Opportunities**

Light-skinned slaves realized their privileges. Such a caste system on slave plantations was often evident and encouraged. “[M]ulattoes were conscious of the distinctions between themselves and darker slaves and believed their white blood did make them superior” (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 762). Slave masters were instrumental in perpetuating this division amongst the slaves. And, for the mulattoes, “[T]hese similarities between whites and mulattoes in physical appearance, speech, dress, and customary behavior . . . operated as a selection criterion in the manumission of slaves” (Keith & Herring, 1991, pp. 762–763). One of these privileges was the potential for emancipation. And, typically, those who earned a good living were able to buy their freedom.

Moreover, as a free person, mulattoes were “more economically secure than other free blacks. The occupational skills acquired as former house servants provided mulattoes with opportunities for more lucrative employment” (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 762). Such opportunities for wage earning further distinguished mulattoes as elite in the black community. This division amongst the blacks demonstrates the beginning of class distinctions within the black community for both the free and enslaved. “With more than a subsistence wage and with continued support from white relatives, many acquired land and other property” (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 762). And land ownership was key to solidifying their status as black elites. Salamon (1979) writes,

[Elite blacks recognized that] . . . the acquisition of land meant something far more than economic viability: it meant independence, security, the opportunity to develop pride in ownership and to enjoy a measure of control over one’s destiny—in a word, escape from the debilitating dependency and degradation of [slavery]. (pp. 151–152)

Obviously, the mulatto's social standing in the dominant (white) culture couldn't have persisted without the support of whites. Not only were these mulattoes elite because of their lineage, but this "white blood" provided more opportunities for them to buy their freedom and obtain the types of employment that placed them into the elite social hierarchy. Jobs they obtained weren't low-paying menial jobs, but work that "paid higher wages" for whites let alone those of mixed race (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 762). "[T]he mulatto elite . . . consisted of a combination of small businessmen, skilled laborers, service workers with white clientele, and a sprinkling of professionals" (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 762).

Similar to the white elites, family pedigree of these mulattoes determined access to these more prestigious occupations as well as their social spaces, more specifically leisure ones too. Fortunately, mulattoes could claim their lineage if their families embraced them as descendants.

Maria Custis, the mulatto child of First Lady Martha Washington's grandson, George Washington Parke Custis . . . asked her father, who was also still her owner, for permission to marry Charles Syphax, a black slave who worked for her father[;] he released both from slavery, gave her a wedding in the [big house], and offered her and her new husband fifteen acres of the Arlington estate. (Graham, 1999, pp. 8–9)

This inclusion helped to maintain the mulattoes' status as elite in the black community and lead a more comfortable life. Furthermore, "membership in the elite depended highly on family background, light skin color, a heritage of freedom before Emancipation, and a life-style patterned after affluent whites" (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 762). Graham (1999) substantiates this indicating, "Since that time, the Syphax family has continued to gain wealth through other real estate holdings and through businesses that involved commercial and residential development and sales" (p. 9).

Thus, the black elite exist because of their access to resources as well as their skin color which resulted from their parentage. Scholars seem to agree and Graham (1999) writes, "Whether they began as free people of color or as enslaved house servants, those blacks who came to make up the black aristocracy were typically those who were able to gain an education and various professional skills" (p. 9).

Accordingly, the heritage of slavery can be traced within the social caste system that resides within the black community today. This system includes the emergence of the black elite that emulates the dominant (white) culture. Moreover, it also includes middle class blacks as well as the poor black folks too. These class distinctions are usually determined by one's access to education and skills. And, for some, this heritage of slavery determines whether or not one is able to access resources, particularly leisure spaces like beach communities.

In this chapter I highlight three black beach communities that existed during the early 20th century. Both originated prior to the 1949 founding of Ocean City. By elucidating and comparing them, I expose problems like elitism and colorism that blacks encountered within the "black" community. I begin with one vacation destination located outside of the segregated South that caters to the elite blacks from northern, urban areas. Unlike Ocean City, this particular black community encourages wealthy homeowners and vacationers with pride in its elitism. Its residents are myopic in their attempts to marginalize and castigate other blacks who cannot afford to visit and/or own property like them.

I also include another black beach located in the segregated South approximately 42 miles south of Ocean City mentioned earlier, Seabreeze or Freeman Beach. My research suggests that Seabreeze was founded with capitalist intentions and

was not about providing opportunities for other blacks. Instead, its owners profited from Seabreeze's visitors by being a temporary place of pleasure excluding them from the possibility of homeownership. And, by doing this, Seabreeze's owners were providing a landscape for "jooking." Thus, by juxtaposing these with Ocean City, I plan to reveal the three layers of black beach communities I've identified in my research. They are:

1. Black Elitism,
2. Jook Joint beaches, and
3. A Safe Haven or family community.

### **The 'Black Elite': A Heritage of Slavery**

Racial segregation was still a reality no matter one's wealth. During the 19th century, many summer resorts and waterfront retreats were white enforcing strict racial segregation policies (Karhl, 2012). So, in many leisure spaces, DuBois's "problem of summer" remained true and this was applicable with wealthier, landowning black families too. Those with money sought refuge from the dominant (white) culture. And from the heritage of slavery, a class of the 'Black Elite' emerged that demonstrated class distinctions among black folks that took pride in their wealth. For many wealthier, black northerners, one of these destinations was a tiny portion of Martha's Vineyard known as Oak Bluffs. "At Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard, there is a hotel and many boarding houses which draw a considerable number of the better class of Negroes" (DuBois, 1929, p. 235).

Though the island of Martha's Vineyard is predominately white, blacks have owned or established businesses in Oak Bluffs since post-Civil War. My research indicates that these blacks were likely part of the black aristocracy directly exposed to the dominant (white) culture during as well as after slavery. They would be the

individuals whose ancestors may have been house slaves. Accordingly, they would likely be

[Black] men and women, with trades [who came to Martha's Vineyard] [a]s domestics . . . cooks, opening up dining halls, doing laundry. . . [M]any of them came in service with those white people who were coming in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and decided they wanted a piece of [Martha's Vineyard], and found a way of getting some land, finding a cottage and a roof over their heads, and starting a little business (Nelson, 2005, p. 58).

Because of their access and exposure to leisure spaces such as Martha's Vineyard as descendants of house slaves, these privileged blacks were able to profit from the dominant (white) culture and began to transition into an elite economic tier.

Beginning in the 1890s, blacks who lived in Massachusetts and parts of Rhode Island began to move full-time to—and open businesses on—the island of Martha's Vineyard . . . [T]here were a handful of well-to-do black families that began establishing roots there as a summer vacation spot. (Graham, 1999, p. 153)

Robert Jones, a New York City real estate developer and consultant indicates that his family has “always had a home in Oak Bluffs” (Graham, 1999, p. 153). Jones “grew up in an accomplished family [his father was the 1<sup>st</sup> black graduate of Suffolk Law School] . . . His background was not rare for the kinds of blacks who could afford to summer at the resort” (Graham, 1999, p. 153). Elitism has not only permeated the white communities of the island, but also the Black ones as well.

Moreover, Robert Jones highlights another important issue that further delineates Oak Bluffs's elitism. He states, “[W]hen I was a kid, the only blacks that came here were ones from Boston and Washington. No New Yorkers, no southerners, no Midwesterners . . . all Boston and D.C. people” (as cited in Graham, 1999, p. 154). He even reminisces about playing with some white children on the island, but states that not

until after New York Congressman Adam Clayton Powell began visiting did “Oak Bluffs gain . . . true popularity among the New York black elite” (Graham, 1999, p. 155). And after the Powells brought such attention, “Oak Bluffs has been a popular area for elite black families since the 1930s and 1940s” (Graham, 1999, p. 153).

Many participants in the black elite circles were also members of other organizations or students at the same schools. Moreover, these individuals usually attended the same “deemed acceptable” Historically Black Schools or Colleges (HBCUs),<sup>11</sup> the same summer camps and their parents participated in “the right” social clubs and organizations such as “Jack and Jill,” “Links,” or the “Boulé.”<sup>12</sup> Here, members as well as their children could associate with the “right” class of blacks. Several joined select, elite fraternities and sororities, so the cultural parallels began to emerge. And, as a result, many of them mingled within these circles because it was “the right and appropriate thing to do.” Thus, such strategically, classist behaviors kept the elite separate from other classes of blacks. Irene Gaines states,

There’s a class system in the [U.S.] and [the black elites are] part of that system. Everybody who came up [to Oak Bluffs] was connected. They went to camp together. Or school together . . . Or there were sorority and fraternity ties. People who came up were pretty much of the same economic as well as cultural background . . . What some people call bourgeois but what I call the black middle class has always been the people who came up here. I know there are Black people on the island who are working class, maybe blue collar, but there has always been a predominance of white collar workers here . . . Working-class Blacks do not necessarily come to the island. (Nelson, 2005, p. 151)

Now, while Gaines refers to Oak Bluffs residents as middle class, I do not agree. These residents delight in their privilege as well as their elitism. They take pride in having more

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<sup>11</sup> Graham, L. (1999). *Our kind of people: Inside America’s black upper class*. New York, NY: HarperCollins. Graham devotes a chapter on acceptable HBCUs to this discussion, too.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. “Elite” Black social organizations that are each addressed in separate chapters.

wealth as well as having permanent and not temporary access to these spaces.

Moreover, their elitism supports the caste system established through the heritage of slavery.

Lawrence Graham describes summers he and his brother spent at Oak Bluffs involving how elitism based on color factors into the beliefs of Oak Bluff residents just as it did in the slave caste system. In particular, he shares his great-grandmother's obsession with their skin remaining the color it was by avoiding the sun. "You boys stay out of that terrible sun . . . God knows you're dark enough already" (Graham, 1999, p. 2). Other accounts also refer to the "one group that the former police chief . . . swore was a Boston gang . . . they didn't look like our kids and they didn't look like us . . . they were dark" (Nelson, 2005, p. 151). A New Jersey dentist refers to such individuals as "[a] coarse element" while his wife states "They obviously have no business here . . . All these loud, dark-skinned kids" (Graham, 1999, p. 161).

Not only does complexion factor, but socio-economics too. Many occupations as well as assets determine one's social and economic position in society. This establishes some as powerful because of wealth and some that are not. However, the serious flaw with this is that power is accessible to some and not others. Michael Apple (1991) writes, "Power . . . is both social and personal. It not only signifies one group's attempts to dominate another; it also refers to a person's ability to help *create* the social conditions" (p. 213). I argue that Oak Bluffs's elitism becomes a despotic tool that is used to validate inclusion as well as exclusion within their community. Despite the fact that some visitors to Oak Bluffs may demonstrate wealth through their material possessions, they still aren't "good" enough to belong to the Oak Bluffs community. Even though "the people who were up here in the BMWs, Navigators, and Lexuses were

people with jobs or in college . . . they didn't look like us" (Nelson, 2005, p. 151).

Another indication of class discrimination is a questioning tactic commonly used.

Graham (1999) writes,

With the increasing number of blacks visiting [Oak Bluffs], there seem always to be new ways to separate the elite from the ordinary . . . I recall that one popular method of establishing divisions was by asking every new face one question: 'Do you rent, or do you own?' (p. 162)

The question is asked but the answer is already known by the one asking. Since Oak Bluffs is a small community on the island of Martha's Vineyard, many of its residents already know each other.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the question is a rhetorical ploy aimed at revealing the obvious which is if you 'belonged' here, as an Oak Bluffs resident, I would know you. Furthermore, Graham (1999) continues revealing the distinctions made by Oak Bluff residents between the communities on Martha's Vineyard,

Among the blacks who summer on the island, there are fine distinctions made between those who own in Oak Bluffs or Vineyard Haven, those who *rent* in Oak Bluffs or Vineyard Haven, and those who own *or* rent in places like Edgartown, West Tisbury, or Chilmark. Blacks who live in the latter three towns might as well live on the island of Nantucket . . . [because] these vacationers [are seen] as 'Incognegroes' who are trying to hide (p. 162).

Again, if one doesn't live within a specific community, then a distinction must be made between "us" and "them." This continued practice of polarization by Oak Bluff residents further delineates them as well as the community itself as a Black Elite resort.

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<sup>13</sup> Graham, L. (1999). *Our Kind of People*. New York, NY: HarperCollins. Graham writes the tiny seven-square-mile village of Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard is actually a mostly white community with only a five percent black year-round population.

### Seabreeze: A Jook Joint Beach

While Oak Bluffs was primarily about access and inclusivity in a Black Elite vacation community, I maintain Seabreeze was about landownership, temporary access to this leisure space, as well as profit for its owners. In Chapter I, I discussed the dispute with landownership rights and defined Seabreeze as a place of leisure for all classes of blacks. In this section, I examine how Seabreeze revolved around two reoccurring themes that have yet to be studied, namely: performing as a jook joint for its patrons as well as a profitable business for its owners.

Zora Neale Hurston (2004) writes, “Jook is the word for a Negro pleasure house. It may mean a bawdy house. It may mean the house . . . where men and women dance [and] drink . . .” (p. 1049). Seabreeze, located in the segregated South just north of Carolina Beach, NC, was a retreat for many blacks at a time when segregation determined where blacks could vacation. Founded by Lulu and Frank Hill, Lulu was a descendant of the black landowning.<sup>14</sup> Freeman family of New Hanover County. Their granddaughter, Joanne Byron, AKA Assata Shakur recalls that her “grandparents . . . open[ed] a business on their land. It consisted of a restaurant . . . and an area for dancing and hanging out. The popular name for the beach was called Bop City.”<sup>15</sup>

Bop City provided live entertainment and earned its name by providing “[a] steady stream of local and national jazz and R&B artists” (Karhl, 2012, p. 172). Artists such as Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and even James Brown would perform on the weekends to large crowds (Karhl, 2012, p. 172). Beachgoers came to Seabreeze not just for the beach environment, but seeking pleasure in the live performances too.

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<sup>14</sup> Kahrl, A. (2012). *The land was ours*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, p. 156. Kahrl indicates after Robert Freeman’s landholdings he left over 5,000 acres to his eleven children.

<sup>15</sup> Shakur, A. (2001). *Assata Shakur: An autobiography*. Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill, pp. 22–23.

Visitors came from near and far many times financially poor, but looking forward to relieving stress by dancing late into the night and music was key.

Artists who performed at Bop City were some of the first nationally recorded R&B performers. R&B music included both rhythm and blues, but early R&B music had strong components of blues, jazz, Latin and gospel music (Gates & McKay, 2003). It was known as the “new black dance music” (Gates & McKay, 2003, p. 69). Not only did the rhythms encourage body movement, but themes of blues music were quite visible in the lyrics of several Bop City performers, especially Big Maybelle. Assata Shakur (2001) indicates as a child “next to food, music was my love . . . James Brown, Dinah Washington, Maxine Brown [and] Big Maybelle were some of the people I listened to during those beach years” (pp. 25–26).

And back then, Big Maybelle was known more as a blues singer. While her biographical information is scant, a play entitled, “Big Maybelle” was recently done at the Bay Street Theater in New York. Jacobson (2012) indicates, “[B]ecause of the scarcity of accurate biographical information, [Levine] has based his play on her discography—which, being the blues, is heavy on heartache” (para. 8). And, like the poor farmers and day laborers from NC who came to visit Bop City, they could relate to Maybelle’s music. Kahrl (2012) writes,

[T]he rural working poor who labored in the sun all day, and who saved their meager earnings for a single day at the beach, cared little how they looked at the end of the day and more about how their overworked bodies and minds felt. On summer weekends, truckloads of rural black farm laborers, crammed into broken-down jalopies, poured in from the countryside. (p. 172)

Moreover, Shakur (2001) adds, “A lot of poor people came to the beach. Sometimes the floors of their raggedy old cars and trucks were half rotted out. Usually a lot of little

children were with them” (p. 25). And, these children were exposed to live performers like Big Maybelle’s brazenness as she belted out music about the experiences of the black community no matter who was in her audience.

One of Big Maybelle’s biggest hits which she likely performed at Bop City was her song, “Candy.” In it, she sings, “I’m sweet on candy, And candy, he’s sweet on me—Hmmm my candy’s always handy, Just when I need sympathy, Oh, I wish there were four of him, And I could love, love that much more of him” (Savoy Records, 1956, David-Whitney-Kramer). Like most blues music, “Candy” infers a strong sexual reference, and according to Zora Neale Hurston (2004), “[L]ittle intimate names are indulged in to heap fire on fire” (p. 1050).

Unarguably, “sexuality was central in both men’s and women’s blues” (Davis, 1998, p. 11). And, in the 1950s it was inappropriate for a woman to make sexual suggestions, especially in the presence of children because such language was considered vulgar. Not only that, but Maybelle never mentions a husband or marriage which blatantly challenged the existing social status quo. So, the audience must assume that her candy is about satisfying her sexual desire through a man and not through marriage or children. “Women of that era were expected to seek fulfillment within . . . marriage, with their husbands functioning as providers and their children as evidence of their worth as human beings” (Davis, 1998, p. 11). However, not only was it unfitting for women to challenge the sanctity of marriage, but also to boast about sexual indulgences too.

As a jook joint, Seabreeze’s primary entertainment centered on music, and not just any music, but music that stimulated body movement. Hurston (2004) furthers this tenet by emphasizing “Musically speaking, the Jook is the most important place in

America” (p. 1049). Not only did the music make an indelible impression on everyone, including Shakur, but the dancing as well. Hurston (2004) writes, “The Negro social dance is slow and sensuous. The idea in the Jook is to gain sensation, and not so much exercise. So that just enough foot movement is added to keep the dancers on the floor. A tremendous sex stimulation is gained from this” (p. 1049). And, Assata Shakur’s childhood memories seem to support Hurston’s position. Shakur (2001) indicates,

I loved to dance. They would play that music and [I] would dance my natural heart out . . . But [I] loved to see people dance too. Many a time my grandmother or grandfather had to call me out of the trance [I] was in watching somebody dance instead of doing my chores. (p. 26)

While Bop City was a leisure space for blacks, I argue these along with other incidents made it an adult space that was inappropriate for children. Not only does Shakur recall the music and dancing from Seabreeze, but also images of acts she witnessed as a child. “There were a lot of lovers and [I] spent some time spying on them in the parking lot, but they weren’t too interesting. All they did was squirm a lot” (Shakur, 2001, p. 24).

As a juke joint, Seabreeze was a space that “[A]ffirm[ed] the bodily expression of the black soul, including its sexual manifestations” (Davis, 1998, p. 8). And, not only were music and sex inappropriate for some of its participants, but displays of intoxication, too. Shakur (2001) recalls “[T]hen there were the goodtimers. Their cars smelled like whiskey. They would dance a lot, eat a lot, spend a lot on the [jukebox], and many times [I] would wonder if they had made it home all right” (p. 25).

While I argue that Seabreeze was a much needed leisure space for black visitors, I also believe that for the Hill family, it was more so a profitable business venture. In fact, one of Frank Hill’s nephews supports my position. He states, “[U]ncle

Frank was less interested in providing therapy for victims of racial oppression and more focused on finding ways to make some money” (as cited in Kahrl, 2012, p. 173). And, while analyzing various accounts of Seabreeze’s Phase I project, capitalist tendencies became more apparent to me.

While reading Assata Shakur’s autobiography, she indicates how important it was to her grandparents that everyone worked. “My grandparents were firm believers in work. They had worked all of their lives” (Shakur, 2001, p. 24). So, the Hills put everyone to work at Seabreeze, including the children. And, as a child, Shakur’s (2001) duties included “sell[ing] small stuff like potato chips, Nabs, pickles, and pickled pigs’ feet . . . But my main job was collecting fifty cents for parking” (p. 24).

As indicated earlier, many of the Seabreeze’s visitors were “a lot of poor people” (Shakur, 2001, p. 25). Kahrl (2012) further supports this idea by indicating that “[These] . . . rural working poor who . . . saved their meager earnings for a single day at the beach” (p. 172). Despite that, Frank Hill found ways to profit from them. Like the beaches of today, he charged for everything from picolos [jukeboxes] to access to the beach. And according to Shakur (2001), Seabreeze’s visitors “[ate] a lot and spen[t] a lot on the picolos” (p. 25). Caronell Chestnut recalls the food sold at Seabreeze. She states “The main feature there was a clam fritter. And . . . for a nickel you [could] buy that clam fritter” (personal communication, February 3, 1995). Shakur recalls the cost of food sold at Seabreeze, too. “[T]hose seafood platters with fish, shrimps, oysters, deviled crab, clam fritters, and French fries with lettuce and tomatoes on the side . . . [I] think they sold for \$1.50” (Shakur, 2001, p. 25).

It was more than about profiting from food sold, but for access to these spaces too. Not only was there a charge for parking, but a cost for beachfront access as well.

“For a fee, [visitors] were transported [via ferry] across the sound [from Seabreeze to Freeman Beach] in what was described as ‘nothing but a big open boat with a motor on the back of it’” (Kahrl, 2012, p. 173). And once at the beach, for those who were concerned about “too much sun,” shade was available for a price too. Shakur (2001) indicates, “[T]he umbrellas for rent went like hotcakes” (p. 25).

I believe this profitable business for the Hill family was one of the contributing factors to Seabreeze's demise. Not only did the descendants of the Freeman family “[B]eg[i]n to perceive potential riches to be made from refitting and marketing its waterfront property to those black citizens who had been turned away from whites-only leisure spaces,” but whites begin to see this potential as well (Karhl, 2012, p. 161). So, when Frank Hill “attempted to clear title to the land in order to begin work on the second phase of his development plans: the selling of lots to black families for the building of seaside cottages” the timing of Hurricane Hazel made the opportunity ripe for white developers like the Home Real Estate Realty Company to ensure those plans never became reality by blocking any ability to transfer land titles to any other individuals and without clear title, no bank would provide funding for any improvements (Karhl, 2012, p. 174).

Accordingly, Seabreeze's survival as a black leisure space rested in the hands of a few, namely the Freeman descendants, instead of a larger black community. If Seabreeze had been initially marketed as a permanent community for blacks instead of a temporary one, then its survival may not be a questionable one. The survival of blacks has always had everything to do with a strong sense of community. Shane Phelan (1996) delineates community as “[A] network of social relations marked by mutuality and emotional bonds . . . by shared understandings” (p. 236). She further posits that “the

crucial element is the recognition of others as *bound to us and like us* [my emphasis]" (p. 236). Guy (2002) furthers this tenet explaining:

[Community] is a cultural process shaped by the tradition of survival and anchored in the memories of the enslavement of our ancestors. [The Black community] . . . represents the concept of togetherness, and the collective consciousness of oppressed people who overcame struggles and emerged as survivors. (p. 8)

The black community has managed to remain resilient despite all the atrocities it has encountered, especially those situated within the "segregated South."

### **Family Communities**

#### **Ocean City**

Ocean City was never an elitist community nor was it land given to the descendants of a wealthy ancestor; instead, it began with the inclusionary thinking of one white man, Edgar Yow.<sup>16</sup> And, when the United States Navy closed Camp Davis, its missile training facility located on Topsail Island during World War II, they sold the island to the public. Edgar Yow happened to be ideally situated with the Navy as well as with private individuals, so he became the primary purchaser of these lands. Yow was politically active in Wilmington, North Carolina as well as an attorney who had represented the Navy on numerous business transactions. Cantwell (2009) writes,

He'd been mayor of Wilmington during World War II. After the war, he used connections he'd made—Wilmington's shipyard was vital to the war effort—to persuade the federal government to release land on Topsail Island it had taken over for gunnery practice and then as a missile test site.

An attorney and self-made man, Yow persuaded the Topsail landowners [the Navy] to give him land in return for his efforts to free up the beach, said his son, Lionel Yow . . . In 1949, Edgar Yow found himself the owner of a 6-mile stretch of

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<sup>16</sup> A former attorney for the U.S. Navy. See Cantwell, S. (2009, September 1). Here now: Ocean City celebrates 60th anniversary. *Wilmington Star News*. Retrieved from <http://starnewsonline.com/>

beach on undeveloped Topsail Island . . ., but he didn't stop there. He'd gotten to know members of the black community when he was mayor, Lionel Yow said. The elder Yow knew Sea breeze was a popular resort for blacks, but it wasn't beachfront. 'He found out [black people] wanted a place *on the beach* [my emphasis] . . . There was a chance for a fresh start for everybody after the war. (paras. 5–6, 8–9)

And thanks to Yow's purchase of lands on Topsail Island, Ocean City came into fruition.

Ocean City was founded in 1949 by the Chestnuts, a black family from Wilmington, NC. Caronell Chestnut explains,

Edgar Yow was an attorney here in Wilmington, and he had a client, whose name was Dr. Gray, who was a black physician who had just started practicing here in this city. And, he, Mr. Yow, was interested in Blacks having a place to *live on the Atlantic Ocean* [my emphasis]. *There was no place in North Carolina that blacks could own land and build houses* [my emphasis] . . . Dr. Gray went back to him, [having] had just started his practice in Wilmington, and could not devote any of his time to any development. So, my husband and two of his brothers who were in business together (they were auto mechanics) . . . and Dr. Gray was one of their customers, so he approached to see if they would be interested in the development up there because all of them (my husband's family) liked the water. They liked fishing and things like that and of course there was never an opportunity to be on the ocean side. So as a result of that, my husband became very interested. (personal communication, February 3, 1995)

This is the same Wilmington, NC that 51 years earlier, endured the 1898 Wilmington Race Riots. Ironically, the "rioting" was done *by whites against blacks* as they destroyed black-owned property. Ocean City demonstrated a stark contrast to the Wilmington Race Riots because it represented *building* done by blacks not the *destruction* of their property. Accordingly, Ocean City represented ". . . the distinction between fact and truth. Because facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot" (Morrison, 2008, p. 72).

Along a one-mile stretch of beach, lots were established and marketed as the first real estate opportunities for any blacks to purchase land at the beach in NC. Yet,

the first development corporation was interracial including both blacks and whites. Mrs. Chestnut explains,

[In] 1949, there was a corporation that was formed called the Ocean City Developers, Inc. Now, this corporation was my husband, his two brothers, and his sister. [They] were part of this corporation with Mr. Yow and Mr. Yow's brothers and others. (personal communication, 1995)

In the segregated South, this was a risky as well as a life-long dream, an opportunity for blacks to *own* beachfront real estate. Chestnut explains, "Mr. Yow was interested in blacks having a place to live on the Atlantic Ocean. There was no place in NC that blacks could *own* land and build houses" (personal communication, February 3, 1995).

Previously, blacks were allowed in select areas on certain beaches temporarily. This was accepted as a normal custom. As Delgado and Stefancic (2001) posit, "Circumstances change so that one group finds it possible to seize advantage, or to exploit another. They do so and then form appropriate collective attitudes to rationalize what was done" (p. 18). However, Ocean City disrupts this expectation by providing blacks the opportunity to *own land on the beach, a permanent phenomenon*. So, when Chestnut indicates that they had an opportunity to own land where they had once before been disallowed to do so, its meaning becomes clear. Lester Salamon (1979) writes,

[Southern Blacks recognized that] . . . the acquisition of land meant something far more than economic viability: it meant independence, security, the opportunity to develop pride in ownership and to enjoy a measure of control over one's destiny—in a word, escape from the debilitating dependency and degradation of [Jim Crow] . . . (pp. 151–152)

The previously mentioned black beaches didn't begin with this premise of black landownership by black citizens. Seabreeze and Shell Island sought to profit from hotels and/or restaurants before extending landownership opportunities to blacks. I believe this

difference is one characteristic that distinguishes Ocean City from other NC black beaches by providing blacks with more than temporary, but instead permanent access to a leisure space. And in doing so, this inter-racial corporation decided the principle of social justice was more important than economic driven profits.

Moreover, its pattern of development reveals an establishment of something different than other NC black beaches, a group of owners who are vested in Ocean City's success demonstrating inclusivity as well as access to the ocean for blacks without ulterior motives. Mrs. Chestnut states,

[A]s the years went on, people started to become a little more interested in it. We would invite people down from various cities. We'd let them stay in [our] home. And I'd fix food for them and what not. So we started selling the lots and the lots were just so cheap in those early years. You could get a lot for \$500 or \$1000 on the oceanfront and so on. It was very, very inexpensive. (personal communication, February 3, 1995)

Since the lots were so inexpensive, ownership for blacks was affordable. And, as more people bought property, other points of interest were added furthering the idea of community-building by providing blacks another opportunity that had only been afforded to whites—pier fishing.

As the years past, we finally built the fishing pier. In 1955 [it] was built . . . And then when that was built, of course that expanded the traffic. In the meantime, the other fishing piers were white. And now remember I'm saying we started there in 1949—1950. So, that gave blacks the opportunity to come from all the surrounding areas and use the fishing pier. (Chestnut, personal communication, February 3, 1995)

Moreover, Dr. Leroy Upperman furthers this ideology of collective consciousness and community during his interview when he describes the difference between Seabreeze and Ocean City:

Ocean City is the only beach like it in the world . . . used to be that if some of the old white people saw it . . . they'd say, 'it can't be a colored beach' because it's clean, it's neat, no joints down there . . . [Yow and the Chestnutts] restricted the lots and the lots were supposed to be residential. And they restricted the businesses. The rest of it *had to be residential which was unusual* [my emphasis] . . . Seabreeze was a 'typical' black beach—'out to have a good time.' It was designed to the *ordinary* expression of Black people who were out to have a good time. And [the owners] did everything they could to [ensure that was done] . . . [Ocean City] was just the opposite! This was designed to be as far from Seabreeze . . . [which was known for] booze, women, renting rooms, raising Hell . . . (personal communication, July 20, 1993)

Dr. Upperman suggests that Ocean City is the denial of the public persona that the dominant (white) culture had established regarding blacks. Instead, his language delineates that because the beach remained primarily owned by its black residents, instead of being commercialized, a sense of cooperation would encourage a caring atmosphere and this represents a private persona; it rejects conformity of the dominant (white) culture's public expectation of blacks' capabilities.

Thus, families would feel welcome an atmosphere that resisted "market-driven" stereotypes of black people. As Upperman indicates, "we weren't expected to have a nice place." The success of this community dispels notions of inferiority from the dominant (white) culture. Ocean City's "private" persona is unexpected because it deconstructs existing racialized ideologies of blacks and (re)constructs the competencies of blacks.

Ocean City's community identity is further established by soliciting blacks who wanted a home away from home that provided a safe atmosphere for their children. Caronell Chestnut states that "marketing materials were created and distributed at any black social event" (personal communication, February 3, 1995). She also indicates that community was important to the members of the corporation through the establishment of a community organization—similar to a homeowner's association.

The Ocean City Citizen's Council [ensured] no rowdiness or frivolity was allowed, so that children would feel free to roam . . . feel safe. [We also] established a community ruling about children going into the ocean. No child could go into the ocean unless an adult was there to watch over them. (Chestnut, personal communication, February 3, 1995)

Chestnut continues by providing additional examples that exemplify community pedagogy by emphasizing how each resident was valued and cared for by one another, especially the children. Chestnut supports this when she shares, "Very often, the children would go from house to house asking, 'Will you stand out so I can go in the water?'" as a result of the *community* ruling" (personal communication, February 3, 1995). Children asked this of other adults besides their parents because they knew that someone would be willing to assist them with following the rules—because they knew that *someone other than their parents cared enough about their well-being to watch them.*

Long-time caring relationships were established highlighting the collective consciousness of all Ocean City residents. Individuals in this community learned to "look out" for one another as well as their children. As a child, I remember spending hours on the beach because I realized that someone always had an eye on me. I felt safe. I also visited nearby neighbors' homes socializing, talking, and learning about new books along with eating. Even though I was a guest of their home, the adults of Ocean City took care of me and the other children too. Linda Upperman Smith, Dr. Upperman's daughter, reinforces this through her childhood memories of Ocean City. Smith states,

Daddy loved to swim and would always take *all the children* who were swimming with us out beyond the breakers to 'ride the waves.' He taught us to turn sideways when the wave approached and to never go further than below your armpit because the water would deepen when a wave approached. He always taught us to walk out to determine the correct depth for yourself and to never dive

outward into a wave because you could end up standing in a hole. (personal communication, June 15, 2013)

Chestnut further corroborates Ocean City's long-time relationships by highlighting community events like "community crabbing" as well as the "annual community fish fry." She even indicates, "We had our own policeman . . . we had our own street lights . . . we had an oyster roast every Thanksgiving . . . we were a close-knit group—whatever we had, we shared; we made our own recreation" (personal communication, February 3, 1995). Robinson (2010) describes his childhood similarly, "[A]s a black man who belonged to a black community that wasn't allowed to participate fully in the social, political, and economic life of its country [because of segregation] . . . [the black] community . . . had to construct a social, political and economic life of its own" (p. 38). Ocean City exhibits resistance to the expectations of the dominant (white) culture and in turn, represents not just an escape from Jim Crow, but a space demonstrating survival too because of its tenet of collective consciousness.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ANALYSIS OF CARONELL CHESTNUT

Caronell Chestnut's interview was unique because it was the only video recording I had out of my storytellers. Local Wilmington videographers<sup>17</sup> met with Chestnut in her Wilmington home. In the title credits, educational purposes are indicated and footage was to be made available to the Cape Fear Museum as well as the NC Archives and History Office in Raleigh. This leaves me to interpret that the interview was an attempt to document the origins of Ocean City, NC through one of its founders. Chestnut was well-dressed in a floral blouse with a tan blazer that seems to be part of a suit with match earrings. Her hair is styled perfectly. And, as is customary in southern traditions, they are conducting the interview in her living room.

As I initially watched the video, I was quite surprised. In the interviews I conducted, I wanted authentic voices to be heard without interpreting any efficacy from me, or anything or anyone else. I didn't want the typical power relationship between research and subject to be an issue (Casey, 1992). "My objective was to interfere as little as possible in the creation of the narrative" (Reissman, 1993, p. 31). Yet, I felt like this interviewer's comments were sometimes intrusive and disrupted Chestnut's storytelling. However, the more I watched the interview, the more I realized that Chestnut was doing something that had been ingrained in her during many years of surviving in a segregated society. She smiled. She didn't let these ruptures disrupt her text. And, if she had not done the same thing years ago during Ocean City's beginnings,

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<sup>17</sup> As far as I can discern from their voices, these Wilmington videographers are white. And, this makes my tenet of Caronell Chestnut being a trickster character even more profound.

there would be no Ocean City. I believe that her wisdom with age as well as surviving in the segregated South has something to do with how well she handles these interviewers too.

The recorder, Diane Logan, was younger than Chestnut. And, many times, younger generations easily lose patience with the stories of the older generations. However, despite age, Chestnut's responses to many of her interviewer's interruptions demonstrate she is far from "mellow." Her wit becomes apparent and this wit reveals her as a trickster character common to the African folktales. In a commonly known Aesopian fable, "The Hare and the Tortoise," the tortoise deftly outwits the hare because of his naturally slow gait. Hare knows that he is much faster and assumes that this skill will win him the race. However, when the hare takes a nap, the turtle remains diligent and wins the race because he made no assumptions other than making the effort to win (Levine, 1977). Chestnut easily proves that despite age, she, like the tortoise possesses high intelligence and can outwit and out-think any (presumed) adversary.

As the questions begin, Chestnut seems relaxed and she is smiling. The female interviewer, Miss Anne<sup>18</sup> begins by saying, "Well I think we need to start at the beginning. I didn't realize when Gwen mentioned your name that you are a charter member of the historical society."

Chestnut: Historical Society (simultaneously with interviewer) Right. (nodding and smiling)

Interviewer: and, I uh—I didn't realize you were this involved. I mean *you and your family* started Ocean City.

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<sup>18</sup> I call the female interviewer "Miss Anne" because of the way she communicates with Caronell Chestnut. The name Miss Anne is a reference to white women who historically have oppressed black women and in my analysis, I believe Diane Logan or "Miss Anne" is attempting to oppress Chestnut. See J. Cole (2011) *Conversations: Straight Talk with America's Sister President*. New York, NY: Random House. Also, "Glossary of Harlem Slang" in Z. Hurston. (1995). *The Complete Stories*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Interviewer: Well, (nodding and smiling) *we did. We did* [Indeed].

Interviewer: Well, I've come to the right place.

Chestnut: (Chuckles).

Immediately, Chestnut's authority is established. Not only does Chestnut smile coyly at what appears to be Miss Anne's amazement at Chestnut's involvement, but she also chuckles at Miss Anne's statement further substantiating Miss Anne's "presumed" expertise. Her responses acknowledge that as a black woman, Chestnut is,

fully aware of the material conditions of [her life] . . . and equally aware of the public discourses swirling around [her] . . . inspired in a context of resistance, as [Maria] Stewart implores, 'to show forth to the world that ye are endowed with noble and exalted faculties.' (Royster, 2000, p. 110)

Her reactions to Miss Anne indicate not only an authority, but a confidence in what she knows to be true, her actions have demonstrated her "authority and power as [an] intellectual being" (Royster, 2000, p. 114).

### **The Beginning**

Chestnut calmly starts talking about Ocean City. She begins chronologically explaining,

Mr. Yow<sup>19</sup> was interested in blacks having a place to live on the Atlantic Ocean. There was no place in NC that blacks could *OWN* land and build houses. Now we had a *little* beach here outta Wilmington that was called Seabreeze.<sup>20</sup> Now we could go to Seabreeze, but it was on the sound. And if you wanted to go over to the ocean, you had to get on a *little* boat—the inland waterway wasn't there then, but before the inland waterway was there, we'd ride across and walk over the dunes to the ocean.

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<sup>19</sup> Edgar Yow—former Wilmington, NC mayor; afterwards, a Wilmington attorney who was presumably Dr. Samuel Gray's attorney for the opening of his new medical practice in Wilmington.

<sup>20</sup> Dr. Leroy Upperman refers to Seabreeze as "a typical black beach . . . designed to the ordinary expression of black people who were out to have a good time" (personal Communication, July 20, 1993).

In my analysis of the language Chestnut used, she's making a distinction between an existing beach community discussed in earlier chapters, Seabreeze. While she explains that "we," black folks had a beach, she refers to this beach as "little." Furthermore, she also describes gaining access to that "little" beach by riding on a "little" boat. While I do believe that Chestnut isn't denying what Seabreeze was to the black community, I think she's signifying with her use of the word "little." The distinction she makes with "little" seems to infer that it is "smaller" than Ocean City because of its lack of oceanfront access. Meanwhile, when juxtaposing Ocean City to Seabreeze, it not only is geographically larger in size, but symbolically as well. Seabreeze limited what blacks could do. Blacks *couldn't* "OWN land and build houses;" therefore, it was "little" in its vision. While at Ocean City, blacks *could* "OWN land and build houses," i.e., this was "bigger" in its vision and in its capacity for what it could do "for the race as a whole" (Royster, 2000, p. 110).

Chestnut continues the chronological historical text of Ocean City and explains how Topsail Island became civilian and no longer government-owned. More importantly, she provides further details about how the black community was approached about ownership on Topsail.

So, when Mr. Yow had bought this land I understand after Camp Davis<sup>21</sup> withdrew their forces or what not or whatever the operations were they were carrying on there—Dr. Gray went back to him, could not, had just started his practice in Wilmington and he could not devote any of his time to any developments.

What she doesn't explain here is that Mr. Yow was a white attorney who approached Dr. Samuel Gray, a black Wilmington physician, about becoming an investor in land on

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<sup>21</sup> An Army training facility—See Stallman, D. (1996). *Echoes of Topsail*. Wilmington, NC: Rutledge.

Topsail Island.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, Caronell Chestnut says, “[H]e [Dr. Gray] could not devote any of his time to any developments.” Through her text, she reveals that a white man asked a black man about investing and likely owning beachfront property as a space of recreation for his family, perhaps the only time this had been done in NC.

### **Socio-economic Class Perceptions**

Chestnut continues,

So, my husband and two brothers were in business here—they were auto mechanics and they had a business on the north side of town and a business on the south side of town—And, Dr. Gray was one of their customers and he approached them to see if they would be interested in the development up there because *all of them*, my husband’s family, *liked* the water and *liked* fishing and just liked things like that. Of course there was never an opportunity to be on the ocean side.

Here, she provides an overview of how her husband became involved in the beach community. He and his brothers were auto mechanics who owned two repair shops. And, society’s assumptions are that auto mechanics aren’t supposed to be “that smart.” Not only do the Chestnut brothers refute this myth, but they are smart enough to own their own business at multiple locations. And since Chestnut advises that “they had a business on the north side of town and a business on the south side of town,” one can assume that some of their customers were likely white too. My analysis here isn’t to ignore the economic class divisions of what her statements make. Instead, I’d like to address them.

Some may argue that Wade Chestnut was part of the Black Elite. I would disagree. Class divisions are based on social as well as economic status. The social status for blacks in 1949 was seen as inferior to the dominant (white) culture. However,

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<sup>22</sup> According to Kenneth S. Chestnut, Sr., it was likely that Yow was Gray’s attorney for the development of his medical practice.

“[d]uring working hours, there was plenty of mixing—whites need blacks as labor” (Robinson, 2012, p. 45). And let us not forget, “These were the days of segregation.” Therefore, skin color placed limitations on one’s social status. Also, Wade was a black auto mechanic who co-owned his own businesses. And a societal perception about auto mechanics is “dirty work” that requires technical training not necessarily a college education. I would argue that “dirty work” without the necessity of a college education and “elitism” are mutually exclusive from each other. Despite that, class in the black community did exist, but was quite different during Jim Crow. Robinson (2012) writes, “Not one of the . . . [black] families was truly rich but most were comfortable; a few were poor. What we had in common was being black” (p. 41). So, as a researcher, I do acknowledge that the Chestnuts were in a different economic class than most blacks, but what is more important in my interpretation is *what they did with their money*.

### **Silence Speaks Loudly**

So as a result of that, my husband became *very* interested and to make a long story short he finally sold his interests in the mechanic—auto business here and just devoted all of his time to developing that area on Topsail Island. (personal communication, Caronell Chestnut, February 3, 1995)

So, when Yow’s relationships with black folks provided an opportunity for blacks, like “my husband’s family” who had always “liked the water and liked fishing and just liked things like that,” her husband seized this as an opportunity for himself as well as the black community. Now, Chestnut’s words don’t say this, but the silence in her language does. Instead of emphasizing what she and Wade truly did, she minimizes the significance of their actions. She acknowledges the uncertainty stating “blacks were a little hesitant about putting money into property like that because they just didn’t know whether this was a gimmick or just whether it would go or just—just what.”

Now, Wade and Caronell Chestnut could've done like other Ocean City residents; they could've simply bought property, built a home and enjoyed vacationing at the beach. Instead, Wade put his life's work into Ocean City with no guarantees of success during "the days of segregation." Not only that, but they were young parents with two small children. And, although Caronell worked, she was a schoolteacher, so her income couldn't have been enough to support a family of four if this venture had failed. Instead, of highlighting the risks they took, Chestnut minimizes them through silence. And, this silence in Chestnut's language further demonstrates how their actions represented activism as "desire for agency and autonomy—as human beings and as citizens who should have rights and privileges" not just for themselves, but for other blacks too (Royster, 2000, p. 109).

### **Importance of Historical Context**

And, he called that area Ocean City—he named that little area Ocean City. It was one mile that was given for blacks 'cause these were the days in 1949. These were the days of segregation. (personal communication, Caronell Chestnut, February 3, 1995)

Many Ocean City critics dismiss the importance of Ocean City because they say, "It wasn't the first black beach community." However, in my analysis of Chestnut's language, she doesn't stress Ocean City as the first black beach. In fact, she acknowledges the existence of another black beach mentioned in the previous chapters, Seabreeze. My interpretation of her language reveals that what she does emphasize is something often overlooked and that is that at Ocean City, blacks were allowed to visit the beach and in some cases, blacks owned oceanfront land, but as *a community*.

Moreover, the dominant (white) culture in this region of NC had been successful at inhibiting previous black-owned oceanfront communities. Her verbal patterns indicate

this by reminding her audience, “[T]hese were the days in 1949. These were the days of segregation.” And, a previously black-owned NC oceanfront community, Shell Island, burned.<sup>23</sup> The only one that remained in 1949 was Seabreeze which was destroyed by litigation with white folks. This repetition reminds essentially of the historical context Ocean City originated.

### **A Connection to African Ethos through Critical Imagination**

More importantly, what her words indicate is that her husband, Wade’s actions demonstrated more than wanting to have a second, vacation home, but more so to provide an opportunity to own oceanfront property in a black beach *community* and provide the same to other blacks too—something that blacks had *never* been able to do.

Robert Ellickson has stated: ‘Compared to other resources, land remains a particularly potent safeguard of individual liberty. Like no other resource, land can provide a physical haven to which a beleaguered individual can retreat.’ Just as land can shelter the beleaguered individuals,’ it can provide a physical base for groups trying to improve their collective lot. (Mitchell, 2001, p. 539)

And, as a black man, Wade’s “devoting all his time [to Ocean City]” demonstrates how “[Blacks] have used . . . beliefs in the development of an African-based ethos [of community], a system of belief and action” (Royster, 2000, p. 86). His commitment exemplifies that “[d]eep connections exist between what we do and what we believe” (Royster, 2000, p. 86).

And, in order for blacks to believe in what they cannot see, they must have imagination. Wade Chestnut II had imagination because he believed in “the possibility of [Ocean City] . . . even if [he didn’t] know the specificity of [it]” (Royster, 2000, p. 83).

Caronell explains

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<sup>23</sup> See Chapter II—Ocean City: An Escape from Jim Crow.

When I went there to look at it, we often laugh about it because I could see no vision as [Wade] saw it. But he said, 'Well this will be the residential area and this will be the business area' and so on. And, as I've often said, I could see land and sky and water. (laughs) I saw nothing else . . .

More importantly, her words indicate that Wade had critical imagination because he was able to see what the dominant (white) culture had withheld from all blacks—oceanfront access. His critical imagination began to reveal the possibility of a (re)interpretation of the future and in “remaking interpretative frameworks” (Royster, 2000, p. 83). While blacks haven't had this opportunity, he now realizes the time for new possibilities is finally here.

Not only that, but by putting *all* of his income into this project, he and his family were invested in Ocean City's success not just financially, but personally and socially too. “About 1950, we moved in our home there . . . we had to be the first to move in because the tower had been turned into a restaurant. We didn't have a pier then. And my husband didn't have a place to sleep, so we had to rush the house so we could have a home to live in.” Royster (2000) supports this writing, “[A] . . . sense of humanness is significantly defined in codependence with the community rather than in terms of themselves as autonomous individuals who are separable and independent from others” (Royster, 2000, p. 86).

### **Hazel Comes to Visit**

Chestnut continues her task of teaching about the beach by continuing in a chronological storytelling pattern. She states, “As the years past, we finally built the fishing pier. In 1955 a fishing pier was built. But before that, let me back up.”

Chestnut's narrative is primarily chronological, but here she realizes that she has forgotten an important point that took place prior to the pier.

Just as we were beginning to get people's confidence to begin building, then Hurricane Hazel came along. (Smiling) And, when this happened, we had to start all over from day one almost. Because then of course, money was very scarce. And it was a sacrifice for even those who made good salaries. It was a sacrifice for them to invest money in a second home. And this is just what was being done.

So we lost our home completely because we did not build on pylons. We had just built on the ground—a regular building as houses were built. But we finally learned the hard way that everything there had to be built on pylons. And, the same builder who built the first home came back and built—started re-building the other homes that were there.

As she corrects herself, one of Chestnut's reactions is to smile. Now, while many would overlook this simple gesture as "Miss Anne" appears to, I don't. Her smile is further indication of my interpretation of Chestnut as a trickster.

And, as a trickster, her verbal and non-verbal patterns have meaning; therefore, all communication both verbal and non-verbal cannot be overlooked. Since Hurricane Hazel was one of the worst hurricanes in NC history, her smiling while re-telling the story of what happened seems contradictory to the disastrous effects of the storm "cast[ing] an innocent smile to signal repudiation" (Casey, 1993, p. 112). As a result, I interpret her smile as another indication of signifying. Her smile is a (re)interpretation of what happened. It signals denial of what was probably a very difficult time in her life during "the days of segregation." Yet the aftermath of Hazel's destruction required re-building, something all too familiar to the black community. Royster (2000) writes,

[Blacks] have been subjected to a body of continuously resonant experiences, experiences that can be articulated . . . as converging oppressions . . . Over the course of these accumulated experiences, we have acquired an intuition, an ability to 'know,' to understand tacitly a sense of self, place, and possibility. This consistency between conditions and response suggests that a sense of survival in being so consistently necessary might become automated and somehow coded into the bloodlines. (p. 88)

Chestnut informs Miss Anne that “we learned the hard way,” but her emphasis is on the lessons learned after the storm. She acknowledges previous mistakes stating “we lost our home completely because we did not build on pylons. We had just built on the ground—a regular building as houses were built.” More importantly for the Ocean City community, Chestnut states, “[We didn’t run; we remained] re-building the other homes that were there.”

To fully understand the impact of “re-building” a community, I chose to highlight a question asked by “Miss Anne” immediately after Chestnut explains the devastation of Hurricane Hazel. “Miss Anne” asks, “How many homes do you think were lost?” And Chestnut answers, “Oh, I can imagine—at that time—about 15 or 20.” Moreover, if Chestnut’s answer is juxtaposed with part of an earlier response to Miss Anne, “Because then of course, money was very scarce. And it was a sacrifice for even those who made good salaries. It was a sacrifice for them to invest money in a second home. And this is just what was being done.”

Some fifteen or twenty residents of Ocean City not only demonstrated resilience in the re-building of their “second home,” but also established Ocean City as a site of resistance or “homeplace.” hooks (1990) explains,

[T]he construction of a homeplace . . . had a radical political dimension . . . one’s homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist . . . [because] making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects . . . where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the [dominant (white) culture]. (p. 42)

Unlike Shell Island or Seabreeze, the Ocean City community didn’t run; instead, they remained because this community had become their homeplace; these residents

realized their presence demonstrated resistance. Chestnut realizes this too; therefore, she has every reason to smile.

### **A Strong Episcopal Faith**

As Chestnut continues her narration, instead of transitioning to another chronological event involving Ocean City, she discusses being an Episcopalian, and mentors a new priest who has recently come to Wilmington. She states,

During that time we had a minister whose name was Father Kirton who was a priest—um, I'm an Episcopalian. And he was a priest here at the church in Wilmington—St. Mark's Episcopal Church. So each summer, we invited them to come up and spend their vacations with us. And he would have a Sunday morning service every Sunday morning when he was on vacation. He would have a service *in my living room* [my emphasis] (smiles).

And it was interesting because people who were there would be invited to come. But we didn't have enough chairs to accommodate them so everybody came over with their folding chairs and you'd see them coming across the dunes to the service.

Well that was the beginning of a chapel that we have there now. We have a chapel that at the beginning was named St. Mark's Chapel after our church here but after my husband died—they named it after him. And it's now called the Wade E. Chestnut Memorial Chapel. But it's interesting that the beginning of that was—*the beginning was in my living room* [my emphasis].

Initially, in my analysis, I believed Chestnut was deviating from the chronology of Ocean City by discussing her Episcopal Faith as a tangent. However, as I re-read her story, I realized that from her standpoint her faith is another important facet that is simultaneous with the early years of Ocean City.

Not only is her faith important, but her words reveal irony in the modest beginnings of this Ocean City church. It began “in my living room.” And, as she says, “in my living room,” while such worship services seem quaint and informal, her smile indicates a sense of pride that she had a part in its beginnings. And, while the Episcopal

Chapel had a humble start, its origins evolved around Caronell Chestnut. Not only was she instrumental in starting this Chapel, but “at the beginning [it] was named St. Mark’s Chapel . . . but after [her] . . . husband died—they named it after him.” Modesty in the midst of pride is quite ironic because the two are usually contrasting emotions.

However, this is the only indication of pride that Chestnut seems to demonstrate, the Chapel begin in *her* living room and is now named after *her* husband.

After highlighting the origins of the Wade E. Chestnut Memorial Chapel, she immediately details specifics about Episcopal camps in Eastern NC for both black and white children. She states,

[T]here was no place in this area for black children to go to camp. And there was an Episcopal camp for white children up near Washington . . . NC . . . But blacks were not allowed to go to this camp. So Father Kirton had a conference with the bishop who at that time was Bishop Thomas Wright and together they provided a place, they were able to get a place (smiling) to carry some of the youngsters down to SC a little camp that was called Camp Baskerville at that time. And they did that for two or three years until Hazel came in 1954. It was two years . . . because Father Kirton came to Wilmington in 1952. And after Hazel destroyed Camp Baskerville down in SC, blacks still had no place to go. So my husband was very interested in the camping program also.

In the meantime, there was a little hotel that had been built there in 1952—I don’t remember the exact year, but anyway there was a little motel built there.

While Chestnut briefly mentions the “little motel,” she doesn’t provide detailed information about it. However, I believe it’s important to remember that along with the pier, this motel provide access to Ocean City for other blacks. And, unlike Seabreeze or Shell Island, this motel wasn’t always about making money as mentioned in Chapter II.

My husband let the campers stay—they closed the motel off for those two weeks and just let the campers stay there. And they had the activities over in the restaurant. They had their bible study and their recreation and what not over in that area. And that was the beginning of a camp that was later built across [Highway] 210 that was called Camp Oceanside.

Here, Ocean City's connection to the black Episcopal youth camp known as Camp Oceanside is evident. What Chestnut is able to demonstrate is that Ocean City's community not only positively influenced its residents, but also other non-residential black children, too. This motel closed during peak season, the summer months, to provide a summer enrichment camp for black youth. This information is pivotal in demonstrating how, despite living in a segregated society, Ocean City provided homeplace not just to its residents, but also for black youth by giving them a "safe place . . . [to] heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination . . . [and] ha[ve] the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture [their] spirits" (hooks, 1990, p. 42).

My analysis continues with her in-depth synopsis about the history of Episcopal youth camps in the context of the segregated South. Not only does she trace their origins, but also their demise. Here she continues by adding,

Now Camp Oceanside is no longer there. The Chapel is there, but the camp is no longer there because this white camp that I was talking about Camp Leach—the buildings were rundown, very, very poor—just a poor condition. And we had no area in our area to expand Camp Oceanside. So, the Diocese of East Carolina—wanted to expand the camping program.

Now this is—integration had come at this time. So, in order to expand the program—there were those that wanted to close down Camp Oceanside and rebuild over at Camp Leach. But that wouldn't have made a good situation because after *we'd been kept outta* [my emphasis] there for all these years—*that wouldn't have been a good feeling* [emphasis added] to have gone into that area.

Well, in the meantime, there was some land down on Emerald Isle that had been given to the Diocese of East Carolina—a Mrs. Alice Hoffman. Now Ms. Hoffman was a relative of Theodore Roosevelt. Now this land that she gave was just invaluable now but at the time it was just—uh land that extended from the ocean to the sound. But it was a much wider area than we are now than Topsail area.

And she was an Episcopalian and she gave a part of this land to the Diocese of East Carolina with the stipulation that it would be used for religious purposes and if it was not used for religious purposes it would be put—given back to the family.

Well, that was a little problem for the Diocese because they had no use for it at the time. So I think they had the Marines to come over and have a little religious service—just enough to keep it within the restrictions.

So, when these two camps had outgrown themselves, an ad hoc committee was formed and they came up with the idea that we would just use that land and they've built a camp and conference center there that is just beautiful. It's called Trinity Center.

The length of time she talks about the establishment of these black Episcopal youth camps indicates how important this issue of equal opportunities for black children is to her. Eventually, I realized that although Camp Oceanside no longer exists and her task is to tell about Ocean City, she continues discussing these youth camps. This tangent in her language shows that while Ocean City is important, her involvement in the Episcopal Church is too. And while the interviewer requests her to discuss Ocean City, she does, but through her own interpretation that intersects with the struggles of not just Ocean City, but the black community.

Next, another element of Chestnut's trickster character is evident with a question she poses to Miss Anne. After describing the origins of the Trinity Center, Chestnut asks, "Have you been there?" The question seems to startle Miss Anne because she wasn't expecting a question to be asked of her. I argue that Chestnut is "remaking interpretive frameworks based on that question" (Royster, 2000, p. 83). She is no longer the interviewee, but the interviewer. Her question isn't meant to insult, but to educate. Trickster characters were more common to African folktales and their purpose was both to inform socially and didactically. Similar to other pedagogic devices, questioning usually is a didactic device "meant to sharpen the wits" of the one being questioned (Bascom, 1954, p. 346).

Miss Anne responds, “I have not been there. But I’m aware of it because Bill’s youngest daughter who lives with us has Down syndrome.” Miss Anne seems audibly surprised and her tone registers how impressed she seems to be when she shares with Chestnut, “And, they have a camp—for handicapped children. But she has not gone there yet.” Chestnut replies to her saying, “I see (nodding).” Chestnut’s response further delineates an indirect message as a trickster. “I see [but you don’t.]” Miss Anne’s words don’t acknowledge what Chestnut has just attempted to teach her and that is the extension of influence resulting from Ocean City. In other words, this nice facility is something that blacks helped to establish for your “handicapped” stepdaughter along with countless other individuals.

Chestnut continues her didactic language by stating, “Well, I hope you will have her go. And—in fact I have an application here today I’ll give for you to work with if you’re still interested.” The context of her discourse indicates not only did she (re)construct the context of the interview by asking questions of the interviewer, but she also (re)interpreted Ocean City’s contributions in the midst of a *segregated* society to the Trinity Center, a possible place of recreation for Miss Anne’s “handicapped” stepdaughter.

### **The Fishing Pier**

Caronell Chestnut continues with her story of Ocean City by explaining one of its most highly regarded landmarks besides the ocean, the fishing pier.

Then the fishing pier was built. And then when that was built, of course that expanded the traffic. In the meantime, the other fishing piers were white. And now remember I’m saying we started there in 1949—1950. So, that gave blacks the opportunity to come from all the surrounding areas and use the fishing pier. Of course now things have changed, they can go to any fishing pier they’d like. But that was the beginning of it. In fact, even that fishing pier now is an integrated entity.

While researching the history of Topsail Island, I discovered that during the 1950's, there were five fishing piers on the island and the Ocean City Fishing Pier was the only one that allowed blacks to fish (McAllister, 2006). While Chestnut mentions the other white fishing piers, and indicates the Ocean City Pier was for the black community, I chose to examine something she subtly states, "Of course, that expanded the traffic." These words are key because while economics determines whether blacks could buy property at Ocean City, the fishing pier didn't. The Ocean City Fishing Pier was privately owned by the Ocean City residents. However, *no one* was excluded from this space, especially rural blacks. Chestnut furthers this belief when she says, "So, that gave blacks the opportunity to come from all the surrounding areas and use the fishing pier."

#### **Ocean City Developers, Inc.—The First Corporation**

While the area of Ocean City as a leisure space is pleasant to imagine, this community was more than about beauty, but about business too. Chestnut states,

In 1949 there was a corporation that was formed called the Ocean City Developers, Inc. now this corporation was my husband and his two brothers, and his sister were parts of this corporation with Mr. Yow and Mr. Yow's brothers and others. But the developers continued operating by selling the land . . . during a part of the development—see when we went in there, there was nothing there. There were no—there were electric lines part of the way beyond us, but not too far. And, no telephones, no anything. So, the developers developed the streets and um, just developed it in general.

Clearly, Wade Chestnut and his other family members had business experience.

Chestnut mentions earlier that her husband and his brothers owned two automobile repair businesses. So, along with their business savvy, Edgar Yow was an attorney who I'm sure had basic legal knowledge of forming corporations and was a former mayor for the city of Wilmington. So, their collaboration efforts weren't superficial, but legitimate as well as strategic. Her language tries to explain how "There were no . . . telephones, no

anything.” And, in order to fully develop this community, and make it attractive to potential buyers, it had to be inhabitable.

With any investment, there are risks and in this case, the risks had to be embraced by all. So, as a sign of solidarity, both white and black investors took sincere strides by having utilities installed for these black residents, a definite indicator of “change not on the surface but in the depths—change in the sense of renewal” (Baldwin, 1993, p. 92). “The white man . . . must become a part of [the Negro's] suffering . . . that he now watches wistfully from the heights of his lonely power . . . How can one respect . . . the values of a people who do not . . . live the way they say they do?” (Baldwin, 1993, p. 96). So, this bi-racial group of individuals in the segregated South looked beyond race similar to the Fusionist politicians of 19th century Wilmington towards a more just society and took a stand against Jim Crow by not only financially participating in Ocean City, but socially investing in the longevity of the community.

### **Death as a Rupture**

As Chestnut finishes discussing the first corporation, her demeanor changes. She begins shaking her head from side to side saying, “Then finally, and my husband died in 1961 (shaking her head) just (pause) as we were just getting things going we thought very well. January 7, 1961 he passed; so we’ve continued to (pause) try to carry it on.” This rupture in her storytelling pattern is obvious because her sadness is still evident, and she can still after 34 years, remember and recall the exact date of Wade’s death. Likewise, the way she tells of his death seems to demonstrate its unexpectedness; “Just as things were going we thought very well . . .” he dies. Her pauses indicate hesitation in her remarks presumably because the memory is still

painful. Moreover, she is very brief and provides no additional information about him.

This briefness and silence reveals her continued grief.

### **Rhetorical Listening**

I believe that in order to avoid the pain of Wade's death, Chestnut doesn't hesitate long over it as she continues her story. She says, "1949—But the first corporation, the Ocean City Developers was dissolved and the land was divided among the stockholders and so forth. The new development is—let's see, I don't remember the name of that new development next to us."

Interviewer One (Miss Anne): It's the um—

Interviewer Two (Miss Anne's husband): Stump Sound.

Chestnut: Yes (nodding). The Village

Interviewer One: of Stump Sound

Chestnut: Uh huh. Now that part is still owned by Lionel Yow. That's the son of

Mr. Edgar Yow: And, that corporation is building that all the way around in that area.

An important tenet I've identified in my analysis of Chestnut's narrative is the importance of listening. And, as I listen to Chestnut's words, I recognize the importance of the fluidity of her storytelling process. While Chestnut may have memory gaps, as most people do, many times, they "work themselves out." Here, during Chestnut's brief memory break, the interviewers interrupt. And, I'm sure they were innocently trying to "help her remember." However, I would argue as a researcher, as Miss Anne is in her role as recorder, interviewing requires "listen[ing] with a minimum of interruptions" (Reissman, 1993, p. 34). And, by not doing so, she and her husband, interfered with Chestnut's storytelling process. More so, I believe that they would've learned more

because “[s]uch listening . . . may help us invent, interpret, and ultimately judge differently in that perhaps we can *hear* things we cannot see” (Ratcliffe, 1999, p. 203). Moreover, the interviewers obviously weren’t present when these corporations were being formed; therefore, they can’t witness to them like Mrs. Chestnut could.

Further, I don’t think her emphasis was on the name of the other corporation, but more so upon its existence. Ratcliffe (1999) writes, “[L]istening [should] . . . be recovered so as to inform . . . theoretically and pedagogically . . . rhetorical listening may be employed to hear discursive intersections of any cultural categories . . . and any cultural positions” (p. 196).

### **A Safe Community**

Mrs. Chestnut continues by detailing the community corporation that stood Ocean City apart because of its philosophies about what a “nice place” really meant. She says,

The second corporation was the Ocean City Fishing Pier Corporation. Now it’s still in operation. And, after the Ocean City Developers was dissolved, then, the people who lived in this . . . area, formed a community organization. And, this was called the Ocean City Citizens Council. And, of course, they had there—they elected their officers and what not and they were able to carry on the ideas of a nice developed area.

One of the things we stressed was that we didn’t want any rowdiness or any frivolity or what not, so that the children would have an opportunity to feel free to roam up and down the little area and feel safe, you know. This is what is—it has pretty well been kept that way.

I often tell the tale about um, children in the beginning who wanted to go into the ocean. And you know we weren’t accustomed to going into the ocean water. You know it’s very rough anyway.

So, there was a community ruling that no children could go into the ocean unless an adult was there to watch over them. So, very often when the children wanted to go in, they’d go from house to house. ‘Will you stand outside, so we can go into the water?’ (Laughing) And, of course, all that’s dissolved now. Children go out there now and I just have to turn my back (laughing) ‘cause I get so nervous

sometimes. They go out with these inner tubes and what not. They're not being supervised.

Here, she is identifying an important aspect of Ocean City, its ability to operate as a community organization whose priority was keeping the children of the community safe. She furthers this perspective saying, "One of the things we stressed was that we didn't want any rowdiness or any frivolity or what not, so that the children would have an opportunity to feel free to roam up and down the little area and feel safe." This is a significant point she makes because of the context of her life.

As a mother in the segregated South, she is raising two sons. And, not only does she want them to be safe in the water, but safe to "roam up and down the little area" too. She reminds Miss Anne that in the context of the segregated South, not only was racism an issue, but also the ocean stating, "[Y]ou know we weren't accustomed to going into the ocean water. You know it's very rough." However, Miss Anne seems to miss this point. They weren't familiar with the ocean because previously, *they'd been denied access to it*. Therefore, it was up to the organization to not only protect their children from segregation, but from the "unknown" ocean waters too.

Nonetheless, Chestnut continues furthering this concept of "community" by detailing the success of the ruling. We know of its success because she states, while softly laughing, "So, very often when the children wanted to go in, they'd go from house to house. 'Will you stand outside, so we can go into the water?'" Her laughter represents fond memories and achievement because the children remained safe. While she doesn't say it, I believe Chestnut is instrumental in this success. Royster (2000) explains that a common African female tradition was when women of the community, ". . . formed alliances . . . to take care of their broad responsibilities, including . . . the

teaching and nurturing of children, the managing of the community conscience, and so on” (p. 102). Likewise, the community became invested in the safety of *all* the children. Collins (2000) writes, “Even when relationships are not between kin . . . [black] community norms traditionally were such that neighbors cared for one another’s children” known as “othermothering” (p. 179).

Chestnut’s “othermothering” is also challenged when the community ruling was dissolved. This is evident when her nurturing continues even after the dissolution of the children’s supervision while swimming rule. Although others aren’t concerned for their children, she continues to be. She says, “Children go out there now and I just have to turn my back (laughing) ‘cause I just get so nervous sometimes . . . They’re not being supervised.” And, while Chestnut acknowledges that the community has changed, her community conscience for the children has not. Her laughter seems to indicate that it’s something that is discomforting to her, but she lives with it.

Rather than Miss Anne being moved by the adaptation of Ocean City’s community conscience, the concern for all Ocean City children or the “othermothering” that began, she abruptly interrupts Chestnut and asks, “I wanna hear the story about um, back in um, the early times when about the crabbing.” This rupture appears to be intentional and self-motivated. She makes no apologies for interrupting Chestnut’s thought process. And in doing so, Miss Anne doesn’t allow the fluidity of Chestnut’s story to remain. Instead, she represents the status quo, the dominant (white) culture by trying to speak instead of implementing a rhetorical listening strategy and puts her desires above those of Chestnut’s narrative. Ratcliffe (1999) writes,

By championing a responsibility logic . . . rhetorical listening offers us the possibility of getting past . . . accusation, denial, and defensiveness—all of which are associated with authorial intent and all of which usually result in a stalemate

that preserves the status quo. By championing a responsibility logic, rhetorical listening asks us, first, to judge not simply the person's intent but the historically situated discourses that are (un)consciously swirling around and through the person and, second, to evaluate politically and ethically how these discourses function and how we want to act upon them. (p. 208)

Nonetheless, Chestnut pleasantly responds to Miss Anne's request. She begins talking about the fun had while crabbing.

Crabbing—Oh yes! Oh yes (smiling). When we first moved there, the crabs were just—everywhere. You could just go down to the water and catch them two and three at a time. But the best place for crabbing was down at the end of the island below where St. Regis is now. And we'd take bushel baskets and go down; the *community* would just go down.

We couldn't drive all the way there because the roads didn't extend that far. But we had a little parking area that the Army people I guess had left there. So we would park our cars and we'd walk about a mile across the dunes and across the—as a *community* [my emphasis] we would just have fun doing that. So, if you would go just as the tide was changing you could—catch the crabs, you just couldn't get them off the lines fast enough.

So one of the tales that my son often tells is that we'd fill all the bushel baskets—the crabs were still biting. And we didn't want to leave (laugh). So he said I asked him to take off his jeans (laugh) and we tied the ends of the legs, so we could put more crabs in that. Well that was fun. The only hard part came, when we started back and had to take those crabs of bushel baskets and what not back (laugh).

Obviously, Miss Anne has heard a version of this tale before because she says, "I wanna hear the story . . . about the crabbing." This time, she wants to hear it told by Chestnut. This request demonstrates something quite common to African oral tradition—storytelling. "[I]n West African communities . . . women . . . were the storytellers" (Royster, 2000, p. 112). For blacks, "the oral tradition . . . preserves the Afro-American heritage and reflects the collective spirit of the race. Through . . . stor[ies,] . . . lessons and precepts about life and survival are handed down from generation to generation" (Smitherman, 1986, p. 73).

In my analysis of her “crabbing” story, it appears that Chestnut has told this story many times too. She appears very comfortable in re-telling it because she laughs and chuckles the entire time. However, I interpret that while this may be a familiar story to her and perhaps others, I posit that her crabbing story is old and new at the same time. I believe each time she (re)tells the story, she (re)interprets its purpose depending upon her audience (Degh, 1972).

Through . . . stories . . . [black] women used language to ‘instruct’ their listeners in ways of believing and ways of doing. Constructing meaning through accessible . . . images [i.e. crabbing] . . . [Chestnut] could sustain . . . [her] most important role—as interpreter and (re)interpreter of the world. (Royster, 2000, p. 112)

She states, “The *community* would just go down . . . So we would park our cars and we’d walk about a mile across the dunes and across the—as a community we would just have fun doing that.” However, the more she talks, the more her emphasis on “community” cannot be ignored. While Miss Anne wanted her to re-tell the crabbing story, she did so, but she also (re)told the story to highlight a point she was making before Miss Anne’s last interruption, it was about more than charming anecdotes involving crabbing; instead, it was about how “we did things as a community” in the segregated South during “the days of segregation.” Chestnut’s (re)interpretation is “[We] . . . nurtured and cared for [our] . . . people” (Royster, 2000, p. 113).

Her highlighting of community is a prominent feature in black culture, especially amongst the women. Despite the abuse from slavery, “[black] women learned to extract from the oppressive circumstances of their lives the strength they needed to resist the daily dehumanization of [it]” and one way they demonstrated that strength was through storytelling (Royster, 2000, p. 112). In her (re)telling of the crabbing story, Chestnut is

able to demonstrate that through recreation they, the Ocean City residents, can care for one another selflessly. She states,

When we would go back we had—a dish that somebody had introduced in the area, for crab gumbo. So, everybody had crab gumbo. Well even the neighbors who did not go crabbing, everybody had crabs whenever—they came—we went crabbing. But uh, that crab gumbo was a famous dish for that area.

Just like I often talk about the area here, the little sound resort that was Seabreeze, the main feature there was a clam fritter. And if you went to Seabreeze and had a nickel, you had to buy that clam fritter (laugh). *But that was different* [my emphasis]. That was a restaurant there.

The homes [here] would have this crab gumbo as the dish of the island. We were just a close knit group there. There weren't too many of us. Whatever one had, everybody had to taste that. Whatever we had, we just shared. We made our own recreation. Whatever we wanted to um, if you had a little social, played cards, you just did enjoy a little recreation there.

There was one-time a little drive-in theater up on the highway which is now 50 between Surf City and Holly Ridge and sometimes somebody would take the car—take the youngsters up to the drive-in movie . . . As I say, it was a *close-knit* [my emphasis] neighborhood.

More importantly, her story of community recreation and ethos demonstrates early literacy and activism within the Ocean City residents. “We were just a close knit group there. There weren't too many of us. Whatever one had, everybody had to taste that. Whatever we had, we just shared. We made our own recreation.” Chestnut's words indicate they loved each other. And her story is one that was repeatedly told. And, the more they heard it, they more they lived it—not just amongst themselves, but presumably for other blacks too. Therefore, her words indicate that by “using sociocognitive ability to (re)create themselves . . . [they as a community could] (re)imagine their worlds” (Royster, 2000, p. 109). Casey (1993) explains,

tension provoke[s] . . . [them] to recognize the continuity of oppression through the history of black presence in this country. But the purpose of this life history is

not simply to document victimization; quite the reverse, the object is to wage and to win an interpretive war. (p. 114)

### **A Spirit of Activism**

In the segregated South, Jim Crow eliminated the 14th amendment or equal protection for blacks under the law. So, many black communities learned to defend themselves as well as their property. Ocean City was no different. Caronell Chestnut reminds us of this when she states,

We didn't have any police or anything during that time. So, there was a fella whose name was Slim Rackley who was a huge guy who had been a Marine who lived down in the Topsail area. So each family paid him to patrol their homes during the winter. And, he did a great job. (Nodding her head.)

We had our *own* [my emphasis] policeman. We had our *own* [my emphasis] street lights. We had to . . . prorate the street lights cause it was dark when you first went down there. (laughs). And uh, this guy was great at doing that.

I remember, one lady who lived in Durham, who *especially* liked the beach. She would just come even during the *cold* winter months with her husband and she said one night she was there and she heard something knocking—she had her lights on and she heard something knocking on the door and it frightened her. But she found that it was Slim—this fella- who wanted to know who was in that house. (smiling). So he did a great job in uh, patrolling the area.

While living during “the days of segregation,” black communities realized their agency as a collective. “So each family paid [Slim] to patrol their homes during the winter . . . We had our own policeman. We had our own street lights. We had to . . . prorate the street lights ‘cause it was dark when you first went down there (laughs).” These words reveal more by what is not mentioned. While Chestnut doesn’t discuss any damage done to anyone’s property, she does remind her audience that “these were the days of segregation.” And, from the history of both Shell Island and Seabreeze, violent acts were black folks’ lived reality. Chestnut and the other residents knew this too.

So, instead of shying away from Ocean City because of the inference of threats, they exercised their own agency. “We hired our own policeman. We had our own street lights.” In order to demonstrate the rights they felt they had, they didn’t wait on the dominant (white) culture to provide them. Instead, they “accepted personal responsibility for securing their own rights and perceived their opportunities to learn to be an obligation to use the benefits of those opportunities for *good* and *righteous* work in solving an array of problems” (Royster, 2000, p. 110).

And, as Chestnut states, “[I]t was dark when you first went down there (laughs).” I’m sure many residents arrived in the dark. So, with no lights to greet them, the darkness could be intimidating. While she laughs, I believe her laugh is signifying that fear was quite real. How could Ocean City be safe for any black person with no lights and no protection by the law? As a result, as a community, they resolved this problem, “not only for themselves but for the [community] . . . as a whole” (Royster, 2000, p. 110). They installed street lights. And, by “(re)interpet[ing] ways of being black in a white world,” they found and implemented their own agency (Casey, 1993, p. 151).

### **The Women’s Movement and Black Feminism**

As Chestnut attempts to continue, “Now –.” Simultaneously, Miss Anne interrupts her again saying, “Early on—Oh, I’m sorry.” Chestnut replies, “That’s okay,” and she continues. However, as I analyze this scenario, I realize that I’m not okay with it. I’ve observed almost this entire interview and by now, I find Miss Anne’s disruptions too coincidental. And while her apology seems sincere, her feigned ignorance seems more an illusion. “White *illusions* (“what seems to be”) are not black *realities* (“what really is”)” (Casey, 1993, p. 141). Miss Anne just doesn’t seem to be listening.

“Giovanni argues that listening is not necessary in our culture for white people as it is for people of color” (Ratcliffe, 1999, p. 200).

Not only that, but her interruptions are comparable to the white women’s movement (Miss Anne) that silenced the voices of black women (Chestnut). Likewise, if Miss Anne symbolically represents the white women’s movement, she seems to ignore Chestnut’s efforts several times when she attempts to share information insignificant to Miss Anne (hooks, 1994, p. 120). Moreover, in each of these disruptions, I noticed a pattern in Chestnut’s language. In the last two interruptions, Chestnut is discussing themes revolving around community, especially othermothering. Similarly, in some parts of the (white) women’s movement, antimotherhood and antifamily sentiments were prevalent and could conceivably be seen as anti-community (Collins, 2000). And, if Miss Anne symbolically represents the white women’s movement, then her ruptures could be easily explained as “the erasure of [the] black female presence” (hooks, 1994, p. 121).

Despite Miss Anne’s attempts at “erasure,” Chestnut was successful at maintaining her authority and agency in her narrative process. After Miss Anne’s last rupture and apology, Chestnut continues,

That’s okay. Every since 19-, well we have a celebration now. We had our 30<sup>th</sup> celebration in 1979. And, then the—10 years later in 1989 and we’re looking forward to 1999 for celebrating the beginning of Ocean City. The brochures that I have—I want you to look at that—(nodding towards the brochures) we tried to put out. It tells a history of the various things that we do around there. Then every year also just to make the community cohesive we have a fish fry once a year. And then every July—we have a picnic where friends are brought in. We have the outdoor—fun. And, it’s quite nice—quite nice. *You started to ask something?* [emphasis added]

Her ability to tell her story even after the disruption indicates that she was probably familiar with similar types of behavior. In my analysis, Chestnut's response to all the interruptions reveals her as a black feminist.

Despite the racism we confronted . . . black women who embraced feminist thinking remained committed and engaged because we experienced new forms of self-improvement . . . feminist politics in black communities could be liberatory for black women *and* men. (hooks, 1994, pp. 122–123)

When she says, "That's okay," she means forgiveness. This is apparent because she moves on. She doesn't hesitate to continue her story about *community* celebrations in spite of Miss Anne's discomfort. "We had our 30th celebration in 1979 . . . and we're looking forward to 1999 . . . Then every year also just to make the community cohesive, we have a fish fry once a year." Chestnut's community theme continues to emanate through her language despite Miss Anne's interruptions. Her voice indicates pride in what she and others have helped to do. Collins (2000) writes,

Black women's community work, with its duality of internal and external efforts, also incorporates these interdependent dimensions of Black women's activism. Dodson and Gilkes (1987) contend that Black women's centrality in African-American families and communities reflects the both/and conceptual orientation of Black feminist epistemology. Curiously, Black women's actions to maintain community integrity through the struggle for group survival is simultaneously conservative and radical. (p. 206)

Chestnut's authority is evident when *after* she's done talking about the Ocean City community, then she asks Miss Anne, "You started to ask something?" Before she asks that question, she makes it clear that she will be heard.

### **(Re)interpretation of Resistance**

So, when Chestnut invites Miss Anne to ask her question, her authority has been (re)established as the storyteller controlling the pace of the text. And, she'll have to do it

again after Miss Anne states, “I started to ask if early on—Was there resistance? Was there any kind of crime?” Now again, while Miss Anne’s question may be simple to her, it’s a complicated question for Chestnut. As she tries to best answer the question, visible signs of hesitation are evident. She begins,

Umm, to a certain extent. There was some (nodding). Umm, you could see a little vandalism in the very beginning. Umm, there was a little resistance. In fact, Mr. Yow, I understand—(hesitation) was greatly criticized for having did what he did. Umm, but in spite of that, he did it—out of the kindness of his heart. And, if he had—I understand that whatever money was invested they (hesitation),—he had been offered twice the amount to give up that idea. But he did not do it. He was a fine gentleman. His name was Edgar Yow. (smiling) But things now have gotten along fine and it’s just a part of the area, part of the community; and we feel pretty good about it—real good (nodding) about it. (Smiles).

Here, Chestnut’s language best reveals her ability at “wordplay.” Her response begins by directly answering Miss Anne’s question. “Umm, to a certain extent, there was some . . . you could see a little vandalism in the very beginning . . . There was a little resistance.” Her repetitiveness with the adjective “little” is important because it implies insignificance. She states, “a little vandalism . . . a little resistance.” While many may see these acts as big, she chooses to (re) interpret the authority of those acts by minimizing them. In other words, they happened, but they were insignificant. She masterfully (re)directs her response in another direction. This signifies slippage where her response seems to contradict the question asked. She deliberately takes the focus of what the black community went through and instead (re)directs it by discussing Mr. Edgar Yow’s difficulties.

Her (re)direction also exemplifies her mastery of signifying. Kernan- Mitchell (1973) defines, “*Signifying* . . . [as] a way of encoding messages or meaning in which involves, in most cases, an element of indirection. This kind of *signifying* might be best

viewed as an alternative message form, selected for its artistic merit, and may occur embedded in a variety of discourse” (p. 311). While she is answering Miss Anne’s question, not only is she smiling, she’s (re)directing the answer from the specifics of vandalism, a negative aspect, to Mr. Yow, a positive aspect. While she (re)members “these are the days of segregation” and realizes that while Ocean City resides “*in* the master’s house,” the community “is not necessarily . . . *under* the master’s control” (Casey, 1993, p. 141). She could talk only about the vandalism and I’m sure there was plenty to discuss. Instead, through slippage and signifying, she chooses to (re)make those experiences.

### **The Episcopal Literacy Effect**

After addressing Miss Anne’s question about resistance, Chestnut’s final topic returns to one of her favorites, an Episcopal theme. She continues by explaining the origins of the Community center as well as the operating hours of the Episcopal Chapel. Chestnut states,

We have a community building there . . . well, when Camp Oceanside closed, we had to remove the dormitories because the Diocese did not want to have any camping going on there. And the same thing happened to Camp Leach. And, the dining hall that was used at that time is now used as a community building wherein we can have our gatherings, and meetings and socials and what not. It’s right behind the Chapel.

And, the Chapel is open only from the 2nd Sunday in June until the Labor Day Sunday. It’s an Episcopal Chapel as I’ve already mentioned, but we don’t have a priest who is to be there all summer, so we schedule different priests every Sunday we um, have a different priest. If he isn’t a priest, he’s a deacon. We haven’t had to use the lay readers too much recently because we’ve been able to supply the priest with the Sundays.

And, it’s now an integrated church because it’s the only Episcopal Church on the island. And, people who come in to vacation on that island see the Episcopal sign and Sunday morning at 11 o’clock, we never know who’s going to come. They do visit with us—very, very good relationship with us there.

That Chapel has been a great asset to the community. And, I'm hoping that someday it will be a permanent thing as the island grows that the Diocese—we're self-supporting now, but we hope that the Diocese—that there will be enough Episcopalians there for the Diocese to keep that as a regular year-round church.

What stands out in my analysis is that after briefly talking about resistance, she returns a topic that is comforting to her, the Episcopal faith. Her selectivity provides final evidence to me that her faith seems intertwined with one important event in her life, Ocean City. Not only does she demonstrate through her emphasis of this Chapel by repeated mentioning of it, but she also posits, "That Chapel has been a great asset to the community. And, I'm hoping that someday it will be a permanent thing as the island grows . . . we hope . . . the Diocese [will] keep that as a regular year-round church." Currently, the Chapel isn't a permanent, year-round church because many of its congregants are visitors and summer residents to Topsail Island.

Despite that, her repetitive language of this Chapel says that she recognizes her faith as literacy too. Her statement, "That Chapel has been a great asset to the community," demonstrates agency for the community since "it has been a great asset." While she doesn't provide specifics, we can presume that as "the only Episcopal Church on the island," all types of visitors to the Church are exposed to Ocean City, especially whites. She stresses, "It's now an integrated church." And, once people visit, they learn about Ocean City as well as its history. This recognition of literacy also reveals that Chestnut acknowledges its influence with "survival in the present and prosperity in the future" with her hopes that "as the island grows . . . the church will grow" (Royster, 2000, p. 114).

### The Final Rupture

While Chestnut's comments seem to be ending, Miss Anne inserts, "Well, I've sent people there."

Chestnut: Oh, you have?

Miss Anne: But, I—I knew it was only—or at least I knew it was part of the year.

Chestnut: *Mmm hmm.* [emphasis added]

Miss Anne: Because the neighbors on both of our sides are from Hickory and they belong to the Episcopal Church.

Chestnut: *Is that so?* [emphasis added]

Miss Anne: And, I sent the Fantroys there this last time, but I don't remember; well now I know.

Chestnut: Uh huh. Second Sunday in June through Labor Day—every Sunday. Uh huh.

Miss Anne: But um, yeah. I think there's a real need for it. We go to the Catholic Church there. And, *I'm on the council there.* [emphasis added] And, uh, it's just grown tremendously.

Chestnut: *I know, I know.* [emphasis added]

In my analysis, this text indicates that Chestnut seems to be finished with her story, but Miss Anne doesn't want to stop talking. She seems to be rambling on a tangent, and Chestnut's comments support this. "Oh, you have? Mmm hmm. Is that so? Uh huh. Second Sunday in June through Labor Day—every Sunday. Uh huh. I know, I know." Realizing her authority, Chestnut is allowing Miss Anne to speak herself into the interview, but upon analysis, Chestnut's responses resemble that of a parent placating a child. "Oh, you have? Mmm hmm. Is that so? Uh huh." These verbal patterns (re)emphasize Chestnut's agency in her ability to not only create this text, but allow others to think they are creators in it as well. Chestnut states,

And, it's now an integrated church because it's the only Episcopal Church on the island. And, people who come in to vacation on that island see the Episcopal sign and Sunday morning at 11 o'clock, we never know who's going to come. They do visit with us.

While Chestnut demonstrates the impact the Chapel has had on both blacks and white congregants, Miss Anne seems to be interested in name dropping and claim making. She says, "And, I sent the Fantroys there . . . I'm on the council there." Donath and Boyd (2004) write "[Claim making or] name dropping may be a deliberate ploy to impress a listener of the speaker's importance or ability to effect some action" (p. 72). I believe that if Miss Anne employed better rhetorical listening as interviewers should do, she would remember that Chestnut's experiences are the primary focus, not hers.

Nonetheless, Chestnut is permitting Miss Anne to feel like a participant in the creation of this text. Chestnut's feigned interest demonstrates another trickster characteristic, wearing the veil. While she acts grateful for Miss Anne's comments saying, "Oh, you have? Mmm hmm. Is that so? Uh huh," I believe that her veiled responses represent,

[a] Black woman's refusal to relinquish control over [her] self-definitions. While [she] pretends . . . and thus appear[s] to conform to [Miss Anne] . . . [she] resists by creating [her] own self-definitions and self-valuations. (p. 205)

In other words, I'm still in control here. I still exercise authority of the (re)interpretation of the *text* of Ocean City.

### **Survival through Healing**

Chestnut's final comments are her most riveting. Her didactic nature continues as she seems to console both Miss Anne and her audience. Yet, her face demonstrates all types of emotions as she softly laughs and chuckles. My interpretation of those

expressions is love, satisfaction as well as healing. Miss Anne states, “I just get so—I don’t know what it is. It’s just when I have to hear how dumb people were . . .” Ironically, she doesn’t seem to understand how “dumb” some of her own comments have been.

Nonetheless, Chestnut responds, “Oh yes. (Laughs) Well, we, we—we just have to forgive them (LAUGHS). They didn’t realize . . .” In those brief words, a lifetime seems to flash before Chestnut’s eyes. I believe that her final trickster presentation is most evident with her these words. I am convinced Chestnut’s words say “forgive,” but I believe as a trickster “forgive” represents satisfaction. For blacks, “the oral tradition . . . [t]hrough story . . . and rich verbal interplay . . . has served as a fundamental vehicle for ‘gittin ovuh’ . . . [and] ‘gittin ovuh’ has to do with surviving” (Smitherman, 1986, p. 73). By sharing her text, she is able to find a voice for herself, as well as the Ocean City community. And, that recognition is satisfaction in the survival of the community. While many may not see the significance in what she as well as this community did, her text performs similar to the slave narratives. Her story is the story of many black communities and it represents not just one black community, but an American community. Baldwin (1993) writes,

I am proud of these people not because of their color but because of their intelligence and the spiritual force and their beauty. The country should be proud of them, too, but alas, not many people in this country even know of their existence. (p. 101)

Chestnut realizes the value of this text because “[It] . . . is [her] history’ . . . [and] ‘this text [is] to persuade other people—you, the reader, who is probably not black—that we are human beings worth of God’s grace . . .” (Morrison, 2008, p. 66). Baldwin (1993) writes “love . . . is the enormous contribution that the Negro has made to [America]” (p.

86). “I use the word ‘love’ here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace—not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth” (Baldwin, 1993, p. 95). When Chestnut says, “We have to forgive them (LAUGHS),” I believe her language has double meaning. Her LAUGHTER indicates satisfaction at Ocean City’s survival, in other words “gittin ovuh.” However, her reference to forgiveness is a hidden message for the dominant (white) culture. I am convinced that she is reminding white folks that it’s time for them to learn to love black folks as they love themselves. Baldwin (1993) indicates, “The only way [whites] can be released from the Negro’s tyrannical power over him is to consent, in effect to become black himself” (p. 96).

So, the lasting words that Chestnut leaves Miss Anne and her audience with indicate that she is at peace. By forgiving “them,” she has learned “To accept one’s past—one’s history . . . [it] is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it” (Baldwin, 2003, p. 81). And, by embracing such morals and placing value on this black community, Chestnut demonstrated to others that “they could survive and help others to do the same. This view supported an ongoing commitment to long-standing cultural mandates . . . in assuring the survival and well-being of the community” (Royster, 2000, p. 112).

## CHAPTER VI

### LEROY UPPERMAN ANALYSIS

#### The Importance of Listening

As an only child for twelve years, I spent a lot of time around adults because I had no siblings. Raised in NC, I can remember when I was younger and in the presence of my black elders, I was chastised a lot. Whenever I heard a conversation that was interesting to me in the presence of these adults, I'd offer my opinion or ask a question. My inquisitive nature sometimes got me into trouble. I remember being told "Do not speak unless you are spoken to," especially in the presence of adults—which happened quite often. So, after much scolding, I finally got accustomed to remaining silent in the presence of "my elders." I believe this ability to be quiet while someone else is speaking happens to be a good quality for me as a narrative researcher. It's also made me more critical of others who don't listen silently enough.

While listening to the narrative of Dr. Leroy Upperman, I was drawn to the developing dynamics between him and his interviewer, an unidentified, young woman. I know that she seemed much younger than him; she was also what I believe to be a white Canadian citizen. I am drawn to this conclusion because of the way that Upperman speaks to his interviewer.

Accordingly, the dynamics between them becomes an overarching theme as he narrates his story of Ocean City. Many times, she would ask a question and I was reminded of my childhood reprimands of "Do not speak unless you are spoken to" almost as if her questions were out of place or inappropriate. In essence, I believe that

my own knowledge as well as the dynamics of black vernacular and black cultural traditions are important in my analysis regardless of whether Upperman's interviewer is aware of them or not.

### **Intentions of Narrative Researchers**

Dr. Leroy Upperman was one of the original property owners at Ocean City. He was also a prominent figure in Wilmington's black culture. And, as a result of his activism in Wilmington, he was selected for the oral historical venture done by Duke University's Behind the Veil Project. Dr. Upperman along with several other Wilmingtonians was interviewed by history graduate students from Duke as well as other universities. They were provided with a list of questions<sup>24</sup> to ask interviewees. And as a narrative scholar, this was sometimes helpful, but frustrating for me.

Many of the questions were geared towards specific *information* the interviewers seemed to be trying to get out of those interviewed. But, narrative research is qualitative inquiry where "[s]ubjectivity is a primary focus" (Bruce, 2008, p. 5), i.e., *the storyteller's interpretations*. "[I]n personal narratives, 'it is precisely because of their subjectivity—their rootedness in time, place and *personal experience* [my emphasis], in their perspective-ridden character—that we value them' . . . culture 'speaks itself' through an individual's story" (Reisman, 1993, p. 5).

In my analysis, my interpretation of Dr. Upperman's narrative is challenging the methods used by his interviewer because his story seems to be oftentimes ignored or overlooked by her. Nonetheless, I, as narrative researcher, chose to learn from the lessons Upperman is attempting to teach despite the fact that his interviewer doesn't seem to.

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<sup>24</sup> See questions attached in Appendix

### Early Indications of Didactics from a Trickster

While listening to Leroy Upperman, I primarily analyzed his text involving language patterns around Ocean City. However, prior to his story about Ocean City, Upperman reveals himself as having components of a trickster character. One of his most common tendencies is to use his language patterns as slippage to answer his interviewer. His contradictory way of trying to “teach” black culture is entertaining because his interviewer doesn’t grasp what he’s doing. Trickster characters were known for their beguiling “tricks” or jokes. They displayed certain characteristics in the tales, such as charm, wit, suaveness and in many instances, knowledge and wisdom (Levine, 1977). Dr. Upperman exudes all of these.

One of the trends I interpreted emerging from Upperman’s narrative was his interviewer’s attempt at getting him to provide instances of the ‘horrors’ of living in a segregated society. Several questions that revealed this pattern were:

Now did your father ever experience or anyone you know, did—because they were—did they ever experience any discrimination because they were successful? In other words, were they—did white people ever try to hold them back from success, from—keep them from getting too successful? Now was it difficult for blacks to buy houses in that period do you think or do you know?

And, while Upperman answered each question, many times, the interviewer didn’t seem to understand what he was trying to explain. One example is when Upperman emphasized that because of his father, he realized racial discrimination existed in the North, “but up there it was more subtle.” And, when she asks, “What kinds of things did you experience this kind of subtle discrimination? Can you think of anything?”

Upperman answers,

Well, I think [Daddy] knew there were certain things that he could do or he couldn't do, or things that he should do or that he shouldn't do. But I don't know of any overt things, any bad things . . . *You just knew what to expect from white folks.* And we had the general idea that they were in a better position and maybe they were better off than we were and probably better than we were because they were better students. They applied themselves more and they had more money and so forth and that attitude.

Here, Upperman is attempting to explain his northern upbringing in New Jersey. Like Chestnut, he doesn't reveal any specific racist incidents, but he does reveal that "subtle" racism because "you knew what to expect from white folks." So, he's not denying that racism existed, but he is providing his perspective about racism as a child; it occurred. And the fact that it happened indicated discrimination existed regardless of whether it was overt or not. As a child, he knew whites "were in a better position and maybe they were better off than we were." However, when the realization occurs that black folks have behaved "normally" and the dominant (white) culture has behaved "immorally," then values are (re)intepreted.

### **The Role of the Pullman Porter**

Upperman also attempts to teach his interviewer about survival within Jim Crow. He explains,

My father was a Pullman porter. He left school at the fourth grade and migrated North for purposes of seeking a job. He got employment with the Pullman Company, railroads. He had—he was married. He had five boys and his wife, our mother, died when I was about eight. He raised the children best he could. He was basically a good, hardworking man, very conservative. Save what little money he had an invested it in a few houses and so forth.

Now, even after his mother's death, as a parent, his father, Bill Upperman, was still responsible for raising five sons. So, Upperman tries to explain how his father did that

by working as a Pullman porter,<sup>25</sup> a highly regarded job in the black community. It was one of few well-paid positions that blacks could obtain. Upperman says, “He . . . migrated north for purposes of seeking a job.” So, while he was academically uneducated, Upperman does indicate that his move northward provided better employment for him. And, while his mother “died when [he] was about eight . . . [h]e raised the children best he could.”

After sharing this, the interviewer asks, “Now were you among—were you a better off than most people in the black community in Jersey City?” And, it becomes obvious that she’s missed what Upperman was trying to explain about his childhood. She presumes that his father is ‘better off’ because his father “invested . . . in a few houses and so forth.” What she completely disregards in his story is that Upperman’s father is a widower whose job as a Pullman porter requires lots of travel while simultaneously raising five sons. After all, “For Black men, it was simply a job that offered mediocre pay but good tips, and thus could support a family. Status wasn’t the point” (Robinson, 2010, p. 88).

Instead, she finds more importance with his real estate holdings. These must make him “better off” than other blacks in a segregated society. Her statement seems to insinuate that his holdings created divisiveness within the black community instead of realizing that no matter how much one had, “a single attribute . . . both defined and united us: We were all black, and to be black was to live under assault” (Robinson, 2010, p. 41). Yet, this presumption is indicative of the dominant (white) culture. And, while Pullman porters were paid well, she never asks Upperman how he was able to do this

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<sup>25</sup> The Pullman Company built sleepers and rented them to the railroads, complete with everything from fine linen and sweet-smelling soap to a service staff whose centerpiece was the porter. George Pullman’s first choice for that job was Negroes from the old slave states. The blacker, the better, passengers told him. See Tye, L. (2004). *Rising from the rails: Pullman porters and the making of the black middle class*.

during what I presume was during the Great Depression with five children. I interpret that these aspects of his childhood were unimportant to her because she disregards them. Ratcliffe (1999) writes,

It may be more another's truth than *the* truth that hurts us; however, this challenge, this conviction, this hurt exposes a space of dissonance. When responding to this dissonance, we should not . . . deny its existence . . . [because] [s]uch reactions only shut down dialogue and reinforce the status quo (p. 206).

Despite her lack of interest, Upperman attempts to explain how his father was “better off” and able to raise his five children. He answers,

I was better off in the sense that my father saved his money and we were meat and potatoes. He never embellished a lot. But we always had food in the house. We always had a home. He saved his money. He bought him a car. I was [inaudible] and he had a few suits. But so far as most of the people I know . . . people didn't save the money like he did.

Here, I believe Upperman is emphasizing something that the dominant (white) culture assumes only they are capable of doing. And, this surprised his interviewer because she immediately changed the subject and asked, “Could you talk a little bit more about the neighborhood in which you grew up?”

While his interviewer is more concerned with Upperman's family being “better off,” he is trying to teach her that context is more important than material possessions. Upperman states, “He never embellished a lot. But we *always* had food in the house. We *always* had a home. He saved his money.” Upperman is trying to reiterate how his father always provided shelter and food because “*he saved his money.*” Upperman's father didn't spend frivolously because he couldn't afford to. And, the money he spent was on feeding them inexpensively with hearty food too. His primary focus was on being

a good provider for his family the best way he knew how. And likely, his experiences as a Pullman porter contributed to how he did this.

Through their time on the train these black porters learned the ways of a white world most had only a vague exposure to before, coming to know how it worked and how to work with it . . . [one way was using the] three Ls [which] was (sic) 'look,' listen,' and 'learn' (Tye, 2004, p. xiii).

Fortunately, Upperman's father worked on the buffet cars.

Upperman: And he did like everybody else. I'm sharing the secrets, but he wouldn't mind. He would hustle and they served steaks on the cars. And he would buy steaks on his own and then when he was on the car, he'd sell several of his steaks and keep the money, but that was making a living.

Interviewer: So he would sell the raw steaks?

Upperman: No, he was on a buffet car and if somebody said, "I want five steaks," four of them would be his.

Initially, as I listened and read this dialogue, I didn't understand it. So, I discussed it with my husband. Thankfully, he explained trains to me despite the fact that he's never ridden on one. And, scholarship supports his interpretation. Pullman sleeper cars were "luxurious . . . [providing passengers with a] topflight dining service" and also lavished them with "the first Pintsch gaslights from Europe, and the first sleepers to deliver precisely the same fluff of the pillow, fold in the linen and bouquet in wine" on each too (Tye, 2004, p. 12). "The rich were used to being pampered, and appreciated a train with amenities they had at home and on their yachts" (Tye, 2004, p. 12). So, the Pullman sleeper fare included all of these accommodations.

And while Pullman's passengers were usually rich, commonly, whites treated Pullman porters as if they didn't exist. "The pioneering porter, in fact, was not expected

to have human proportions at all . . . He was a phantom assistant who did not merit the dignity of a name or an identity of any sort” (Tye, 2004, p. 1). As a Pullman porter, Upperman’s father likely endured humiliation regularly. “He was servant as well as host. His was the best job in the community and the worst on the train” (Tye, 2004, xiv).

More than likely, this was the context of Upperman’s father work on the dining car. So, when Upperman says, “He would hustle and they served steaks on the cars. And he would buy steaks on his own and then when he was on the car, he’d sell several of his steaks and keep the money, but that was making a living,” I imagine that he had access to some of the finest foods in the world. So, when he states, “if somebody said, ‘I want five steaks,’ four of them would be his,” I believe that Upperman had an arrangement worked out with his co-workers.

More specifically, since other porters would place food orders for their patrons, then they could probably also place “extra” order for non-existent passengers too. And those “extra” orders might possibly be sold to other porters, like Upperman’s dad who “b[ought steaks on his own” and “when he was on the car . . . sell several of his steaks and keep the money.” “This was making a living.” One can also presume that perhaps some of this food was also brought home to feed his sons.

Yet, his interviewer seems to miss these important clues regarding how Pullman porters “survived” despite such inhuman treatment while supporting their families. Upperman realized the irony in what his father was doing, but his interviewer doesn’t. She asks, “Now was that typical—did people hustle like that? Was that something people did?” Upperman responds, “Everybody hustles in this business, so you can’t weigh all this steel downtown and all of that.” And, while the dominant (white) culture may infer hustle as theft, I would call such views hypocrisy.

After all, “everybody hustles in this business” and most businesses are predominantly controlled by white business owners. However, they “can’t [be weigh[ed]]” or held accountable for their theft because it’s just “business.” For black folks, it was “a hustle.” Let’s remember that George Pullman’s ‘centerpiece’ was these black porters who earned a small base salary, but fought for higher tips in order to increase their wages because he wouldn’t pay them more. Yet, patrons of these Pullman sleepers were rich white folks. Therefore, I’m sure Pullman could’ve afforded to pay his ‘centerpieces’ more, especially for the humility they endured. Nonetheless, what he did is perceived as good “business.”

In my analysis, I also believe that Bill Upperman’s stories further demonstrate the power of storytelling. As a Pullman porter, Upperman’s father was part of a brotherhood who were “agents of change” (Tye, 2004, p. xii). My interpretation indicates that because of his employment that taught him to “look, listen, and learn,” Bill Upperman saved his money, realized the importance of buying real estate and recognized through “picked up bits of news and new ways of doing things” how to teach survival to his family (Tye, 2004, p. xii).

Interviewer: Now was education important to your father?

Upperman: Going to the fourth grade, I think he wanted us to get all the education that we wanted . . . Of the five boys, *all of them did something*. The oldest became a lawyer. The next one was an electrician. The next one was just a hired hand at a garage. I was the next one who became a doctor. And the youngest one was an undertaker.

Interviewer: Now how did you get there? How did you pay for this, for your college? Did your father pay for it?

Upperman: [M]y father paid. He paid every penny. There was some government I guess some government subsidies and all that. But

he paid every penny of my—you had on-campus jobs a little self-help, but he paid it.

Here, Leroy Upperman explains how his father encouraged all five of them to be educated. Tye (2004) substantiates this saying, “[Pullman] porters [were] determined that their children would get the formal learning they had been denied” (p. xiii). His interviewer never comments on this remarkable phenomenon of these five black men being education whether technically or academically because of their father. And, instead of commenting on their collective achievements within a segregated society, she seems surprised that Upperman was even able to attend school with her question, “Now how did you get there?”

She seems even more baffled that his father “paid every penny” of Leroy Upperman’s medical education. Again, I believe the interviewer seems more impressed with the economic perspective of Upperman’s story, rather than the socio-political agency that he learned from his father which was the windows of opportunity that can be provided to blacks through literacy. And, not only do the stories from Upperman’s father provide life lessons along with humorous anecdotes, but they also explain the origins of Upperman’s trickster character.

### **The Role of the Black Woman**

Dr. Upperman explains that he didn’t know his mother. He says, “[O]ur mother, died when I was about eight.” When his interviewer presses for more information, Upperman says, “Don’t know much about her background.”

Interviewer: Was it—now your—did your mother work at all?

Upperman: Actually I don’t remember much about my mother. If she were to walk in here now, I wouldn’t know her. But I’m sure she did not

work. She had five hard-headed boys to take care of, but she did not work.

Now, in this part of my analysis, I expected the interviewer, a woman, to further pose questions about the life and death of his mother. Instead, she again changes the subject and asks, “Now were you among—were you a better off than most people in the black community in Jersey City?”

Initially, this portion of the interview reminded me of Frederick Douglass's slave narrative where he writes about his mother's absence because of her death. I also begin to think that perhaps Upperman's silence about his mother was similar to Douglass's narrative. hooks (1990) explains by writing,

Douglass . . . says he never enjoyed a mother's 'soothing presence, her tender and watchful care' so that he received the 'tidings of her death with much the same emotions I should have probably felt at the death of a stranger.' Douglass surely intended to impress upon the consciousness of white readers to the cruelty . . . of [slavery]. (p. 44)

However, as I (re)read the language patterns of Upperman and his interviewer, I realize that Upperman is answering questions posed to him by this white woman. And, instead of criticizing Upperman for his lack of knowledge about his mother, which he should have more of whether it be her smile or favorite color, I find more so the interviewer's silence towards his mother by changing the subject from her to their position in the community quite insensitive.

Moreover, as a black female researcher, I was offended because this erasure of black women is common today. The interviewer doesn't ask any questions about how his mother “took care of them,” nor does she ask about any other memories he has of her. And, by leaving his words of “she did not work,” unanswered, I interpret that this

interviewer makes assumptions about “her work” without making any additional inquiries. This was a missed opportunity for her to discover the role or “recognition of the particular circumstances of black women in relation to black men and families” (hooks, 1990, p. 45). Instead, her changing the subject demonstrates the “[o]verall devaluation of the role of black women . . . [and highlighting] the colonizing mentality which promotes . . . [s]exist thinking about the nature of domesticity” (hooks, 1990, p. 45).

### **Gender Dynamics**

At the time of Dr. Upperman’s interview, he is 80 years old. So, like many black elders, he seems to enjoy storytelling. Also, he is telling his story while rocking in a rocking chair in his Wilmington home. As he rocks, Upperman says,

Between marriages, I just did like anybody else did. I *stumbled on my wife*. She—it was natural and a good thing. We married. We did various things that people do in a small town, nothing spectacular. And we married. I bought the house next to my office and we fixed that up and then *you know how women do*, she talked me into building this barn. And I did that. And then she talked me into building a place on the beach (rocking), a summer home down on the beach. So that’s that. *But she was a good person.*

Upperman begins this discussion by indicating “[b]etween marriages.” And, while he is speaking of his second wife here, he does provide information about his first one too. He says, “My first wife, we separated. She was basically a *good woman* but she was her mother’s child and her mother wanted her to marry a doctor.” Dr. Upperman’s first wife’s profession is never discussed. He only shares that her intention was “to marry a doctor.” Yet, his second wife was a nurse. Her career was already established and she met him working at the hospital. Both the second wives of Bill and Leroy Upperman appear to be career women. These are interesting patterns that cannot be ignored.

What's more fascinating in my analysis is how Dr. Upperman refers to both of his wives as "good." Yet, he also indicates, "you know how women do." I believe that Dr. Upperman is admitting that usually through persuasive discourse, women usually get their way. And, the irony rests in that he while he seems uncomfortable with this truth, he is willing to acknowledge that usually they are right. While Upperman doesn't disagree with her suggestions, he does seem to infer that she had to *convince* him these were good investments. Her discourse represented her (re)interpretation of possibility or (re)imagination. She "understood intellectually and intuitively the meaning of homeplace in the midst of an oppressive and dominating social reality, of homeplace as site of resistance and liberation struggle" (hooks, 1990, p. 45). This is more evident with her "talk[ing] [him] into building a place on the beach."

### **Literacy in Asbury Park**

Yet, Dr. Upperman wasn't unfamiliar with beach community. He indicates earlier that he grew up in Jersey City, but his stepmother's hotel was in Asbury Park, NJ, a beachfront community in NJ. Here, Upperman indicates, "And she taught us everything, how to make beds, wash clothes . . . Empty the slop jars, iron, sweep tables, and do all that." This is a community that catered to tourists and many of these black visitors stayed at here. Upperman says,

North Jersey Shore was a very popular place for people from New York and in the environs to come down. North Jersey Shore isn't anything now. People are flying all over the world. But that was very popular, from Asbury Park on down to Atlantic City. And that's where people would come.

And some black people would come and sometimes they'd hire the—had dances down there. The dances during those years, some of the big name bands, I don't know if you've heard of them. I'm getting forgetful now. But the black bands used to come down to Asbury Park and the bands, the white bands that used to be playing on the oceanfront would come over and listen to them and that's how they started learning the black rhythm.

So, his knowledge of living close to the ocean environment is extensive because of his childhood. He also manages to teach his interviewer something else valuable other than his stepmother's hotel helping them to be "better off," but instead shares its participation in these leisure spaces as a "safe place" (hooks, 1990, p. 42).

Upperman also provides her with a historical lesson about black bands. However, he is sure to remind her, "I don't know if you've heard of them." And his inference suggests that since you don't know anything about them, remain quiet and listen to my words. Moreover, he tells her that white bands "learn[ed] the black rhythm" from black bands playing in *his* hometown. And, since this was during Jim Crow, I'm sure that these black bands had designated Jim Crow spaces for their performances. More importantly, while white bands could probably come into black spaces, I'm certain that it couldn't be the other way around.

Furthermore, my interpretation of his words is that he further proves that black beach spaces were also homeplaces, "safe place[s] . . . where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside" in the dominant (white) society (hooks, 1990, p. 42). This particular space in Asbury Park recognized its own participation with hosting these black bands. Furthermore, this realization of how this community has participated in the recognition of what black bands have taught white ones demonstrates literacy too. And, although I realize that literacy is the ability to read, I am suggesting that within a (re)interpreted space, literacy transcends the skill of reading the words on paper and becomes a social process, similar to conscientization, of reading the surrounding environment (Freire, 1993, Moss, 2003). And, this literacy revealed to Asbury Park participants their own authority as change agents. These residents knew that "white bands" were (re)made within these spaces to "learn black rhythm."

### “Passing” at the Beach

Not only is Upperman familiar with these leisure spaces, he’s also familiar with the segregated rules within these locations too.

Upperman: Yeah, I’ll tell you about the beaches. The only pools would be maybe at the YMCA or something. We [Blacks] didn’t even have a Y. [Whites] had a pool on the boardwalk which is the boardwalk was about oh, ten blocks long. They had a pool there where the aquarium, the blacks couldn’t go in that.

And in the ocean, they had a section of the black beach which was about—well I guess about a half a block wide. And we had to go there to swim. You had to pay, buy a ticket. But that’s where you had to go.

So one day I was working at a hotel down there and we decided we’d go swimming. And now the adjacent town, they had a different program for swimming. In Belmar, people who lived there got *passes*. So there were no tickets sold. So this day, a couple of—a buddy and I decided we’ll go to Belmar and go swimming.

But the damn the cop came and put us in jail and charged us and fined us for swimming—for undressing under the boardwalk. But we didn’t undress and all, but this was the way they would—it wasn’t so much black against white, but they were trying to control access to the ocean. They fined us four dollars and all of that.

Interviewer: So you think that if you had been white and you hadn’t had a pass, the same thing would have happened to you?

Upperman: Probably no because they wouldn’t have *spotted* me, you see. They knew no blacks lived there, so this was easy.

Upperman’s language patterns here reveal something important. He is familiar with how segregation affects those who disobey the invisible ‘white’ and ‘colored’ signs in the ocean. He was arrested for it. More importantly, he realizes why he was arrested, “they wouldn’t have *spotted* me, you see. They knew no blacks lived there, so [his arrest]” was imminent because none of the Belmar residents were black.

“Fundamental questions of interpretation are raised when black speakers respond to attempt impositions of white versions of reality by manipulating the import of the original utterance” (Casey, 1993, p. 112). Upperman was “spotted” because his complexion was dark enough to be considered black. I argue that Upperman’s experience reveals how he was subjected to “the power of the [white] gaze” (hooks, 1990, p. 39). This gaze “perceived [him] as ‘a mute, visible object’” (Casey, 1993, p. 111). The gaze made assumptions about Upperman based on his physical characteristics. Ralph Ellison states “I have been called one thing and then another, while no one really wished to hear what I called myself” (as cited in Casey, 1993, p. 111).

Also, the word “pass” has deep implications for black folks. This notion of “passing” has generated countless amounts of discussion as well as scholarship. And, here, Upperman is “mock[ing] the very notion of [its] ‘correct’ meaning,” yet his interviewer doesn’t catch his pun. He was arrested because he didn’t have a pass because he was black; therefore, he would never be able to “pass.”

### **A Trickster Revealed**

I *stumbled on my wife*. She—it was natural and a good thing. We married. We did various things that people do in a small town, nothing spectacular. And we married. I bought the house next to my office and we fixed that up and then you know how women *do*, she talked me into building this *barn*. And I did that.

Upperman briefly reveals his trickster character here. He begins by explaining how he and his second wife met. “I *stumbled on my wife*. She—it was a natural and a good thing.” Upperman is a visceral storyteller. His language patterns involve signifying. By “stumbling” upon his wife, I’m sure he doesn’t mean that he literally tripped over her, but instead, had an accidental or unplanned encounter. Moreover, I’m

sure that his “barn” was his house and not a building that housed livestock or other farm animals. Accordingly, I quickly characterized him as a trickster character because he seems to revel in his obvious efforts to be indirect or utilize the “trick.” I define the trick as an oral act that emphasizes “knowing something the . . . [other person] does not” (Levine, 1977, p. 101).

While the trick is more common amongst slave tales, I believe it functions as a means to challenge the power of the dominant (white) culture (Dundes, 1980). It is “the play upon ‘literal versus metaphorical’” (Dundes, 1980, p. 45). It is never expressed in a direct way (Dundes, 1980). In some instances, the trick is to use an oppressive situation in a metaphorical way to outsmart or deceive the oppressor. However, my usage of this term implies how blacks, namely Upperman, “enjoy intensely knowing something the . . . [dominant (white) culture] does not, and the exquisite delight he derives from realizing that . . . [he or in this case, she] has been bested in a little game makes up for any loss or indignity he may be obliged to endure” (Levine, 1977, p. 101).

As a result, Upperman the trickster is also Upperman the signifier. This tenet of the oral tradition used by signifiers is what black cultural scholarship refers to as ‘signifying’ (Gates, 1988; Kernan-Mitchell, 1973; Smitherman, 1986). Kernan-Mitchell (1973) writes,

*Signifying* . . . [as] a way of encoding messages or meaning in which involves, in most cases, an element of indirection. This kind of *signifying* might be best viewed as an alternative message form, selected for its artistic merit, and may occur embedded in a variety of discourse. (p. 311)

And, in Upperman’s text, when he “stumbled” on his wife and they “built this barn,” he is signifying by adding humor to his story. More importantly, signifying for him shows itself as a permanent form of discourse like many other blacks.

### The Terrapin Teacher

As the interview continues Upperman begins to share his Ocean City experiences. The interviewer asks, "Where was your summer home? What beach was it on?" Upperman responds, "On Ocean City."

Interviewer: Oh, on Ocean City.

Upperman: That's uh, you know much about this area?

Interviewer: Well, I know a little bit about the beaches.

Now, as I indicated earlier, this young woman is a white Canadian. And, while she claims that she knows a bit about some U.S. history, Upperman's question to her seems to infer some doubt. He asks her, "[Do] you know much about this area?" which infers he's already decided that she doesn't. Caronell Chestnut does this as well with her interviewer. And, similarly, I believe that Upperman is (re)interpreting the context of his interview by disrupting the interview process of who can ask questions. Doing this seems to elicit the same type of response that Chestnut's interviewer demonstrated, discomfort because she really does know "a little bit."

And, like many people, she doesn't want to seem ignorant. So instead of providing him with more detailed information about her knowledge, she changes the subject back to Ocean City by asking, "When was this that you built the house?" Upperman seemingly allows her to re-direct him. However, with trickster characters, their thoughts aren't always apparent. Upperman answers the question asked by saying, "'54. Remember Hurricane Hazel?"

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Upperman: You wasn't born then (rocking).

Interviewer: You know Hurricane Hazel came through Toronto where [inaudible].

Upperman: Oh okay. (simultaneously—*he talks over her.*)

While his interviewer appears to try and manipulate Upperman, by re-directing him towards something that she wants to discuss, his response to her reminds the audience who is really controlling this conversation. He deliberately asks her, “Do you *remember* Hurricane Hazel?” And, her response is “Uh huh [Yes].” His reply to that is, “You wasn’t born then.”

With his last reply to his interviewer, Upperman begins to reveal his specific identity as a trickster character, the tortoise. Common to the Igbo tradition, “the tortoise impresses with [his] . . . ageless look, [his] deliberate gait (suggesting the sagacity and dignity of a venerable elder), and a portable armor” (Owomoyela, 1997, p. x). And, at 80 years old, his answer of “You wasn’t born then” challenges what she seems to try to avoid and that is that Hurricane Hazel took place in 1954. You couldn’t possibly “remember” it because you weren’t born yet. His wordplay along with his age shows his tortoise-like characteristics by reminding his interviewer I am older and wiser than you. You really don’t know because you’re too young to know and more importantly, *you can’t remember something that you didn’t live; whereas, I did.*

While Upperman may be 80 years old, the

Terrapin [or tortoise] defeats Deer [Upperman’s interviewer] by placing relatives along the route with Terrapin himself stationed by the finish line. The deception is never discovered, since to the arrogant Deer all terrapins ‘am so much like anurrer you cant tell one from turrer.’ ‘I still the fas’est runner in de worl,’ the bewildered Deer complains after the race. ‘Maybe you air,’ Terrapin responds, ‘but I kin head you off wid sense.’ (Levine, 1977, p. 115)

And as his interviewer tries to explain her pre-existence with historical facts of what she knows, “You know Hurricane Hazel came through Toronto,” the true fact remains that she still wasn’t born. Upperman signifies this knowledge to her by affirming her statement; “Oh, okay.” Although he says, “okay,” his words suggest that he’s made his point and like my own youthful experiences, she needs to, “Remain quiet unless spoken to,” especially about experiences that she wasn’t alive to witness.

### “The Only Beach Like it in the World”

Upperman continues his story saying, “All right. (rocking) Well I built a house in ‘54 on the beach and went in there in the spring and Hurricane Hazel fixed it up in the fall (rocking). But we rebuilt—” Upperman’s indirectness is evident again. “Hazel ‘fixed’ it up” is referring to Hazel’s destruction. Also, like Caronell Chestnut, Upperman emphasizes that he, like the other Ocean City residents, “rebuilt” after Hurricane Hazel. Not only does Chestnut show Ocean City as a site of resistance through their (re)building efforts, but here, so does Upperman. However, his recorder, like Chestnut’s seems to overlook this crucial element of the resilience of this black community. This is evident when she responds, “Right. (simultaneously).”

Upperman: —and it’s a real nice beach down there.

Interviewer: Now it was—that was a black community?

Upperman: All right now that’s another *good, good, good* story. (rocking) Ocean City is the only—Ocean City Beach is the *only beach like it in the world*. (stops rocking and seems to sit forward closer to the recorder).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> I realize this as I listen to his words because as he narrates this point, he stops rocking and appears to lean closer to the recording device because his voice comes through louder and clearer than previously. As a rhetorical listener, I believe that this action demonstrates his need to stop rocking his chair to emphasize to his white interviewer without any distractions how groundbreaking this was for blacks.

Upperman seems to use his authority as an elder to continue his story emphasizing that Ocean City represents a “*good, good, good story*” because it is “the *only beach like it in the world.*” In other words I believe that Upperman is telling her, “Listen, very carefully, young person. I have a story to tell.” His non-verbal language of sitting forward closer to the recorder is an indication that what he’s about to say is important. His delivery of this message is just as important as the words that he uses, especially for this ‘youngster.’ Upperman’s text is a story and can offer something for her if she is willing to listen.

Like Chestnut, his intention is to teach his audience. “The didacticism of the trickster tales was not confined to tactics and personal attributes. They also had important lessons to teach” (Levine, 1977, p. 120). His words represent his opinion and in doing so seem proverbial. Proverbs “were also educationally useful . . . [They] take a personal circumstance and embody it in impersonal and witty form. Proverbs are nearly always stated in the form of a single sentence” (Abrahams, 1972, p. 119). While his sentence, “Ocean City beach is the *only beach like it in the world,*” has no binary construction, it like many of his other language patterns, includes a hyperbolic function discussed further in my analysis.

As Upperman continues, he makes another proverbial statement when he says, “And it used to be if some of the *old* white people saw it, they’d say, ‘It can’t be a colored beach,’”—

Interviewer: Right. (simultaneously)

Upperman: —[B]ecause it’s clean, it’s neat. There’s no joints there.

“[P]roverbs use . . . devices we commonly associate with poetry . . . binary construction . . . conciseness, metaphor, and occasional inverted word order and

unusual construction” (Abrahams, 1972, p. 119). Upperman’s text explains to his recorder of public perceptions of Ocean City. He explains that “if some of the *old* white people saw it—they’d say, ‘It can’t be a colored beach,—because it’s clean, it’s neat. There’s no joints there.’” However, his sentence structure is inverted. Instead of simply saying why it’s a nice beach, he provides the criticism of the dominant (white) culture’s perceptions of why it “can’t be a colored beach” first. I believe that Upperman’s rhetorical inversion is deliberate and disruptive; it doesn’t follow a ‘typical, logical’ sentence structure. He knows how he is using his words and in doing so he further (re)claims his experience as his own. “African trickster figures were more obsessed with manipulating the strong and reversing the normal structure of power and prestige” (Levine, 1977, p. 114). After indicating why “it can’t be a colored beach,” then, Upperman states, “It’s clean; it’s neat; there’s no joints down there.”

### **Are You Listening?**

As Upperman shares this with his interviewer, she affirms his statement.

Interviewer: Right (simultaneously)

Upperman: —It’s real nice. And we got it because a good *friend*, I mean, he wasn’t a *friend* then but he later proved that he was a *friend*, Ed Yow. He used to be in politics here. But down on that beach, the Army used to have training program for coastal artillery. And then they did some other things and then they closed it up—

Interviewer: Right (simultaneously)

Upperman: —and sold it to the public. And Ed Yow bought a piece of it. And the piece that he bought he decided that he was going to set aside a piece for the black people.

Interviewer: (Interrupts) Mmm hmmm. Now was he white?

Upperman: Yeah.

However, here she begins to demonstrate a pattern of ruptures. At this point, my analysis discerns two important occurrences that I believe happen simultaneously. First, I interpret that this woman doesn't realize that she is being disruptive. Like many conversations, some listeners give simple affirmations to let the speaker know they are attentive to what's being said. Accordingly, I believe her ruptures indicate this because her words are affirmations and confirmations of Upperman's statements. Still, it doesn't mean that she's actually listening.

Secondly, I believe Upperman's responses to most of her ruptures demonstrates that he sees such behavior as normal for the dominant (white) culture, especially younger people. And, while these ruptures are rude, I believe that Upperman allows her to continue with these affirmations to reveal how her actions demonstrate "a prolonged and telling parody of white society" (Levine, 1977, p. 118). And, as a trickster, his text isn't simply to "teach how to make a thing, but how to act, how to live" (Levine, 1977, p. 91). While her ruptures don't always seem to bother him, I do believe his allowance of them is deliberate.

Conversely, while her affirmations don't seem to disturb Upperman's storytelling style, as he provides key historical facts about Ocean City's origins, one of her questions seems to exasperate him. The interviewer briefly interrupts with only one question, "Now, was he (Yow) white?" Upperman answers, "Yeah" in a manner that almost questions whether or not she's listening to his inferences. Another "didactic element in these stories was rarely specific or technical but embodied in the moral of the tale itself" (Levine, 1977, p. 90). Accordingly, the interviewer's questioning here seems to be Upperman's first annoyance at being interrupted.

**“Our Stories are Our Books”**

Upperman: And he, Yow—and Yow, he’s dead now. But anyhow, he set aside a section and he got a group of us together and told us that he was going to develop it and that he would sell us as much as we wanted. (sounds like he’s leaning forward to emphasize this story—stops rocking). *Well I was naive and I thought that he was some white man who was trying to take advantage*, so I didn’t buy.

Interviewer: Mmm hmmm. (simultaneously)

Upperman: But several others did. And then the rest of it that he didn’t sell, he and some other folks got together and formed a real estate thing. Anyhow, they developed Ocean City Beach.

Interviewer: Right. (simultaneously)

At this point in his story, Upperman begins providing more historical details about Ocean City’s origins. From Caronell Chestnut’s text, we realize that Edgar Yow was instrumental in providing the opportunity for blacks to own oceanfront land; now, Upperman reiterates this. “[Y]ow told us that he would sell us as much [land] as we wanted.” And, similar to Chestnut, this statement seems important to him and to his story. “While you Whites have schools and books for teaching your children . . . we tell them stories, for our stories are our books” (Levine, 1977, p. 90).

Upperman: And they restricted the lots. All the lots were supposed to be residents and they restricted businesses to the fishing pier

Interviewer: Mmm hmmm. (simultaneously)

Upperman: and one other thing, one motel. The rest of it had to be residential, which was unusual.

Interviewer: Right (simultaneously).

Upperman’s text echoes Chestnut’s story of community with his emphasis of “restrict[ing] the lots.” He highlights how it was “unusual” to “restrict businesses.” His

insistence on this idea of “restrict[ing] the lots” indicates repetition and this repetition is essential in interpreting his text. Like Chestnut, this “restrict[ion]” meant a “remaking of interpretive frameworks” (Royster, 2000, p. 83) by specifying which areas had to be residential and which had to be businesses. In doing so, community values could be taught. “[D]idactic tales attempted to inculcate elements of proper conduct and righteous living, they were also filled with strategies for survival” (Levine, 1977, p. 99). Upperman’s language indicates that he knew by requiring certain areas to be “residential” which was “unusual,” this community, a black community in its (re)interpretation of what was the ‘norm,’ could survive.

### **Friends Come in All Forms**

Upperman: I didn’t get in because I had an interest in South Carolina, a colored beach down there.

Interviewer: Right (simultaneously).

Upperman: And I almost built down there until I got a chance to buy out somebody’s lot at this beach,

Interviewer: Right (simultaneously).

Upperman: and I did. This was nearer. Make a long story short, it’s developed to one of the nicest beaches that *you’d ever want to see*.

Interviewer: Right (simultaneously).

Dr. Upperman reveals an interesting personal perspective about his interpretation of Ocean City; he “didn’t get in because [he] had an interest in South Carolina—a colored beach down there.” This important detail demonstrates that blacks were seeking leisure spaces. And in these spaces Southern blacks were hoping to, “to re-build strength and calm our nervous system” in the midst of a segregated South (DuBois, 1937). More importantly, his efforts were contrary to the perception by the

dominant (white) culture as “our nigras being happy just like it is” (DeFelitta et al., 2012).

As he continues, Upperman shares another important element with his words. He states, “I almost built down there until I got a chance to buy out somebody’s lot at this beach [Ocean City]. And, I did. This was nearer.” In the segregated South, travel for blacks, even those with families was difficult. And in my analysis, while traveling to Atlantic Beach, SC may not have required an overnight stay to reach this destination, I interpret that stopping for gas or to use the restroom would be a likely presumption. And, not everyone carried a *Green Book*<sup>27</sup> with them. So, Upperman indicates that something “nearer” was desired. I believe while in the context of the segregated South, “nearer” also meant safer.

Dr. Upperman’s story is the only one that provides candid information about Edgar Yow. While Caronell Chestnut tells us that he was a nice man, she provides no anecdotes for her view. However, Upperman gives specifics saying,

I got to *learn* Ed right well and we became *very close*. And one day I asked him, I said, ‘*Why did you*’—and the white folks down there gave him hell for building that beach I said, ‘*Why did you do this?*’ He said, ‘*Well, Doc,*’ he came from up in the mountains somewhere—he said, ‘*When I was young, colored people did a whole lot of nice things for my family. And I thought that I would return the— [favor].*’ But that’s it. But that’s how that got there.

Interviewer: Right. (simultaneously).

Upperman reveals another trickster component and that is self-rupturing while telling a story in order to emphasize a particular point. He does with mini-ruptures in his own story-telling process. And in doing so, he is able to maintain authority over his text

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<sup>27</sup> *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, published by Victor H. Green. <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/green-book-helped-keep-african-americans-safe-on-the-road>

through his (re)interpretation of it. In other words, stories are typically told in a logical manner, beginning, middle and ending. Upperman's storytelling style is to rupture this sequencing by (re)interpreting his experiences through his own sequencing style. "The trickster's exploits, which overturned the neat hierarchy of the world in which he was forced to live" indicates (re)interpretation was a key element in trickster tales (Levine, 1977, p. 114). And, when Upperman says, "And one day I asked him, I said, 'Why did you'—and the white folks down there gave him hell for building that beach I said, 'Why did you do this?'" He is demonstrating that not only was Yow instrumental in the origins of Ocean City, but he endured "hell" while exercising social change too.

After this brief tale of Yow's involvement, Upperman is abruptly cut off by his interviewer's affirmation. Similar to "Miss Anne," this young lady seems to want to participate in this text. While Upperman is kind enough not to chastise her, my analysis regarding this Canadian woman is annoyance. Like Chestnut's interviewer, I've listened to Dr. Upperman's interview and have grown weary of her interruptions causing disruptions in *his* storytelling process, not hers. However, like the trickster he is, I believe that by not finishing his last sentence saying, "And I thought I would return the—" and rupturing his own language pattern, he is again revealing this recorder as "a telling parody" of the dominant (white) culture (Levine, 1977, p. 118).

Upperman's text about Edgar Yow also demonstrates how some whites supported democratic principles for all Americans in the segregated South. Upperman proves that Yow realizes "When [he] was young, colored people did a whole lot of nice things for my family." This statement is significant because it demonstrates his literacy.

There is . . . a serious problem with the literacy of American people. Some aspects of this question reside in elementary skills, but for the most part, this is a misplaced emphasis . . . Our problem is, who can think through what's going on

in the world, the changes in our lives underway as a result of decisions made at the political level. [This] illiteracy can only be addressed in the context of social movements which wish to make serious social changes. (Aronowitz & Giroux, 2003, p. 64)

Yow recognized blacks helped his family and this recognition demonstrates his literacy of oppression of blacks in the segregated South. Moreover, his willingness to make a social change was essential in Ocean City as “a site of resistance,” or homeplace (hooks, 1990, p. 42). And, not only was Yow willing to affect social change, but he was also willing to take risks. Upperman reminds us, “The white folks down there gave him hell for building that beach.” Despite that Yow’s literacy demonstrated that “some of our white brothers in the South have grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it” (King, 2003, p. 1904).

### **Sugar and Hockey and Other Stereotypes**

Next, Upperman’s interviewer asks her most thought-provoking question of the interview. She asks, “Now how would this compare? How would Ocean City compare to Sea Breeze?” And Upperman’s response is in true trickster form. He states, “Humph.” Afterwards, he provides listeners with a lengthy (PAUSE). Then, he states, “You can’t—I’m trying to find a nice way to say it. You can’t mix sugar and hockey can you? (laugh).” Initially, I was confused by his reference of “mix[ing] sugar and hockey.” Then, I remembered that his interviewer is a Canadian native. After researching this phrase “sugar and hockey,” I compared it with his laughter after this statement. My interpretation revealed that Upperman’s trickster humor is most evident saying this phrase as well as his laughter that followed. “Sugar and hockey,” or more specifically maple “sugar and hockey” are stereotypes associated with Canadians (kassidyb, 2010).

Dr. Upperman's cultural knowledge is phenomenal. Not only does his literacy of "sugar and hockey," demonstrate his ability to be didactic through other stereotypes, but it reveals that he knows about other cultures, namely his interviewer's too. While her responses have indicated that she isn't as smart as she would like him to believe. His knowledge also further substantiates Upperman as the tortoise character because his awareness truly demonstrates his wisdom too.

And, earlier, the recorder indicated that she "knew a little about the beaches." Well, if she really had knowledge and not stereotypical information of 'colored beaches' because they must all "look alike" then she wouldn't have asked that question. And, Upperman's way of chastising her is to repeat a stereotype about her Canadian culture and ask her about it. Remember, he begins this 'lesson' saying, "I'm trying to find a nice way to put this." Upperman's response reminds her that her question is an "assault upon deeply ingrained and culturally sanctioned values" and so, he teaches her a valuable moral in humility (Levine, 1977, p. 104).

He quickly moves past her stereotypical remark and continues his 'lesson.' He says,

There's no—Sea Breeze was a typical black beach. It was designed to the *ordinary* expression of black people who were out to have a good time.—And they did *everything* they could to do that. And everything went. *This is just the opposite*. This was designed to be as far as from Sea Breeze or Atlantic Beach, South Carolina as it can be. And it is.

Now, Upperman's language directly compares the expectations of what blacks are 'capable of' under the Jim Crow system. In his text, he (re)constructs this stereotypical expectation through his contrast. He knows what the dominant (white) culture thinks about blacks as inferior, second-class citizens. The expectation was that they were

incapable of doing anything successfully or as well as white people; they were only out “to have a good time.” Upperman’s wit in his statement is subtle and indirect. As a trickster, he again employs humor as well as signifying by not stating the obvious.

His use of the word “ordinary” implies more than its meaning of plain. Instead, Upperman is suggesting that “ordinary” is predictable, stereotypical behavior for blacks. And, when juxtaposing this usage of ordinary with an earlier statement he made, “It can’t be a colored beach’ because it’s clean, it’s neat. There are no joints there,” my analysis determines that he is saying Ocean City is a nice beach because it *wasn’t* ordinary. However, Seabreeze isn’t comparable to Ocean City because *it is* ordinary. In essence, Seabreeze is a joint, a jook joint as I discussed in Chapter II. Moreover, the dominant (white) culture expected everything that blacks did to be *nothing more than ordinary*. Accordingly, Ocean City demonstrated a (re)construction of the expectations of the dominant (white) culture.

However, the interviewer doesn’t understand this premise. She says, “Right.” And, Upperman must see confusion in her face because he prods further, “Do I make myself clear?” Then, her perplexity becomes more apparent because she adds, “Well, a bit. —It would be nice if you could be a little more uh—.” At this point, Upperman seems to lose patience with her. He says loudly, “BOOZE—.”

Interviewer: Okay.

Upperman: *Women. Renting rooms. Raising hell. You name it.*

Interviewer: Right. Now um (pause) Okay.

Upperman: Need I say more?

Interviewer: No, that's, that's, that's fine. (laughs). Were there other places in Wilmington that were like that, that were rough sort of?

Upperman: No beaches like that.

The interviewer's discomfort seems apparent because of her hesitations as well as her continued confusion. And, I believe she doesn't ask any further questions because she doesn't want to appear any more ignorant than she already seems to be. And, in my analysis, the dynamics of the interview change because while she seemed to be the one who "remembered" Hurricane Hazel and "knew a little bit about the beaches," her reactions to Upperman demonstrate that she really knows very little at all, especially about *his story* as well as *his lived experiences* and she is learning very little while purportedly "listening."

In fact, Upperman's wordplay seems to further highlight this and at the same time, exacerbate her. It's apparent that she wants him to be more direct, and he is, but at the same time, she has chosen to interview him and not the other way around. So, his text has invited her to *learn* in this process and she has failed with his story about Ocean City. His text is "an art form designed to tell people something they didn't know" (Morrison, 2008, p. 58). And, while she isn't familiar with this text, she is also culpable in her own ignorance by not being open to receiving any of its 'lessons.'

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SECOND GENERATION OF OCEAN CITY

Earlier analyses have focused on outlooks of Ocean City from its adult founders. However, the stories of Linda Upperman Smith and Kenneth Chestnut, both in their late fifties to early sixties and second generation Ocean City residents, provide a different view from their childhood as well as adult memories. These are the only stories that I was able to personally collect. I visited both of them in their Ocean City homes. So, I was more fully able to exercise both rhetorical listening as well as my role as a participant in this community for my narrative analysis. I do believe that both were able to better share with me their stories because I am a member of the same interpretive community. Also, I went there as a child, so this allows me to be an insider. If someone external to Ocean City had asked these same questions, I don't think they would've been able to glean such richness from them.

Their texts walk us through their experiences as children in the segregated South who spent summers at Ocean City. And, my interpretation of both Smith and Chestnut's narratives allows me to record the historical memories of Ocean City as a legacy for future generations. My analysis will show how these living traditions represented through their stories, provided a zamani<sup>28</sup> perspective. In doing so, the collective of past, present and future Ocean City generations has provided a sense of community that has allowed blacks to always feel safe within its boundaries. And this sense of safety

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<sup>28</sup> "In zamani time, a person joins the collective or the community of spirits and achieves collective immortality." See Royster, J. (2000). *Traces of a stream*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

derived from a community that continues to be a safe haven for generations of blacks today.

### **Linda Upperman Smith Analysis**

#### **Ocean City—The Stones for the Future**

My interview of Linda Upperman Smith, the only daughter of Dr. Leroy Upperman<sup>29</sup> took place in her Ocean City home. Initially, when I arrived, she wasn't there. So, her husband invited me to come in and wait while he chatted with me. As I was waiting, I noticed huge conch shells displayed all over the family room. I was immediately taken back to my childhood. As a child, I remember conch shells displayed all over our beach home too. And, like a child, I picked one of Smith's up and held it to my ear to "listen to the ocean." In doing so, I noticed that each shell had a number on it. Howard Rasheed, her husband, proceeded to explain how each number correlated with a story found in a spiral-bound notebook on their coffee table. Consequently, I begin to pick up more shells to find the stories associated with them. It almost became a game.

I realized that this notebook, entitled "Uppie's Skybox"<sup>30</sup> told a fascinating story not just about these shells, but about Ocean City as well as the very home I was sitting in. I was intrigued and begin to read more. And, as I was reading, Smith returned. She chuckled as I asked about the shells. She said,

Let me begin by explaining the shells. We recently began renting the house out because we'll be traveling a lot next summer, so I figured it could help out with paying the taxes and insurance. So, the realtor told me that if *you make it more personal*, they'll take better care of it. So, I got the idea to create that notebook and number all these shells.

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<sup>29</sup> Dr. Upperman's narrative analysis is Chapter IV.

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix C—Uppie's Skybox narrative

Each number is listed in the notebook and corresponds with a shell—but I made it all up! I don't know where all these came from. I know that my mother probably picked most of them.

Smith's words, "We recently begin renting the house out," highlight a recent phenomenon that Ocean City, along with other black beach communities, is now encountering, the cost of current homeowners to maintain their ownership due to skyrocketing tax and insurance costs.

Earlier, I established Ocean City as a site of resistance, and the fight to keep ownership of this space continues. In the black coastal communities, "land-as-community versus land-as-commodity, which had long been a source of tension, negotiation, and conflict . . . [as these issues] became more tied to regional development" (Kahrl, 2012, p. 251). And as property taxes increase along with rising insurance costs, "[s]mall black landowners . . . became, by virtue of these changes in the coastal political economy, both a market liability and, for [white] unscrupulous developers, a potentially lucrative opportunity" (Kahrl, 2012, p. 251). So, many Ocean City owners, like Smith, rent their homes out not for capitalist intentions of making money, but to be able to afford to keep their property.

Next, she shares more information about the "shell game." Smith explains, "So, the realtor told me that if you *make it more personal*, they (tenants) will take better care of it. So, I got the idea to create that notebook and number all these shells. Each number is listed in the notebook and corresponds with a shell—but I made it all up! I don't know where all these came from." One of the shell stories reads,

My mother used to visit Steve Rodgers home. She always admired a large conch shell that his wife had found on the beach and displayed prominently in her beach home. The Rodgers' house was totally destroyed during Hurricane Hazel. When my mother got on the island after the storm and walked the beach,

she found a large conch which she picked up and brought home. She teased Mrs. Rodgers (whose first name I can't remember) that the shell she found was the one from the Rodgers' house and it was supposed to be in our house not hers all along. The shell remains in our home even today.

I could hardly hide my surprise at Smith's literacy of Ocean City; I realized that it took a lot of time as well as creativity and imagination to do this. Royster (2000) defines "imagination as . . . commitment to making connections and seeing possibility" (p. 83).

While Smith indicates that she did this because "The realtor told [her tenants] will take better care of it," I argue that her imagination in this storytelling process represents something more. I believe that Smith is listening to her 'ancestral voice' to create a collective appreciation of her home to others who may not otherwise feel a connection to it (Royster, 2000). Royster (2000) writes,

Having the facts at hand is less important . . . than having the desire to satisfy one's curiosities through imagining . . . I want to be absolutely free to imagine parts of it. The facts are not very important. The possibilities are everything. When I look back, I see infinite possibility, and that's exciting to me. (p. 82)

In other words, Smith has created a curiosity amongst visitors to her home using her imagination and this demonstrates a kind of historical narrative. While she invented these shell stories, the text of each allows not just her but others to "imagine parts of it" with her because "the facts are not very important" (Royster, 2000, p. 82) regarding how the shells got there. What becomes more important is that these "narrative modes of history-telling . . . [assist her in making] historical [re]construction[s]" or teaching her knowing of Ocean City to others (Royster, 2000, p. 83). More importantly, by sharing these narratives with visitors to the Ocean City community, she has implemented a strategy,

to (re)construct history with respect for the long view . . . [w]ith a long view, the historical narrative does not reference individual experience. It references . . . collective patterns in broad scope. These patterns form a cultural landscape, the contextual backdrop against which to render a meaningful and perhaps even a representative story. (Royster, 2000, p. 83)

Consequently, Smith's knowledge is demonstrating the presence of zamani (Royster, 2000). Royster (2000) writes, "In zamani times, a person joins the collective or the community of spirits and achieves collective immortality" (p. 79). Not only do these "shell stories" demonstrate knowledge, but they also represent historical memories to remind future generations of Ocean City. They become interpretative traditions of Ocean City, articulated by an interpretative community. "Each of you is to take up a stone . . . to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' [T]ell them . . . [t]hese stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever" (NIV, Joshua 4.5-7).

I believe visitors to "Uppie's Skybox" will be changed because of this (black) "cultural landscape" (Royster, 2000). Moreover, exposure to such imagination provides visitors with "infinite possibility" (Royster, 2000) of what was, is and continues to be the contextual backdrop of Ocean City. The significance of this is that in creating infinite possibility through imaginative shell stories challenges the assumptions of (white) history. "We can acknowledge our own ignorance of individual stories as a significant factor and not assume so arrogantly that our not knowing predetermines that they and their experiences were absent, deficient, or unimportant" (Royster, 2000, p. 80). And, to blacks, this possibility is essential to survival. Therefore, when visitors come to Uppie's Skybox who are unfamiliar with Ocean City's history as well as its traditions, their knowledge has the potential to become (re)made and in turn, create infinite possibilities of literacy for themselves as well as others of the dominant (white) culture.

### “We Could Breathe”

When I ask Smith to “Tell me about Ocean City,” a smile comes across her face and she begins. She says,

I remember as a child, we *always* came here during the summers—Me and Leroy. We’d spend *all* summer here and daddy would commute every weekend. My mother was a public health nurse until she married my father.

Once we got past the big sand dune which is the north end of the Village of Stump Sound or if we were walking on the beach we did not go past the pier—on the other side of it, *I just felt like we could breathe—we were safe*. It was a safe place for us as kids. We had so much fun as children. We knew everybody and played with all the other children too. *It was like a big family*. Someone was always watching us play.

Unlike me, her summers were spent were during segregation and “[o]nce we got past the big sand dune . . . I just felt like we could *breathe—we were safe*.” These words are profound.

What Smith suggests is that the car ride from Wilmington to Ocean City (one safe place to another safe place), though short in length, was precarious. And, this subtle use of the word “safe” suggests that even in its near proximity to Wilmington, only the black communities represented comfort. bell hooks has similar memories while visiting her grandmother’s house. She writes,

When I was a young girl the journey across town to my grandmother’s house was one of the most intriguing experiences . . . I remember the fear, being scared to walk to Baba’s (our grandmother’s house) because we would have to pass that terrifying whiteness—those white faces on the porches staring us down with hate. Even when empty or vacant, those porches seemed to say ‘danger,’ ‘you do not belong here,’ ‘you are not safe.’ (hooks, 1990, p. 41)

And similar to Smith, hooks (1990) writes, “Oh! That feeling of safety, of arrival, of homecoming when we finally reached the edges of her yard” (p. 41). Ocean City was

Smith's "homecoming." It was her homeplace, her safe place where she could be affirmed and by doing so heal from the ugliness of the segregated South (hooks, 1990, p. 42).

Smith's language patterns are important here because her description of what Ocean City did for her as a child represents cultural knowledge too. She says, "*I just felt like we could breathe.*" And, usually breathing is associated with inhaling and exhaling. However, my interpretation of her word "breathe" is a bit more complex. Typically, uncomfortable situations cause people to inhale, or breathe in until "it is over." I believe that Smith's use of the word "breathe" represents exhaling because Ocean City is a black community. And, during Jim Crow, blacks only felt comfortable enough to exhale or breathe out within *their own* communities. This represents homeplace, too.

### **The Women of Ocean City**

Within this community, blacks have "had to construct a social, political, and economic life of [their] own" (Robinson, 2010, p. 38). The realization that takes place within this community transforms into cultural knowledge. And, while I realize that literacy is the ability to read, I am suggesting that within an interpretive community like Ocean City, literacy transcends the skill of reading the words on paper and becomes a social process, similar to conscientization, or reading one's surrounding environment (Freire, 1998, Moss, 2003). Smith's knowing reveals Ocean City as homeplace that "could restore . . . dignity denied [her] *on the outside in the public world* (my emphasis)" (hooks, 1990, p. 42).

And, upon further analysis, I argue that Smith's awareness was likely taught to her by the adults in the community, more specifically, her mother and the other Ocean City mothers. "In . . . young minds, houses belonged to women, were their special

domain, not as property, but as places where all that truly mattered in life took place—the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of . . . souls” (hooks, 1990, p. 41). This is evident in her words when she says, “We’d spend *all* summer here and daddy would commute every weekend.” This indicates that most of her time was spent with her mother. Caronell Chestnut confirms this when she says,

At that time, schools only stayed open nine months which meant that it gave them three good months to stay down at the beach. And the husbands would stay in town, or wherever they lived for their work, but they’d come in Friday night or Saturday morning and leave Sunday night or early Monday morning. (personal communication, February 3, 1995)

Therefore, Ocean City’s mothers were instrumental in making this community a homeplace. hooks (1990) supports my tenet and writes,

We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the *outside*; it was there on the *inside*, in that ‘homeplace,’ most often created and kept by black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits. This task of making a homeplace, of making home a community of resistance, has been shared by black women globally, especially black women in white supremacist societies. (p. 42)

And according to Smith, even the shells are collected by Ocean City women. In the “Uppie’s Skybox” notebook, Smith writes,

When my mother got on the island after the storm and walked the beach, *she* found a large conch which *she* picked up and brought home. She teased *Mrs. Rodgers* (whose first name I can’t remember) that the shell she found was the one from the Rodger’s house and it was supposed to be in our house not hers all along.

### **A Big Family**

All activities were usually outside in the ocean or on the beach; and despite the invisible boundaries, summer fun was the main objective. Linda explains, “We had so

much fun as children. *We knew everybody and played with all the other children too. It was like a big family. Someone was always watching us play.*” While Caronell Chestnut emphasized the community ruling of an adult’s presence while children were playing in the ocean, Linda’s words provide evidence of this ruling. “Someone was always watching us play.”

From Linda’s experiences, the community ruling did provide another aspect of collective safety of all Ocean City children. Caronell Chestnut explained in Chapter III that because of their lack of exposure to beaches, many blacks didn’t know how to swim. So, the danger of drowning in the strong currents of the ocean was real. So, the parents’ awareness is again demonstrated through this knowledge.

And, this knowledge represents a collective knowing as well as “community conscience” (Royster, 2000) or “like a big family.” Smith states,

Those were good times. We shared everything. Recipes, meals, and if someone needed to go to the store, then that person would telephone or stop by the homes of others to see if they needed anything too.

I believe that Ocean City was a “big family” because it was a homeplace. They took care of each other. Robinson (2010) writes “Racial apartheid, imposed and enforced by others, ironically had fostered great cohesion among . . . [blacks]” (p. 43). hooks (1990) furthers this “cohesion” and explains, “growing up in a segregated small . . . [place], living in a marginal space where black people (though contained) exercised power, where we were truly caring and supportive of one another” (p. 35). Moreover, within its boundaries, children could be “free” in knowing that “someone was always watching [them] play.” I am convinced that inside this space, “black children were allowed innocence” (hooks, 1990, p. 33).

### Stepping from Inside Out

Smith also provides an example of what happened when they left this safe, private, homeplace and entered the public space of the dominant (white) culture; it was there on the *outside* of Ocean City that blacks were reminded of the segregation's cruelty. She explains,

There was limited shopping on the island. The prices were extremely expensive so most folks brought their food with them. At one point there was a small grocery store, however, one time I was shopping with my mom who was fair and looked white.

She was on one side of the store and I was on the other. One clerk asked the other one if she was going to wait on the little "nigger," meaning me. My mom verbally confronted the clerk, and spoke with the owner who would not discipline the clerk.

She then organized a boycott of the store by the other Ocean City residents until the store changed ownership in the next few years.

By working to establish a homeplace for their families, Ocean City women understood the importance of this, especially for the children. So, when Smith's mom "verbally confronted the clerk" because this individual called Smith "nigger," she was bringing the community literacy established from inside of the homeplace into the outside or dominant (white) culture. While the role of mother is generally considered a "conventional role," Smith's mother "expanded it to include caring for one another, for children . . . in ways that elevated our spirits, that kept us from despair, that taught some . . . to be revolutionaries able to struggle for freedom" (hooks, 1990, p. 44).

Furthermore, I am convinced that this knowledge demonstrated by Smith's mother transcended into exercising Ocean City's agency because not only did she "verbally confront the clerk, and spoke with the owner who would not discipline the

clerk,” but she also “organized a boycott of the store by the other Ocean City residents until the store changed ownership in the next few years.”

### **An Interpretive Community Emerges**

In communities, commonly, individuals can be connected through stories of oppression. And, in navigating through the oppression, its participants are able to “. . . construct a social, [and] political [space] . . . of [their] . . . own” (Robinson, 2010, p. 38). As a part of this social process, community literacy is established. African American community literacy (AACL) is defined as, “collective social interactions [that] frequently provide the best chance for individuals to develop through dialogue, personal interactions, and storytelling—into critical citizens” (Green, 2011, p. 1). AACL is demonstrated through the collective act of boycotting. Their actions reveal a “collective consciousness dedicated to social change and personal success . . . [revealing its goals] to both educated and effect change” (Green, 2011, p. 1).

Smith continues,

*We really took care of each other.* Back then, it was dark on the island. My father along with the Chestnuts attempted to organize residents to pay for street lights in our area. Each year, my father would send postcards asking residents to assist in paying the electric bill. I can remember how the daddy paid for the installation of the street lights. Then, he’d walk from house to house and collect money from everyone to pay for the electric bill.

And her text here reveals how her father, a community leader in Wilmington, NC, was also a leader in the Ocean City community too. She emphasizes, “We really took care of each other.” Now, while this could be seen as a blanket claim, she provides support by specifying her father’s involvement in *organizing* the installation of street lights for Ocean City. She explains, “[b]ack then, it was dark on the island.” And, in the segregated

South, darkness could be dangerous for blacks, especially from whites who had already “given Yow hell”<sup>31</sup> for supporting this community.

So, instead of waiting to collect the money for the cost of the street light installation, Smith’s “daddy paid for the installation of the street lights [himself]. *Then*, [my emphasis], he’d walk from house to house and collect money from everyone to pay for the bill.” “The impetus for African American literacy practices . . . is anchored to an ever-present call to duty, service, and uplift” (Sias & Moss, 2011, p. 4). While Smith’s father was instrumental in the street light installation, the entire community *collectively* participated in maintaining them. Such actions are indicative of how Ocean City represents “social justice, courage, and self-determination of black leadership and activism which was borne out of . . . [black] communit[ies]” (Sias & Moss, 2011, p. 4).

Next, Smith continues telling anecdotes about her father.

Daddy loved to swim and would *always* take *all the children* who were swimming with us out beyond the breakers to “ride the waves.” He *taught us* to turn sideways when the wave approached and to never go further than below your armpit because the water would deepen when a wave approached. He always *taught us* to walk out to determine the correct depth for yourself and to never dive outward into a wave because you could end up standing in a hole.

Smith’s father is again instrumental at demonstrating “swimming literacy.” While it’s likely that he taught his children how to “ride the waves,” he could’ve stopped with them. Instead, Smith describes how he “would *always* take *all the children* who were swimming with us . . . to ‘ride the waves.’” And, he didn’t just show them, he “taught” them. So, not only were the women concerned about “the survival and well-being of the community,” so were the men. Again, his actions exemplify Ocean City’s community conscience (Royster, 2000). Smith’s dad must’ve felt a responsibility not just to his children, but “*all*

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<sup>31</sup> See Chapter IV—Leroy Upperman Analysis

*the children.*” And, since exposure to the ocean was uncommon for them, he wanted to ensure their safety.

### “Blow”

When [Smith’s father] he got to Topsail, he would always immediately change into his swim trunks, get a cold Budweiser and sat in front of our big picture window to “blow.”

He did not get air conditioning in his car for many years so the ride up to Topsail from Wilmington was very hot. He also sat in this same window and looked out at the beach and ocean. He loved this place.

Smith’s father, Dr. Upperman, was probably a very busy man. Usually, doctors work long hours, are on call 24 hours a day because illness never seems to go on vacation. So, as Smith remembers her father, she recalls how he liked to “blow.”

DuBois (1937) writes,

That brings to each of us the question as to where we should spend our vacations and how, in order to re-build strength and calm our nervous system and think this thing of life over carefully and quietly. No sooner do we pose such questions, then there comes problems: where should I go; where as a colored person can I go? (p. 11)

Fortunately, for Smith’s father, he could “blow” at Ocean City. While some might not understand Dr. Upperman’s use of the word “blow,” I believe that when putting the word in context with the other language Smith uses, it becomes apparent. “Blow” means breathe freely or exhale. This is apparent when analyzing what Smith’s father did to “blow,” he “change[d] into his swim trunks . . . [and] g[o]t a cold Budweiser.” To him, Ocean City was DuBois’s definition of a vacation. I can imagine that as Smith’s father, “sat in front of [their] picture window,” and drank his Budweiser, he probably thought about he could “re-build his strength and calm [his] nervous system and think this thing

of life over carefully and quietly” (DuBois, 1937, p. 11). And while working a demanding career while living in the segregated South, he was fortunate to have Ocean City, a place where he could breathe freely and easily. That is why, “he loved this place.”

### **Passing on the Stones**

I ask Smith my next question: “What do you want others to know about Ocean City?” And she takes a minute to contemplate my question. After a brief pause, she responds,

I know that Ocean City will *never* be the same place. It'll *never* be what it was—an all-black beach again. And, that's alright. But what I would like people to *know* no matter what their background is—is that Ocean City has *history* and *culture* and it should be *known* and *preserved* by all.

Smith's words here convey a knowing of the “history and culture” of Ocean City that she wants “preserved.” Her language patterns reiterate the importance of Ocean City not just as a place to visit, but as a *community*. For the founders as well as the current owners, *it's more than a place to vacation*, but it's a community. And this memory of the community itself is the interpretative tradition that she wants “*known* and *preserved* by all.” Similar to the stones that serve as reminders to the children of the Israelites, Smith isn't concerned that it will no longer be “an all-black beach again.” And for her, “that's alright.” Morrison argues likewise; and she (2008) writes how vital it is for interpretative traditions to remind us,

to recognize and rescue those qualities of resistance, excellence and integrity that were so much a part of our past and so useful to us and to the generations of blacks now growing up. [We must be aware that] something valuable is slipping away from us, [therefore,] the more necessary it has become to find some way to hold on to the useful past without blocking off the possibilities of the future. (p. 42)

### **Deliberate Action**

Next, Smith's words quickly interrupt one mode of literacy and demonstrate another one. She begins talking about Hurricane Fran which demolished Topsail Island in September 1996.

I knew what would happen after the storm (Fran), so I moved quickly. The town wanted me to tear down my house and I refused. It was clear immediately that the town did not know what to do and I wanted to be sure that *no* decision was *hastily* made that could not be reversed.

My damage was to my downstairs and I lost the roof. I painted "Do Not Destroy" on my house and let it sit for five months until I was able to gain permission to move the house back closer to the street. I moved it [back] 65 feet where it has successfully survived the ocean surge that other houses that were on the same line did not in subsequent storms. I moved this house back before the inspectors could come in to condemn this house.

She anticipates "what would happen after the storm, so [she] moved quickly."

Casey (1993) writes, "[K]nowledge is power; to be wise in 'black' interpretation is essential to physical and psychic survival; but to succeed at studying 'white' knowledge is to undo the system itself, to refute its (re)production of black inferiority materially and symbolically" (p. 124). "The town" as well as "the inspectors" represent the white folks of Topsail Beach. And, her awareness seems to expect them to act "hastily," while she counters haste with deliberate action.

Sadly, unlike Smith, my family did not act deliberately enough. Our home was destroyed by Hurricane Fran like many oceanfront homes. And, for those homes that remnants did remain standing, those owners had to advocate for the right to keep their homes identified as single family residences. Unfortunately, my family was not in that grouping, so the only option "the town," gave us was to re-build as a multi-family dwelling. Of course, this was cost prohibitive because the home was insured as a

single-family residence and the re-building costs would likely be double. Moreover, the tax assessment would increase significantly along with the insurance costs too because the home would lose its residency status and be classified as a commercial dwelling. As a result, my family did not re-build.

So, for the homes that weren't completely damaged, homeowners like Smith and others were able to repair as an interpretative community instead of being forced to re-build as dictated by "the town." This is significant because by painting "Do Not Destroy on [her] house and let[ing] it sit for five months until [she] was able to gain permission to move . . . [it] back closer to the street," she was likely able to communicate her plans to save her home to other Ocean City residents. This is evident because since she was one of a few Ocean City homeowners who were living in Wilmington, she was in close proximity to Ocean City; accordingly, I believe she was able to share her plans with others.

Therefore, other oceanfront homes were able to maintain their single family residential status because of the cohesion of this interpretative community. In turn, through a combination of her interpretative traditions and knowing, she is able to (re)interpret how to protect her property, and "move[s] it [back] 65 feet . . . before "the inspectors" could come in to condemn [the] . . . house." This forethought reveals that she is "able to free herself and her people through her intellectual prowess" (Casey, 1993, p. 127).

### **Ocean City is Represented**

Smith's final language patterns demonstrate the lasting effects of Ocean City's interpretive tradition through activism. She explains,

I was asked to participate in the BEST (Beach Erosion Study Team) that was set up by the town of North Topsail Beach around 2007 to study what would be best to manage the erosion problems on the island. *I felt that it was important for someone from our community to represent our interests. I strongly and successfully advocated* for additional sand in our area as well as the whole town because I believed that the addition of a stronger buffer would not only benefit tourism but benefit the tax base for the county as well.

Based on this report, the town has recently voted to raise the tax rate to pay for this project. Most importantly, the town has decided that all property owners benefit from the sand and that all property owners should pay for this project (instead of the ocean front property owners). They were able to see that everyone stood to lose in another storm, not just those on the front row.

Now while some may not see the connections to Ocean City, her own agency isn't the only perspective she shares. While Smith was asked to "participate in the BEST that was set up by [the white folks]" it seems that she chose to become part of BEST in order "for someone from *our community* to represent *our interests*" to be heard. And, the way to carry on Ocean City's interpretive tradition is to "revel in the freedom of expression possible for those who are ordinarily suppressed" by making sure Ocean City's "interests" are clearly understood (Casey, 1993, p. 141).

Moreover, Smith's involvement in BEST was certainly influenced by her input. Smith "strongly and successfully advocated for additional sand" to be added to Ocean City's shorefront. This is phenomenal because beach erosion was one of the contributors of Seabreeze's demise.<sup>32</sup> Not only has Smith's presence benefited Ocean City's physical space, but by being involved in a "study [to determine how] . . . best to manage erosion problems on the island," she can then share this learned knowledge with other Ocean City residents to further ensure the community's survival. In essence, her involvement has provided her "the opportunity to take advantage of strategies for enhancing literacy" within the Ocean City community (Royster, 2000, p. 141).

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<sup>32</sup> See Chapter II—Ocean City: An Escape from Jim Crow.

Smith's final words highlight something that indicates success and that is shared responsibility. She states that,

'[T]he town' has recently voted to raise the tax rate to pay for this project. Most importantly, the town has decided that *all* property owners benefit from the sand and that *all* property owners should pay for this project (instead of the ocean front property owners). They were able to see that *everyone* stood to lose in another storm, not just those on the front row.

Smith addresses something that "the town" seems to have discussed at length.

Apparently, some Topsail property owners didn't feel they would benefit from the BEST project if they weren't oceanfront owners. However, Smith's words tell a different story.

Her interpretation of who benefits from this project is arguable because she feels that "all" and "everyone" should pay equally because "all" and "everyone" stood to both "benefit from the sand" and "lose in another storm." Accordingly, she highlighted that "[p]eople are not for example, terribly anxious to be equal" (Baldwin, 1993, p. 88).

However, I argue because she is representing Ocean City's interpretive tradition as a community, she believes that everyone shares equally. In other words, she brings Ocean City's knowledge to *them*, the whites. Therefore, Smith "appropriate[s] interpretive gaps which open up around . . . [her], using the 'respite from the . . . rigid historical patterns that dominant ideologies impose' (Clark & Holquist, p. 302) to repair racist ruptures in [her] own and in others' lives" (Casey, 1993, p. 141). She teaches them "the stones" of community collectiveness.

More importantly, Smith's political involvement beyond the boundaries of Ocean City ensures that the community's concerns will be heard. She demonstrates that those "who worked consistently to take advantage of opportunities to secure rights . . . justice

and empowerment” will ensure that the memory of the Ocean City community will continue to thrive and survive (Royster, 2000, p. 116).

### **Kenneth S. Chestnut, Sr. Analysis**

#### **Amazing and Incredible**

I interviewed Kenneth S. Chestnut, Sr., the youngest son of Wade and Caronell Chestnut, at his Ocean City home. He welcomed me in offering me something to eat and drink as we sat in his living room across from a huge picture window that dazzled me with unobstructed ocean views. And, as I looked out at the ocean, I realized how much I missed that view. He seemed quite excited about my research and began talking before I could ask questions. So, I quickly set the recorder up and pressed record, Chestnut began and as a rhetorical listener, I let him without interruption. And, like several others, his first language patterns highlighted the impact of hurricanes to Ocean City. This becomes evident as he says,

Coming back after Hurricane Hazel because, you know, there were probably a dozen homes built here. Hazel came through with the exception of one and just—you’ve seen the pictures—and just wiped *everything* out.

And, most people would’ve just said, ‘Okay. I tried it. See you later.’ ‘Cause that’s money (inaudible). But then to come back and re-build, and—I realized as a people we have that history where we just don’t give up.

You know but to have it on something that’s not our primary home—with kids and raising families and with *all those other commitments*, you know. And coming down here—it’s just *amazing* to me. Because they would invite lawyers to come down here and doctors to try to sell lots or buy lots for \$100 back then. It’s just that—I don’t know. I think you have to give anything *context* and say what was going on during that time period . . . but, to do it then was *incredible*.

In my analysis of Chestnut’s language, I am struck by the highly charged emotional words that he as well as other Ocean City residents use in their (re)interpretation of this community. His language, along with the other narrators,

demonstrates a non-conforming characteristic of the conventional storytelling pattern because they employ contrasting words. Chestnut reminds his audience that “you have to give anything *context*.” So, while he doesn’t clearly state it, the origination of this community during the segregated South must remain as a central element when discussing Ocean City. Therefore, the words “*amazing*” and “*incredible*” that he discusses are in direct contrast to white folks and blacks folks because as a black community, nothing was supposed to be amazing or incredible to an inferior group of people. So, this extreme language describing Ocean City’s success is done so while juxtaposing the racism of the dominant (white) culture that existed too.

Such superlative language also contrasts how in the midst of living under such conditions, blacks were able to create a safe community at home as well as at Ocean City. And, while the black community at home was safe, I argue that the language of these residents demonstrates how Ocean City was the “ultimate” safe place. Not only does Chestnut use language to support this tenet, but so do the others with language like, “It’s the only beach like it in the world” and “we could breathe.” By using such superlative language, Chestnut, as well as the others, reveals how Ocean City was triumphant at *transcending* the boundaries of the segregated South. This contrast is a subtle representation of double consciousness that I will discuss in detail further in my analysis.

### **Hazel Leaves an Impression**

While Chestnut mentions the devastation of Hurricane Hazel similar to the other Ocean City residents, specifically his mother and Leroy Upperman, his words delineate a different perspective. I argue Chestnut reveals another (re)interpretation of Hazel’s

devastating effects similar to his mother, Caronell Chestnut. He acknowledges how Ocean City residents demonstrate they “just don’t give up.”

Now, while Chestnut provides a logical reason for why these original owners could’ve quit by saying, “Okay. I tried it. See you later,” what he recognizes is their commitment to more than owning a vacation home at the beach in the segregated South. Again, he recognizes the *context* of how the community displayed resilience by remaining. Moreover, he points out an important aspect of Ocean City and that is that its residents had “kids and [were] raising families and . . . [had] all those other commitments.” Highlighting yet another aspect of Ocean City, Chestnut indicates that despite all this, these Ocean City founders accepted their responsibilities of home, but also recognized Ocean City as an opportunity. This recognition demonstrates how these founders again *transcended* the confines of segregation. They realized “[t]he importance of the past can only be understood in relationship to the responsibilities of the present. Gramsci . . . [writes] ‘it is necessary to direct one’s attention . . . towards the present as it is, if one wishes to transform it’” (Casey, 1993, p. 157). These founders knew by remaining and (re)building, they could make a difference. They realized that by continuing their (re)interpretation, history would be (re)made. For them, Ocean City wasn’t just a financial opportunity, but a social one. And, by challenging these invisible borders, they were (re)making their lives as well as their children’s. Gramsci in Casey (1993) writes,

We feel ourselves linked to [those] who are now extremely old, and who represent for us the *past* which still lives among us, which we need to know and to settle our accounts with, which is one of the elements of the *present* and one of premisses of the *future*. We also feel ourselves linked to our children, to the generations which are being born and growing up, and for which we are responsible. (p. 156)

### **Tell Me about Ocean City**

I asked Chestnut the same question I did of Linda Upperman Smith. I asked him to tell me about Ocean City. He doesn't hesitate with his words and immediately begins describing Ocean City in physical, philosophical as well as socio-political terms. He concisely states,

Well, Ocean City is physically a one mile strip along Topsail Island facing the ocean and the sound. It has—just such a rich—history of a *community*. So, it's more than just physical property, it's a community that goes back and when it started—the pioneers that started it has always had a sense of *community*.

And, in spite of all the challenges, which would be you know: high taxes, erosion, and the economy, all those things, racism for us, it's you know—had been dealt with—it still is not only surviving, but *thriving*. You know, it certainly is not what it was then, it won't be but there's still a sense of *community* and so forth. But that defines it.

Here, while I focus on what Chestnut says, I also address what is inferred with his repetition of this “sense of community” which is rooted from the perspective of those who were treated as possessions. The descendants of kidnapped Africans are black people that have a tradition without possessions. They had no material “things,” only a sense of their African culture. I argue that African culture instead focuses on people's language and traditions which emphasize a “sense of community.”

Furthermore, participation in another community outside of one's primary residence is telling because it is optional. And, while some trivialize this participation by focusing on the socio-economic perspectives, Chestnut's words deconstruct and (re)construct dominant (white) ideologies. He not only addresses why Ocean City is significant because “it's more than just physical property, it's a community,” despite all of its challenges like “high taxes, erosion, and the economy . . . [and] racism for us.” Chestnut highlights that within this interpretive community, this African culture has

remained an interpretive tradition with its “sense of community.” And, Ocean City “not only surviving, but thriving,” is another contrasting superlative that goes even further. While the dominant (white) culture may view blacks as nothing more than possessions, blacks see themselves as much more. Accordingly, they support one another in communities. This overturns the dominant (white) ideology of possessive individualism.

This tenet is comparable with the biblical stones discussed in Joshua, chapter four. I believe that this “sense of community” or knowledge is black folks’ “stones” or historical memories that originated in Africa. And during slavery, this community consciousness survived the Middle Passage and was passed down through generations by enslaved blacks. I consider this knowledge to be African literacy. And, Ocean City’s founders taught this concept of African literacy through beliefs and ethos in their emphasis of “community.” Royster (2000) writes,

An African-based ethos . . . [includes:]

1. The ‘survival of the tribe,’ as an integral and indispensable part
2. There is a sacred obligation to the genealogical line, both vertically, in terms of the succession of generations (past, present, and future) . . .
3. To be human is to belong to the whole community.
4. Both responsibility and destiny are collective.
5. Deep connections exist between what we do and what we believe. (p. 86)

All of these components are evident in the Ocean City community and Chestnut realizes it. Ocean City has done more than, it continues to thrive. Smitherman (1986) writes,

[T]he oral tradition has served as a fundamental vehicle for gittin ovuh.<sup>33</sup> That tradition preserves the Afro-American heritage and reflects the collective spirit of the race. Through . . . story, folk sayings, and rich verbal interplay among everyday people, lessons and precepts about life and survival are handed down from generation to generation. (p. 71)

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<sup>33</sup> “Gittin ovuh” is a concept embraced by the black community. It is defined with a particular emphasis on the survival of black folks despite the American chattel slave system as well as its residual effects. See Smitherman, G. (1986) *Talkin and testifyin*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP.

This is what I argue seems to amaze him; he understands how this ethos has created community knowledge and in turn, explains why Ocean City is “not only surviving, but thriving.”

### **An Invitation to Participate**

Afterwards, there is a significant pause. And as a narrative researcher, this silence cannot be ignored. It means something and for my interpretive purposes, “this level of detail is absolutely necessary” (Reissman, 1993, p. 36). Then, I realize that that Chestnut is expecting me to ask another question. So, I try to get him to share more about Ocean City, but I don’t think asking another question is appropriate. Quickly, I recognize that perhaps what Chestnut wants to do is tell the story in another sense (Reissman, 1993, p. 36). Maybe, he wants to ask me a question, but he doesn’t. He continues looking at me. “The structures and language [storytellers] chose in collaboration with a listener” are important here. And, then I finally “get it.”

Chestnut may not want to talk without my participation. He wants more than a listener, he wants a dialogue. His silence is my invitation to participate. Since he knows what my research is about, he expects me to dialogue with him. For me, this is significant because I wanted his subjectivity to be the focus of the text, but it takes me awhile to recognize that this is his subjectivity that he has invited me to participate in because “the relationship between the research and subject, was never, and indeed could not be, a formal one” because I was already an “insider.” Moreover, by being an “insider’ . . . I could become part of [his] conversation” (Casey, 1993, p. 18).

### Conditions, Traditions, and Epistemology

So, I quickly, (re)gather my thoughts and share an observation with him that stood out to me during his mother's interview.<sup>34</sup> I say,

I identified your mother as a trickster. In her interview . . . she's being asked about the challenges she encountered and your mother answers: 'Well, there was a little vandalism' with a smile as she leans her head to the side [I also smile and turn my head to the side], but then she switches it up and states, 'But now Mr. Yow had it much worse than we did.'

Chestnut smiles slightly and his memories seem to take him back to the past. He says,

Yeah, yeah. I remember when I was a kid, and I must've been six years old, or something like that, but I *knew* I was in the segregated South. I *knew* that much. I *knew* I couldn't go to Woolworth's and get a hotdog or you know.

As I analyze Chestnut's language, his repetition of the word "knew" stands out. Though his story is about childhood experiences, Chestnut is indicating what he "knew," even as a child because he had been taught to know. And this knowing demonstrates his epistemology.

This is important because he provides insight about what it was like as a child living in the segregated South. More importantly, his knowledge specifies that he "knew" deviating from Jim Crow's unwritten rules could mean punishment. And, his epistemology demonstrates that he had a sense of "right" and "wrong." Therefore, this conditioning reveals that he learned this through his lived experiences as well as those of his parents. His language demonstrates that blacks, even black children, had to be hyper vigilant about their conditions in order to survive in the segregated South outside of the black community.

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<sup>34</sup> See Chapter III—Caronell Chestnut Analysis

My dad and I were riding with Mr. Yow coming up here and I don't even remember what it was for and but he stopped at The Mermaid which is just where that bar or restaurant—it's on the other side of the North Topsail side. So I was out . . . [by] the car and he went in. And, I was just standing there 'cause I knew that I didn't go in there.

And he said, 'No. Come on in.' [I say] 'I don't know about this' (Shakes his head—no) And, he said 'No, no. You come on in.' And I went in with him and he said, 'What do you want?' And I said, 'I want a soda or a cherry orange or whatever it was.' But he told 'em 'Give him what he wants.' (Gesturing)

Here, Chestnut is further revealing details about his living “in the segregated South.” While his words indicate Yow's authority on Topsail Island, they also further delineate Ocean City as an interpretive tradition. As a white man, I presume that Yow realized what he was doing when he insisted that Chestnut enter the restaurant to order a soda. His actions defied the “normal” rules. Simultaneously, he was “playing” the race game. And, as a white man, he knew he could do this without repercussions from the dominant (white) culture. However, blacks didn't have the same authority and such actions weren't considered “play” by black folks, but unnecessary risks.

In my interpretation, Chestnut's hesitation shows another aspect of Yow's “playing.” As an adult, Yow knew that Chestnut, a child, would obey his orders. Sadly, this perspective of Yow's “playing” is a dangerous one that should be addressed. While Yow was “playing,” and his actions demonstrated courage by defying the dominant (white) culture to which he belonged, they also showed reckless inconsideration for an innocent, black child who wasn't a part of the same culture.

I also believe that while Yow was “playing” this race game, Chestnut's epistemology is further revealed because not only did he realize where he wasn't supposed to be, he also recognized through his interpretive traditions, where he was safe. Even though he knew he couldn't enter certain establishments, I also believe that

Chestnut' "knowing" recognized the irony in the dominant (white) culture's sense of "right" and "wrong." Nonetheless, as a black child, I am certain that such an epistemology was essential for the survival of the black community.

### **"Ordinary" as a Paradox**

And—you know, it's an *ordinary* thing, but it's not. But that defined the character, his character to me. And, he didn't care what anybody thought or what they talked about you know, when he left. He said 'he just wanted to come in there to get him a soda.' So, just simple acts like that you know when nobody's looking or somebody to even remember that.

When Chestnut finishes his story about Yow, he says, "it's an ordinary thing, but it's not." Yow realized the importance of establishing relationships with everyone, both black and white. And, his "simple act" demonstrated that "the black and the white, deeply need each other here if we are really to become" truly human (Baldwin, 1993, p. 97). Chestnut's contrast of "ordinary" and "not ordinary" is meaningful. His use of a double negative here is employing another paradoxical idea. While he is subtle, his words are exaggerating this sense of "ordinary."

Obviously, there was nothing "ordinary" in Yow's actions. While it seems that his is understating Yow's "ordinary" expressions of humanity, his subtlety along with the contrast is significant. His words imply that Yow's actions are just the *opposite*. In fact, they are not ordinary, but *extraordinary* simply "by creat[ing] an oppositional worldview, a consciousness . . . a standpoint that exists not only as that struggle which also opposes dehumanization but as that movement which enables creative, expansive, self-actualization" (hooks, 1990, p. 15). And, ordinary acts become ways of (r)emaking interpretive frameworks (Royster, 2000).

### Lesson Taught through Anecdotes

As Chestnut finishes his lesson, I am overwhelmed by his story. And, as I process the significance of his words, I say, “Nowadays it seems ordinary. You know I think about how we can take our kids anywhere—or how we can go anywhere, but it wasn’t always like that.” And as I comment on depth of his living tradition, the seriousness of this context grips me as he responds to my reaction. He says, “Oh, yeah. Yeah.” And, his words seem simple and *ordinary*, just like Yow’s act. While I analyze his non-chalant affirmations, I am amazed at his lack of bitterness or anger at his experiences in the segregated South. His response is quite matter of fact. I realize that Chestnut isn’t angry about such incidents. Like many other blacks before him, he has “sought to learn, to better [him]self, to change [his] world” (Royster, 2000, p. 110). Chestnut is using his text to “change hearts, minds, and conditions” (Royster, 2000, p. 110).

Chestnut continues with another anecdote. While his earlier story about the experience at “The Mermaid” seemed an awkward one, he also shows his comical nature too. He says,

I remember another story with um, talking about Dr. Norris. And, Dr. Norris could really *pass* for white. And, (laugh) he had a boat and he (slight hesitation) took his boat in the water and he was having some trouble with it.

So I went into Wilmington with him. My mom and dad said, ‘Ride with him and show him where the place is’ and all that. So he was going to get a hotdog and I said, ‘I don’t go in that place (LAUGHING). You go on your own.’ I don’t know, but anyway—he went and got his hotdog, you know. (LAUGHING) No problems. It’s *memories* like that.

Yet another tale about Jim Crow, but this time, Chestnut is not persuaded to go inside and he doesn’t. Instead, he remains with the car. However, in his (re)telling, it’s obvious

that he appreciates how Dr. Norris ignored the laws of Jim Crow because of his laughter. Norris was a resident of Ocean City, an all-black community. Had he truly wanted to pass for white, I presume that he could have at another beach location. So, I believe that this was a deliberate choice on his part. At the same time, so was his visit to “that place.” Again, I imagine he also knew what he was doing when he went inside to get something to eat. His choice was another deliberate one that clearly demonstrated how he mocked the dominant (white) culture—by “passing” for one of them.

While “race is represented in terms of its authority to define (that is, to ascribe identity, to assign the subject to a stable ‘place’ in the racial order)” (Wald, 2000, p. 5), this is determined by the dominant (white) culture. Therefore, Norris’ actions (re)define what “white” means by “passing.” By “passing” he contradicts the notion of “a stable ‘place’ in the racial order” (Wald, 2000, p. 5), especially when determined by one group who maintains superiority over another. Chestnut’s story of Dr. Norris’s “passing” indicates that both he and Norris “feel that bigoted whites deserve to be cheated and fooled since the way they behave toward us makes no sense at all” (Wald, 2000, p. 8).

And as he recalls this story, he begins laughing softly and then his laughter gets louder. While Chestnut is able to laugh, I realize that at that time, he probably didn’t laugh. In fact, he seems to be the victim of two adults’ reckless race games. Nonetheless, as I reflect on Chestnut’s response to these stories, I must recognize that commonly adults learn to survive difficult times by joking and laughing.

### **Acknowledgment or Tokenism?**

After Chestnut finishes his “passing” story, he quickly reverts the conversation back to something I commented about earlier, his mother. He says, “But yeah, she

was—she definitely shifted it to Mr. Yow. Yeah. That interview is in the archives.” I confirm that with him and say, “I got it from the State Archives.”

Chestnut: Yeah. Right, right. And, the Historical Society of Topsail has been very supportive over the years. Did you talk to Ms. Bradshaw? And some of those older [white] people that have been involved I mean they would invite her (his mother) to a luncheon to speak and just to talk. And, you would see it when you go up to the building. They’ve got a prominent display.

And, then the other friend has been Stallman—Dave Stallman. He wrote the book.<sup>35</sup>

Me: Mmm hmm. I read his book.

Chestnut: And, he’s come down a few times. I wanted you to meet him. He’s a good one to know. See, he would have a good perspective on just the context of what was going on during that time period.

Me: Mmm hmm.

Chestnut: You know, post WWII, et cetera. And what was going on on the island.

While I recognize that Chestnut is explaining the recent recognition Ocean City has obtained, I also realize the recognition he describes from the Historical Society as well as David Stallman both indicate dominant (white) acknowledgment. And while I believe this tribute is long overdue, it is still underrepresented. Accordingly, my affirmations to Chestnut’s statements are signifying this underrepresented “acknowledgment” of Ocean City.

I visited the Topsail Historical Museum and I read Stallman’s book, and I was unimpressed by both. While the Museum’s display is tastefully done, it still provides a brief, historical overview without acknowledging that Ocean City existed before some of the other items displayed did. It also does not provide a contextual elucidation for the significance of Ocean City regarding its founding during segregation. Out of Stallman’s

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<sup>35</sup> Stallman, D. (1996). *Echoes of Topsail*. Wilmington, NC: Rutledge.

286 pages of text about Topsail Island, only five discuss Ocean City in a chapter titled, “North Topsail Beach.” While my interpretation may seem harsh, both seemed to display tokenism; in other words, “It’s enough because ‘they’ are now included.”

### **Double Consciousness Revealed**

Chestnut changes from the lively storyteller about his childhood experiences to a diplomatic role. In my analysis, I believe that Chestnut’s sudden shift represents double consciousness. DuBois revealed the “. . . most nuanced and powerful theory of race and racism ever developed,” double consciousness (Winant, 2004, p. 25). DuBois (1994) writes,

Negroes are born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of *the other world*. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (p. 2)

Giddings (1984) further delineates this concept as “. . . the two-ness or ‘double-consciousness’ dilemma . . . [where] blacks [see themselves through] a hall of mirrors, where they saw their reflection first from one angle, then another” (p. 183).

While Chestnut recognizes that my primary reason for this visit is research, I believe he’s also shrewd enough to realize that my research will have another audience, *external* to Ocean City. And, his shift from storytelling to examples of networking involving Ocean City’s story demonstrate this. As he discusses his historical memories, I believe his veil has been lifted. However, as he mentions the Historical Society of Topsail along with the author, David Stallman (i.e., white folks), the veil descends. While he is still didactic, his language becomes more formal. As I continue interpreting his language patterns, I do not think that Chestnut is aware that he’s doing this.

I also believe that it is an involuntary response not just because he is black, but also because he is unaccustomed to anyone asking him *his* story about Ocean City. While journalists, reporters, historians and other whites have asked him about Ocean City, I doubt any of them have asked about *his* historical memories.

### **Answering with a Story**

Next, I ask Chestnut, “How do you think your mom managed to make it continue to happen even after your father died?” And his response surprises me because just as quickly as the veil descends, it is removed again. He states,

Yeah, yeah. I don’t know because you know she um, she taught school, so she didn’t have a lot of—she wasn’t wealthy financially. I mean she was fine, but she didn’t . . . you know. And she was a determined person.

She was—whatever she set her mind to—a lot of people say she was ahead of her time. But I think she moves the clock forward. *People like that move the clock forward*; they’re not ahead of their time.

But for example, she went to all 50 states. She travelled internationally, but she went to every state in the union. So I was talking to her and I said, you know, “Mom, how did you end up going to North Dakota?” (laughing) I said, “I can see you going a lotta places, but how in the world did you end up going to North Dakota?”

And, I just picked that out and she said, “Well, I was at an Episcopal National Conference in Minneapolis and I’d been to all the states except North Dakota. And, I got a plane out of Minneapolis and flew to, I guess it’s Sioux Falls. Got a taxi, drove through downtown Sioux Falls—back to the airport and caught the plane back. (Smiling)

Chestnut further substantiates my interpretation of his mother as a trickster. While “women . . . were the storytellers, members of the community who taught with parables” (Royster, 2000, p. 101), I believe Chestnut’s mother taught him to be one too. As he explains to me about how she managed without his father, he doesn’t directly answer the question; however, he does answer it. Such discourse reminds me of the parables

of the Bible. In my analysis, I define a parable as a short, narrative story that involves a didactic comparison usually a simile or metaphor (Dorson, 1972).

While Chestnut is answering my question, he is also teaching me about how his mother survived without his father, but through a story. Instead of directly answering, Chestnut is indirect by telling me that as a schoolteacher, she wasn't "wealthy financially." However, she was fortunate enough to travel. And, in his mother's travels, she was able to visit all 49 states. And, while she never had a reason to visit North Dakota, while near it, she decided on her own, to fly there. He continues,

She said, "Cause that was my last one—I've done 49 states and that was the last one." So, you look at what stories like that, you know, about a person's character and that was—that certainly identifies her as being determined. And, that was her goal. So whatever she set her mind to, she was determined to make it happen.

I believe that Chestnut is teaching me through a parable about comparing his mother's travels with living without her husband. By demonstrating that she wanted to see all fifty states by *using her ingenuity* is not only how she accomplished that goal, but also how she was able to survive without his father.

### **An Inside Joke**

I was humored by Caronell Chestnut's determination, so I laughed at his parable. And, as the dialogue continued, I said, "I was reading somewhere and it may have been in the materials you gave me, but she was talking about the first time she came here." Chestnut says, "Oh, yeah (smiling)." And, I continue, "She didn't see it. [She says,] I didn't see it. (LAUGHING)." <sup>36</sup> Chestnut agrees and says, "Yeah, 'I didn't see it' (laughing)." As our dialogue continues, we both laugh at our (re)membering of his

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<sup>36</sup> See Caronell Chestnut's recollection of Ocean City when she first sees it in her narrative analysis discussed in Chapter III.

mother's "lack of vision" when she first encounters Ocean City. And, our discussion at the irony of that becomes obvious for both of us. It becomes an "inside" joke for us because for a woman who was unable to see the "vision" of Ocean City as her husband did and even after his untimely death, clearly her words provide an ironic sentiment in the text of Ocean City. And, this is funny because we both "got" it. While she claims she didn't "see it," obviously she saw more than she was willing to admit and this is the joke.

### **It Wasn't All "Fun and Vacation"**

Chestnut's storytelling resumes as he shares more about his mother with me.

He indicates,

And, the other thing about her, she worked hard. Cause she *worked* hard, I mean we all did you know just getting at the pier and all that cause she would *teach* school and then she'd come down and *work during the summer*—at the restaurant, I mean we all would. I mean just—you know, so. It wasn't just *fun and vacation*- and then entertaining trying to get people to buy lots and come down so—

Chestnut's words highlight an important and overlooked perspective on Ocean City; "It wasn't just *fun and vacation*." Yet, his mother never mentions this in her storytelling. And, Kenneth S. Chestnut, Sr.'s text reminds me of her silence when he contradicts a portion of her story. I presume that her silence regarding the "work" she did at Ocean City has to do with her wanting to (re)interpret her role in this community as a "lady" and not as a "woman."

Some believe that life at Ocean City was tranquil and all about vacationing at a second home at the beach. What Chestnut's words emphasize is that initially, it was just the opposite. Obviously, as a schoolteacher, Caronell Chestnut had the summers "off." However, in my analysis, I (re)interpret this ideology of having summer vacations. While Chestnut clarifies that going to Ocean City was work because "we all would . . . *work*

during the summer—at the restaurant,” I argue that even though Caronell Chestnut wasn’t ‘teaching’ in an official capacity, she was teaching in an unofficial, grassroots capacity. As she worked in the restaurant with her sons, she was teaching them the meaning of “community.” Likewise, in African communities, women,

developed patterns of action. Prominent among these patterns is that they operated fairly autonomously and developed habits of *hard work* and *self-reliance* . . . women . . . t[ook] care of their broad responsibilities, including . . . the production and processing of food, the teaching and nurturing of children, the managing of the *community conscience*, and so on. (Royster, 2000, p. 102)

Also, what Chestnut’s words suggest is that establishing this community was hard work for him and his brother too. After all, it wasn’t just “fun and vacation.” They spent their summer vacations, working to help build and maintain a community. Not only did they observe and learn through this work, they were participants in it too. Similarly, Greene (1995) maintains that young people should be allowed to participate in a classroom in order to learn from it and teach others. Thus, I argue that their participation in this community building provided them the space to “envisage . . . [their] involvement [and likely produced] . . . a range of literacies [and knowledge encouraging them to] . . . grow up to participate in the democratic community” (Greene, 1995, p. 34).

### **The Dynamics between Black and White Women**

Chestnut further explains the type of woman that his mother was. He continues,

But she was just a woman that was just determined. And so whatever she made her mind up to do, she would—she would do it. And, she didn’t (hesitation) bite her tongue. I mean if it was something that was right—she stood up for it. And, for example, I was a kid and she went to the dry cleaners and she was taking her dry cleaning and it was a white woman there that wrote—asked her her name and she always wrote/put Mrs. On there. Mrs. Caronell Chestnut—particularly when she was talking to white people. And the lady wrote down, Caronell Chestnut. And, she said, ‘I said *Mrs.* Chestnut. You don’t call me . . .’ (ruptures himself). And she made her get it right (Laughing).

Chestnut's brief parable about his mother compares something that surprises me, the dynamics between black and white women during segregation. And, the context of this relationship began during slavery. Morrison (2008) writes, "White females were *ladies* . . . worthy of respect . . . [with lady-like qualities like] [s]oftness, helplessness and modesty . . . Colored females, on the other hand, were *women*—unworthy of respect because they were tough, capable, independent and immodest" (pp. 18–19). During slavery, the white mistress did not respect her slaves, especially when calling one of them by name, a name that was given to them as kidnapped Africans by white slavers. So, formal titles were usually omitted from mistress to slave.

Conversely, slaves were expected to address their master and mistress as "Master" or "Missus"<sup>37</sup> indicating respect for one's "superiors." And, this contradiction is made evident in Caronell Chestnut's language when she says, "I said *Mrs.* Chestnut. You don't call me [Caronell]." Her words demand equal treatment from this white "lady," and in doing so, Chestnut is inferring "I am a lady too." By challenging her, she is (re)constructing the social order and putting herself equal to the white woman while removing any inequality. I laugh in amazement as well as understanding because I have commonly encountered similar situations.

### **The Lesson Continues**

I continue and ask, "So, did it ever at some point because I'm sure you were a witness to this—become easier for people to see the vision?" Chestnut's language is mesmerizing to me. Here, I am the student and he is the teacher as he says,

I think so. I think it did. And, then the concern I have is a lot of the *next generation*—a lot of that's not being passed on. And, so that's what *we've* got to

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<sup>37</sup> See slave narratives collected by the WPA Project under the Library of Congress.

work on. You know, there's always challenges that you go through—whatever type of challenges there are, you just go through—you go through life.

And, so, this is not any different. So, more people see *the vision*, but now you've got to *pass the baton*. Get more people interested and that's really—really I think the cycle that we're in now. Just trying to expand that.

'Cause you know, I see it as the treasurer and we're entrusted with taking care of it during this particular time that we can do that, but *we're stewards of something that we've got to pass on*. And so to be a *responsible* steward, then you've got to make it *better than it was before*, and pass it on to a generation that's like-minded. (inaudible)

Chestnut's words resonate deeply with me. I believe that he is making two crucial points in answering my question. His first point is to emphasize that he and his generation must do more. He positions himself as being responsible for the next generation of Ocean City participants. And, while he suggests that "more people see *the vision*," it is up to him and others like him to "pass the baton." This immediately reminds me of Joshua 4:5-7 which states, "'Each of you is to take up a stone . . . to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' [T]ell them . . . [t]hese stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever" (NIV). Gramsci, as cited in Casey (1993) writes,

We feel ourselves linked to men who are now extremely old, and who represent for us the *past* which still lives among us, which we need to know and to settle our accounts with, which is one of the elements of the *present* and one of premisses of the *future*. We also feel ourselves linked to our children, to the generations which are being born and growing up, and for which we are responsible. (p. 156)

And, I interpret his second assertion as a direct challenge to me and my generation. While the Holy Bible incorporates stone metaphors to represent living traditions, I believe that Chestnut's metaphor of "passing the baton," like a race is run by a team of "generations." And, while each runner has a "leg," once his/her time is up,

then that individual is obligated to “pass the baton” or the historical memorial on to the next runner. Furthermore, I am convinced that Chestnut is symbolically preparing me for my “leg.” Despite the circumstances, his words indicate that it is time for me and my generation to receive the baton and “make [Ocean City] better than it was before.”

Chestnut continues his lesson and I eagerly listen. He says,

And, there’s certain, as you go through history, there’s certain people that I think the good Lord puts in your path like Father Kirton who did that component of it. If you look at Mr. Jervay who ran the paper in Wilmington, the Wilmington Journal, the black paper there and we’re gonna honor him this coming year. Because he did a lot to promote the beach, like that brochure and the lady from the Historical Society was just asking about it. She said, “I’ve gotta get a copy of that.” I said, “Well, I’ll scan it and let you.” But Mr. Jervay would come down and just walk up and down the beach and talk and he just enjoyed doing that. But he would also put a lot of newspaper articles in the Wilmington Journal about the beach and the history of the beach and interested in promoting the beach and all that, you know. And, there’s people like that who’ve done a lot over the years.

Me: Word of mouth

Kenneth: Yeah. And just look—it’ll all come together and like Linda’s dad. I’d like to put him on the list to honor because we didn’t have street lights down here so he arranged to get street lights and he’d go to every house, I think it was \$20 a year, your grandfather and others from all—everybody. You know to pay for the street lights. So there’s some things like that need to recognize people. But they had to commit to something bigger.

As Chestnut talks, I listen. While I’m familiar with the names he mentions, I’m not familiar with the details of their involvement. I recognize Thomas Jervay’s name because he is the man who created the pamphlets promoting Ocean City.<sup>38</sup> And as he discusses honoring those that came before him, by doing this, he continues to demonstrate community literacy.

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<sup>38</sup> See Appendix D

### **My Interior Access**

Chestnut's words also reveal that while some white folks realized the significance of Ocean City, other whites still remained on the outside of the community. And, while many of them may have good intentions, they still wouldn't be privy to accessing the Ocean City archives like I was. Chestnut indicates that "the lady from the Historical Society was just asking about [the brochure]. She said, 'I've gotta get a copy of that.' I said, 'Well, I'll scan it and let you [have it].'" What Chestnut omits is that he loaned me the brochure to use for my research. This is telling because some have free access to these archives and obviously, some do not.

Then, Chestnut reminds me why I have an interior access to Ocean City. He says, "[W]e didn't have street lights down here so [Dr. Upperman] arranged to get street lights and he'd go to every house . . . your grandfather and others from all—everybody. You know to pay for the street lights . . . But they had to commit to something bigger." Chestnut makes sure that I realize that my great-grandfather participated and committed to the community discourse of Ocean City. This commitment to something as "simple" as street lights demonstrates a way of (re)interpreting black constituency (Casey, 1993, p. 124). As a child of Ocean City, this story is a historical marker that teaches me that "black constructions of meaning by black families and communities" (Casey, 1993, p. 124).

### **Who is Dr. Gray?**

Next, in my learning lesson, I decided to ask Chestnut about Dr. Samuel Gray. He was honored recently by the Ocean City Citizens Council for his initial involvement with the origination of Ocean City.<sup>39</sup> Yet, information about him is scant. So, I ask

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<sup>39</sup> See Caronell Chestnut's story about Ocean City's beginnings in Chapter III.

Chestnut, “Now, Dr. Gray found out about Ocean City because of Mr. Yow, right?”

Chestnut answers, “Yeah, he knew Mr. Yow. And, then Dr. Gray said, ‘I don’t have time to take away from my practice. And, let me talk to—my dad and his brothers<sup>40</sup>—‘cause they may be interested.’ And so—.” As I realize that Chestnut is finished answering my question, I ask another. “Now, how did Dr. Gray know them? Know your dad and brothers?” Chestnut replies,

I think, I think [they] just knew each in Wilmington. [my dad and his brothers] were—Dr. Gray probably, I think he delivered me. So, [my dad and his brothers] were—he was the family doctor. And you know, they had an automobile repair shop and I’m sure they took [care] of his stuff, so they just know each other. And so he said, ‘Well let me see if they’re interested.’

Chestnut’s text indicates what I presumed. He delineates the Wilmington black community as close-knit. He says, “[T]hey just know each other.” This is important because it furthers my tenet of why Ocean City was a homeplace. It was safe for blacks because it was in the black community. The individuals who founded Ocean City wanted this same sense of community cohesiveness in leisure spaces too regardless of occupation. In a video interview with Allan Gregg, Morrison states,

. . . there were neighborhoods, and because we were segregated, you lived next door to a doctor or a doctor lived next door to the barber and everybody went to the same barbers, the same beauty shops, et cetera. . . . There was no sort of a moneyed class distinction because everybody lived together. (Ontario Educational Communications Authority, 2010, 08:56–09:16)

### **Co-intentional Learning**

As the discussion continues, I begin better accepting my role as a participant in this dialogue instead of as a researcher conducting an interview. My (re)interpretation of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

the context of our discourse finally soothed me enough to share some of what I had begun unearthing in my research efforts. I had to accept that while this newfound context was uncomfortable to me, it was no different than what I asked my students to do in my classes. Greene (1995) explains,

Democracy, we realize, means **a community that is always in the making . . .** this can happen even in the . . . classrooms, particularly when students are encouraged to find their voices and their images . . . [when] the space in which to discover what they recognize together and appreciate in common. (p. 39)

Together, Chestnut and I were learning from each other. What Chestnut and I demonstrated was Freire's (1993) "co-intentional education" (p. 51). We were both, teacher and student, involved in learning something new critically, (re)creating an existing knowledge through our reflections and experiences and this (re)constructed interview encouraged both our voices to (re)create an existential consciousness for both of us (Freire, 1993, p. 51). The context of this interview was less an interview and more of an unconventional classroom. And, what happened next substantiates my (re)interpretation.

I begin to explain Dr. Upperman's initial involvement in Ocean City. "I found a recording of [Dr. Upperman], and he originally—when he was approached about Ocean City, he didn't buy in at that first approach."

Chestnut: Right, right.

Me: Because he had invested in Atlantic Beach.

Chestnut: Right, that's what it was. I knew it was somewhere else. Yeah.

Here, I taught Chestnut something he didn't know. And, this is compelling because it demonstrates that knowledge both produced and shared in a community further

represents Ocean City as a site of resistance, a safe place that can both provide knowledge as well as affirmation about our knowing instead of our ignorance (hooks, 1990). Such literacy can teach others a (re)interpretation of knowledge. While I realized that I had learned something about Upperman, I did not know that Chestnut was unaware of it. By sharing this with him, my research has demonstrated Ocean City's significance. "It's the knowledge that sees history as possibility and not as already determined. The world is not finished. It is always in the process of becoming" (Freire, 1998, p. 72).

### **Voice Versus the (White) Gaze**

Not only do I begin to realize the impact that Dr. Leroy Upperman had on the community, but I begin to understand the impression he left on Chestnut too. As I share what I learned about Upperman, I can visibly see the memory of Upperman on Chestnut's face. He gazes into space and a smile emerges. Chestnut states, "Right. He was definitely a character (smiling)." I laugh quietly because I realize that he sees Upperman as a trickster too. Chestnut continues,

Linda's a good one to talk to as well. She says *we're the last two*—of course she's younger than I am, but will remember, you know, the going back—things at the beach. And you know her brother and I, we grew up together.

Chestnut's didactic characteristic becomes apparent. As he continues his story, he is still "teaching" and "advising" me about whom else I should speak with. In essence, he is "watching out for me," despite the fact that I am not swimming in the ocean. Yet, his community conscience is so endearing for me as a "child" of Ocean City, that like his mother, he cannot simply detach from his caring about my needs.

Simultaneously, Chestnut begins detailing lasting memories of Upperman as a “character.”

But he (Upperman) was a character. He would sit in this chair in his later years and just look out over the water and I’ll always remember I said, ‘Doc, you look great.’ And he’d say, ‘Well you can’t tell the price of beef by looking up a bull’s behind (laughing).’

Me: (LAUGHING)

Kenneth: And, he’d always say that. “You can never tell the price of beef by looking up a bull’s behind.” And, I’d say, “Ok, Doc.” He was a character. There should be a lot of information at the Upperman Center at UNC Wilmington. I don’t know how much of it relates to OC, but—

Not only is Upperman’s trickster personality evident to me, but it was also apparent to Chestnut too because we both are privy to another “inside” joke. His saying, “Well you can’t tell the price of beef by looking up a bull’s behind,” means that appearances can be quite deceiving. However, in typical trickster form, Upperman teaches, like Chestnut, but in an indirect, humorous practice. This demonstrates another voice in juxtaposition with the white gaze. While the dominant (white) culture only has information based on external views, Upperman’s voice demonstrates an internal epistemology. And, while his colloquialism was to incite laughter, I believe that common to trickster form, he wanted to make one think critically instead of making assumptions based on outward appearances.

And, while Chestnut is sharing a memory of Upperman, he’s also continuing to try and advise me. He interrupts his story about Upperman to teach me again. After all, he remains in that parental role as he directs me to the Upperman Center at UNC-Wilmington, but reveals that it may not have too much information about Ocean City. While stories are usually told in some type of chronological order, I believe that Chestnut

realizes that although the Upperman Center might not have archives regarding Ocean City, it still might be useful for me. And, like footnotes or endnotes on a page are used to provide supplemental knowledge, I imagine this digression serves a similar function.

Chestnut's memories of Dr. Upperman continue and I realize that Upperman left quite an impression on Chestnut. This shows me that he greatly admired and respected him.

Chestnut: Yeah, he was a good guy—a good guy. He's just—he was a really sharp guy. The one thing, well there's a lot of things I remember about him, but I met Althea Gibson at his house.

Me: Really?

Chestnut: Yeah. She was retired and I met Charlie Sifford, he was the first African American professional golfer. If not the first one, one of the earliest ones and so they were at his house. And I got to meet both of them. She's retired and they'd come back to Wilmington to visit. And, I was over there seeing Leroy or something. It was in Wilmington in '57.

These memories further demonstrate that had it not been for Ocean City, Chestnut would not have been likely exposed to “learning how to ride the waves,” successful pioneering black athletes as leaders in the black community or humorous jokes that required critical thinking. And, without this knowledge, I as a researcher must imagine how this would have affected not just Chestnut, but others who were impacted by Dr. Leroy Upperman.

### **Final Thoughts**

My final questions for Chestnut are, “Well is there anything else that you'd like to share with me? Anything that you think should be included? That you think I may not be aware of?” And his response surprises me. As I analyze his language patterns, I

remember the likelihood that no one has ever asked him *his* thoughts on Ocean City.

So, I looked forward to his answer. He states,

That's a broad question, Hope. I don't know. I don't know what to say. I think just the sense of community and going back to what knitted the community together.

Certain foods, there's a common denominator as in every community like ours and so people would share food whether they caught crabs or shared recipes, you know we have that recipe book that Winnie did. Carla scanned that. But share, you know if someone was going to get a paper, you'd go get that and share it or bring it back. Certain food is a common denominator when you say that—somebody would make gumbo and share it—I mean whatever it was, so I think just the sense of community.

People walking up and down the beach—and stopping in or dropping in—the doors were always open. And then there were certain—as a part of that community—there were certain rules about not going into the beach without an adult watching you—it's all a sense of community.

And the village if you will—that everyone watched out for each other. And so it was a strong sense—even though it was *a certain period of time*, in the *summer*, it was very strong. And even people that didn't live here would come down on a regular basis and visit. They would have a kind of appreciation of the ocean.

As I interpret Chestnut's words, I recognize some sort of nostalgia for this different, yet wonderful time for him. Though the summer months were short, I believe that Chestnut realizes that his experiences from these few weeks were wonderful and quite intense. I believe the intensity felt by everyone who participated in Ocean City then, represents a nostalgia that transcends the harshness of growing up in the segregated South. And, despite segregation, I believe that Chestnut's language exudes good times at Ocean City. Giovanni (2004) writes, "Black love is Black wealth and [white people will] talk about my hard childhood and never understand that all the while I was quite happy" (p. 2098). And, Chestnut's language indicates happiness in his childhood memories of Ocean City.

Furthermore, I believe that this nostalgia demonstrates the essence of Ocean City today. Chestnut reiterates common themes along with the other three Ocean City storytellers. He highlights two repetitive tenets of Ocean City's literacy. They are: a sense of community and, sharing. And, most especially because of the context, he seems visibly impressed with both of them. More importantly, he recognizes that this "sense of community" is more than a physical location; it's a way of life. Phelan (1996) writes, "The crucial element [in a community] is the recognition of others as *bound to us and like us* [emphasis added]" (p. 236).

## CHAPTER VIII

### AFTERWORD

#### Conclusion

This study has been joyful as well as painful for me. As I re-visited Ocean City, I walked past my family's vacant land and it hurts. While my narratives discuss storms, I discovered my own Ocean City story focuses on storms too. While Hurricanes Bertha and Fran destroyed my family's Ocean City home, my metaphorical storm continues within my family. Today, my grandparents are deceased, so the land belongs to my mother and her three siblings. However, she is the only one who wants to re-build. Sadly, she cannot afford to buy the others out, so the land sits empty.



Figure 5. The Cowan vacant lot at Ocean City after Hurricanes Bertha and Fran.

Despite my pain, I realize that Ocean City has had a profound impact on me; otherwise, I wouldn't have centered my dissertation on it. My summers spent there bring forth happy memories similar to those of Smith and Chestnut. I remember "riding the waves" (with an adult present, of course). I never remember feeling afraid. There, I learned how to surf fish. I also scavenged the beach for sharks' teeth as well as shells. Digging for sand critters was another activity where the critters were often used as bait for surf fishing. But most of all, I recall the beauty of the ocean and the people. There's

nothing like waking up to the sound of those waves as they wash ashore. It is serene. And, the people, regardless of whether I knew them or not, took care of me because I was one of theirs. I was a child of Ocean City.

As an adult, I realize that I was privileged to be able to spend summers there as a child. Unfortunately, I cannot provide the same opportunity to my children as my grandparents did to me. However, I can try to make a difference using the same concepts of creating “community” for my children as well as my students regardless of whether they are at Ocean City or not. As a parent and as a teacher, it is my responsibility to demonstrate that “[t]o accept one’s past—one’s history—is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it” (Baldwin, 1993, p. 81). So, I realize that my experiences can be shared with others, especially the younger generations.

In my classroom, at a Historically Black College (HBCU) just like the Ocean City community, we recognize everyone as a participant in his or her learning, knowledge and literacy. For black students, this is essential. For years, all students, regardless of color, religion or other cultural nuances have suffered at the hands of the dominant (white) culture, especially in the classroom. Standardized tests have replaced the critical education taught in the black community. Nevertheless, cultural education continues to take place within the black community.

Recently, I shared with Dr. Casey about black barber shops teaching cultural education to young, black boys and men. She was surprised because she wasn’t aware of this. However, I pointed out to her that I have two sons while she has a daughter. So, it was likely that she would never go to one. While, I realized that while I cannot provide summers at Ocean City to my sons, I can provide another cultural education to them through another black community, the barber shop.

Like Ocean City, HBCUs, black churches, and barber shops provide another unique space within the black community. Each demonstrates an ethos of caring about the lives of young, black boys. The barbers, mainly black men, always inquire to every young black child about how school is going. They ask, “How are those grades? What sport are you playing this year? How’s your mom doing?” The barbers’ questions begin a dialogue about these young lives. These questions demonstrate genuine concern about the voices and lived experiences of these young, black men; thus, cultural education is a part of the landscape in black barber shops along with getting a nice “shape-up.” I am appreciative of these black men caring enough about my sons to allow their voices to be heard. I also shared with Dr. Casey that in my appreciation of these barbers, I made them a sweet potato pie last Christmas. She heartily laughed at my story and I smiled too. And, while I could not financially buy each of them a gift to thank them for their nurturing of my sons, I can show them I am grateful.

Morrison (2008) writes,

The autobiographical form is classic in Black American . . . literature because it provided an instance in which a writer could be representative, could say, “*my single solitary and individual life is like the lives of the tribe*”; it differs in these specific ways, but it is a balanced life because it is both solitary and representative.” (p. 57)

In order to affect change, everyone’s story must be heard and treated as knowledge. It is important that my students realize that my mother as a teacher has influenced me being a teacher. Sharing stories with them helps us to connect with each other. This is African American Community Literacy (AACL). And, because I use it, I am showing black students how to tell their stories while simultaneously learning. Toni Morrison (2008) writes, “[L]iteracy [i]s power . . . literacy [i]s a way of assuming and proving the

'humanity . . .' denied them" (p. 68). "Thus, it's imperative that in looking forward to how AACL is enacted today . . . [we acknowledge] its potential for shaping public and academic classrooms . . ." (Green, 2011, pp. 5–6). This potential for (re)making interpretive frameworks provides hope for the future (Royster, 2000).

My research has reminded me why I loved being a student at an HBCU as well as why I teach at one. Immediately after the Civil War, black folks were finally allowed to receive an education. This was followed by the origination most of the HBCUs. Like the survival of those kidnapped Africans, I believe the dominant (white) culture did not expect HBCUs to persist. Yet, they did.

And even today, HBCUs continue to be underfunded when compared to their white counterparts. Nonetheless, they thrive. So, how is this possible under such conditions? I believe it is because at HBCUs, the privilege of education is emphasized. Many black students continue to be first time college students, so I don't just teach them, I get to know my students. I share my life with them. I learn who they are by calling, emailing and even feeding them. I know that some have younger siblings who look up to them and they know I have a younger sister too. I know that some have dreams of becoming football coaches, college professors, writers, and politicians. I treat them as if they were my own children by sharing stories about my sons with them. And, most importantly, I listen. In the classroom, I introduce these personal experiences. I make our stories relevant to their learning. And in the process, I show them how invested I am in their education and in them.

As an HBCU faculty, I am teaching them the stories of one's people, *their* people. I remind my students that their possessions come and go, but education can never be taken away. So, collectively, the HBCU environment recognizes knowledge over

“possessions.” And, like our kidnapped African ancestors, HBCUs have survived because of this “sense of community.” I make sure to know each of my students as well as something about them. As a result, several of my students have obtained summer research experiences, scholarships, graduate school admittance as well as jobs. If I did not encourage them to share their personal experiences, I would not be able to do this. Several students have shared about child molestation, rape, homelessness, felony convictions as well as other poignant stories. And, in the process, we all learn about one another. We learn to value each other. This same African ethos of caring and sharing has sustained black folks for generations because these stones contradict individualism.

Recently, Dr. Casey asked me the difference between an HBCU and a PWI. I suspected that she knew the answer, but wanted me to articulate it to myself. I answered, “Inclusion. Belonging.” This same exercise reminded me of a conference I attended a few years ago. During a special interest group meeting, someone mentioned they were looking for a job. I chuckled and replied, “My HBCU is hiring. We are looking for a Chair. You should apply. We would love to have you.” He responded, “No, thank you. You work too hard for too little money.” Despite lower paying salaries, the environment of HBCUs has always embraced a commitment of cohesion and an ethos of caring for its students. I do not teach at one for the money; I teach at an HBCU because I am “committed to nurturing intellect so that . . . [my students can] become scholars, thinkers, and cultural workers—black folks who use . . . [their] “minds” (hooks, 1994, p. 2). And, when talking with other HBCU faculty, their answers are the same as mine.

Historically, HBCUs have been spaces that also provided a safe learning environment for marginalized black folks. And, my lived experiences can support this.

As a student, I always felt welcomed and everyone knew my name. Administrative assistants were always supportive. Many provided good advice about classes along with professors' teaching styles. Likewise, a few of my professors would inquire about me if I looked tired or exhausted. They would ask if I was getting enough sleep and offer suggestions if I wasn't. These folks "fed" me spiritually. One faculty, in particular, would sometimes take me to lunch. He "fed" me literally. Several key individuals came to know me as a person and would quickly ask about my family. I not only felt cared for, but I felt "full" both literally and rhetorically because I knew I was loved.

And, as an undergraduate student at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), I cannot say the same. At my first PWI, my English chair ridiculed me because I was on financial aid and required a payment plan to remain in school. Apparently, this was something new because other students didn't have the same arrangement. And, in the process of making these arrangements, my professors were encouraged to be supportive while these plans were finalized. However, this professor's response to me was, "I wasn't entitled to remain in his class because I couldn't afford to be there like the rest of his students," who were primarily white. He refused to cooperate and did not allow me to return until my payment plan was finalized. Not only that, but frequently, my professors did not know me by my name; they only knew me by my student identification number. And, this is how they took attendance. Unsurprisingly, I transferred to an HBCU after two years and never had any regrets of my decision.

For years, black folks have been silenced by the dominant (white) culture. Yet, in the context of an HBCU, black folks' voices were finally recognized and heard. And this same recognition has also influenced the missions of these campuses to include a service learning component within their mission statements. So, not only are its

participants made to feel included, but so are its surrounding, black neighborhoods.

While history has changed the landscape of HBCUs with the growth of the black middle class, their missions have remained focused on racial uplift as well as service learning.

In essence, HBCUs have mended the gaps caused by the social classes becoming more separate because they (re)establish those connections through interpretive traditions. And my dissertation addresses those gaps by revealing how black communities, interpretive communities like Ocean City and HBCUs continue to remain necessary because of their “sense of community” in the (re)making of our society. Sias and Moss (2011) write,

Students were and are encouraged to see themselves as scholars and ambassadors of the black community and the world who have the ability to go out, “reach-back,” and exact social and political change through their active social engagement, rhetorical presence, and literacy practices. With this in mind, HBCUs as sites of African American literacy and African American community signal a critical awareness in writing and communal spaces that contribute to our understanding of community engagement and social uplift. (p. 5)

This service learning component of HBCU missions has always existed. And, in turn, this mission was implemented into the pedagogy of its faculty. As a teacher at an HBCU, I teach African American literature as a way to show them the authority of voice over the (white) gaze.

While the text is usually literature from a textbook, we (re)construct the term “text” by using our critical imaginations to include our own experiences. Most of my students are black youth. And, for black folks, literature and our history go hand in hand. Morrison (2008) writes, “[T]he authenticity of my presence lies in the fact that a very large part of my own literary heritage is the autobiography . . . slave narratives” (p. 65). My students’ stories are valued in conjunction with the literature of black folks. And, my

students connect with the literature because many of them recognize the interpretive traditions. I remind them that in order for them to be here, it was likely that an ancestor of theirs endured the horrors described in the slave narratives. And, knowing this gets my students talking. We discuss the injustices as well as the fortitude it took to survive. Then, I ask them, “Now that you know, what are you going to do?” I teach them to juxtapose the two and use their critical imaginations to identify these injustices and present solutions. Thus, my classroom becomes an interpretive community. And, their creativity becomes part of their interpretive traditions.

My students’ research projects have varied from creating films to writing poetry that address child molestation, domestic violence, and the black identity crisis that plague the black community. For example, I routinely require a vernacular assignment from my students. Many are them are immediately uncomfortable and wary. However, I explain how the oral tradition is a core feature of black folks’ culture. I remind them that this is the opportunity for them to share their gifts and talents handed down to them from their ancestors. And, as a result, students have written songs, letters and as well as poetry. One poem stood out to me because in it, this young, black man (re)claims black folks’ identity by (re)addressing it as an “identity crisis.” He asks readers if they will ever understand that they are royalty—the originators; he acknowledges what society defines black people to be, but concludes with a poignant reminder that there aren’t enough “IDs in the world to solve this crisis.” In other words, no one but black people can “define” who we are; therefore, we (re)define it while simultaneously we (re)claim it.

Another research project for my African American film class requires my students to collaboratively write, produce, direct and edit a short film involving an aspect of black culture. One group chose to address common stereotypes within education by

displaying them as a paradox incorporating double consciousness. For example, at Thomas Jefferson High School, a black male teacher gave a black, star athlete an A on a quiz that he deserved a D on. The teacher's justification was that this football player should focus on his "talents" (i.e., football), and not an education. Yet, the athlete knew this was wrong because he questioned the teacher. He asked, "Shouldn't I be more concerned about my education?" In other words, the external, dominant (white) culture expected this young black athlete to be incapable of performing in the classroom because he was an athlete. However, this young man's internal literacy recognized something differently.

And, this story, like many stories in the black community begins to question the emphasis of athletics over education. Especially since education, until recently, was something black people had to fight to obtain. These students titled their project "Ms. Educated." And, even in the (re)naming of their film based on Carter G. Woodson's *The Miseducation of the Negro* becomes a tactic at signifying what education has become to the black community.

This legacy of stones as living traditions has the potential to heal all those whose humanity has been denied them in the academic setting. I know that from my own experiences; for a young black student like me, the only place this was possible was in the black community. I felt valued when my voice was welcomed. I felt included in a community of learning. In a sense, I knew I belonged. And, for a young black student like me, the only place this was possible was in the context of the black community. Within that space, I could imagine a better society. I believe that that space also provided me with a sense of hope.

And, like many other black folks, a sense of hope is something I have sought all my life. While I carry the name Hope, it hasn't always been a defining symbol for my identity. As a child growing up, I despised my name. I was teased constantly. So, when I was older, I asked my mother, "Why did you name me, Hope?" She smiled and explained, "When your father and I were trying to have children, I was unable to conceive. So, I had to take fertilization pills. It took us five years to conceive you. We realized that we probably wouldn't be able to have any other biological children, so you were our Hope." This explanation eased my pain from years of tormenting.

And, even today, I carry its significance with me. Not long ago, in one of Dr. Shapiro's classes, he shared that he was struggling with finding hope in today's society. I jokingly, put my hand up and said, "No need to look any further because here I am." He and I both laughed. However, what I was trying to do was to use myself metaphorically. I wanted him to know that as long as he had students like me who were encouraged to dialogue by him, we "were . . . [participants in] a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance" (hooks, 1994, p. 2). And this dialogue encouraged us to document oppression, focus on resistance and find ways to make a change.

I realize that hope is more than a name, especially in a classroom. Instead, it is a place where everyone can "be changed by ideas" (hooks, 1994, p. 3). "Hope is something shared between teachers and students. The hope that we can learn together, teach together . . . produce something together . . . and resist together the obstacles that prevent . . . our joy" (Freire, 1998, p. 69). Moreover,

[H]ope is a referent for civic courage and its ability to mediate the memory of loss and the experience of injustice as part of a broader attempt to open up new locations of struggle . . . [H]ope translates civic courage into political practice, one that often begins when a person's life can no longer be taken for granted. (Giroux, 2010, p. 115)

Hope is evident in interpretive community. Its people share similar experiences and use the same language. Within this community, participants recognize that good can come from bad, but only by talking about it. In sharing these stories, we are able to make connections through our personal experiences. And, the recognition that “it doesn’t have to be this way” inspires people to become creative. These creative thoughts begin to (re)interpret what “normal” is. And, critical imagination provokes the desire to make changes through (re)interpretation. Interpretive community participants emerge changed and (re)made. They begin seeing possibility and hope in the unseen. And, over time, their actions (re)make classrooms, communities, and society.

I believe this is what Ocean City residents have done. By sharing, they (re)made the dominant (white) culture’s perception of beaches as “whitewashed.” They established an all-black, beach community. And, like HBCUs, they continue to be (re)made. While my narrators realize that “it will never be the same,” they also recognize the importance of its beginnings as well as its emphasis on the “sense of community.” These historical stones are how black folks have survived generations of oppression. And, my dissertation has demonstrated hope through the significance of Ocean City and its interpretive traditions. I believe that we all would benefit from this if we realized that historical memories must be implemented in all communities, especially in the classroom where academic learning is supposed to happen.

Accordingly, inspiring community in education is vital in educational settings. Students must feel encouraged to reflect on and exercise sharing and a sense of belonging both in and out of the classroom. They must believe that their experiences are valued. It is long overdue that education curricula recognize that students’ histories

are full of stories of struggle and triumph. And, not only do these acknowledge their ancestors, but also gives hope to the future (Purpel, 2005).

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**APPENDIX A**  
**NARRATIVE TERMINOLOGY**

**Signifying**: an indirect or embedded message; also known as an escape mechanism or a survival technique that relishes in its ability to be seen from a dual perspective, i.e. internal or external in order to ensure the survival of one's culture and beliefs.

**(Re)interpretation**: recognizing that something already understood, can be interpreted in another and sometimes better way

**History being (re)made**: the recognition that while a person, place or event may seem fixated in time because of facts, it can also be seen from a "new" perspective when additional information or new facts are provided that add to what is "known."

**(Re)building**: When something is built, the assumption is that it is permanent. However, this concept takes something physical or ideological and conceives of it in another perspective without destroying the original idea or structure. It is building upon something which already exists.

**Grassroots**: when "extra"ordinary action is performed by "ordinary" people who aren't expected to be able to "know" how to perform it.

**Interpretive traditions**: living traditions based on one's personal and lived experiences.

## APPENDIX B

### HISTORICAL NOTE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS FROM DUKE UNIVERSITY'S "BEHIND THE VEIL" PROJECT<sup>41</sup>

During the summers of 1993, 1994 and 1995, multi-racial research teams traveled throughout the South to conduct oral history interviews with elders in African-American communities. During the first summer, the project ran a series of pilot studies in five North Carolina communities. Subsequently, the project followed a thematic approach while conducting research in areas selected to represent the diversity of cultures and geographic regions within the South, as well as the predominant work cultures of the region. Researchers were chosen from applications from history graduate students at a diverse range of schools, from the Ivy League to historically black institutions such as Jackson State and Clark-Atlanta to state universities such as Michigan and Maryland. Collectively, they conducted 1260 oral history interviews in more than twenty communities in ten Southern states. They also copied thousands of family photographs and other materials that reveal the diversity of African-American experiences under Jim Crow.

While based at Duke University, the Behind the Veil project has been a collaborative venture from its inception. Scholars from historically black colleges and universities such as LeMoyne-Owen College, North Carolina Central University, Johnson C. Smith University, Jackson State University and Clark-Atlanta University have helped to shape the research project and have developed related curriculum projects to introduce undergraduates to oral history methodology as a means to discover and document the histories of the communities in which they live. Research teams worked in collaboration with a wide variety of black community and civic groups, which played critical roles in recruiting potential interviewees and providing logistical support. Summer researchers were hosted by distinguished institutions such as the Black Archives at Florida A&M University and the Civil Rights Institute in Birmingham, Alabama. Local institutions also helped researchers to understand the communities in which they worked and to frame

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<sup>41</sup> From Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South. Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/btv/#historicalnote>

their interview questions and research agendas accordingly. In turn, the Behind the Veil project has deposited copies of the interviews in local archives at or near the various cooperating institutions, assuring that these histories will be accessible to local community members as well as scholars throughout the South.

Questions that may or may not have been asked were:

When did you come here (to this town/city)? Why? With whom? What neighborhood or community did you live in at first? How many people lived in your home? Anyone besides your immediate family?

What do you remember about your grandparents? Where did they live? When did you see them? Did you see them often? What would you do with them? Did they ever talk about their youth or share stories with you about their lives?

What was your first job? What were your wages? How long did you stay at this work? What other jobs have you held? For how long? What job did you like best and what job did you like least? Who else worked in your family? When did you retire?

Define your neighborhood community. Can you give geographic boundaries? What was most important to people in that community? How has the community changed within your lifetime? as far as physical appearance is concerned? What were the "bad sections" of town? Can you describe them? Were you afraid to go there?

What do you remember about your home and your neighbors' homes? Can you describe them? Who were your neighbors? Did relatives live nearby? Which relatives? What were the occasions for family gatherings? What do you recall about them?

What are some of your earliest childhood memories? Can you recall the greatest joy or sadness in your childhood? Who were your childhood role models? What were the things that you enjoyed doing as a child?

How were decisions made in your family? Who made decisions about housekeeping, budget, etc.? How about other decisions like schooling, moving, occupation, approval of marriage? Do you ever remember any conflicts over decisions or decision making? Who took responsibility for child care and discipline in your family? Did you treat your own children the same or differently than your parents treated you?

What kinds of values do you think your parents instilled in you? How were you expected to behave in front of adults, bit black and white? What contact did you have with white children?

Do you remember a point at which people stopped treating you like a child? Or when you considered yourself grown up?

Who were the people most important to you? How were unmarried people viewed in your neighborhood?

What property (land or house) do you own today? How did you come to own it? Did your family ever rent?

Did you go to school? Where did you go and for how long? Did you attend school for the entire school year? What did you like and dislike about school? Were you ever disciplined by your teachers? Did the teachers in your school play favorites? How were your parents involved in your schooling? What kinds of things did you learn in school? Were you taught any African American history? What were the major differences between your education and your parent's education? Your children's education? Did your family attend church? Do you continue to go to church? If you do not attend why? If you do, what churches have you attended and why? Who from your community belongs to your church? What was your church's and ministers' role in civic affairs?

## APPENDIX C

### “UPPIE’S SKYBOX” NARRATIVE

The following narrative can be found in the notebook kept in the Ocean City home of Linda Upperman Smith. It includes the “shell stories” highlighted in Chapter V—The Second Generation of Ocean City. It reads:

#### Welcome to Uppie’s Skybox.

We hope you will cherish and enjoy our home as much as we do. This has been our summer home since 1953. Originally built as a 4 bedroom, 2 bath house with a large rec room downstairs, Uppie Skybox was the first Topsail Island experience for many of my family members who eventually purchased property and built homes here. At one time, my relatives owned over 15 homes and lots here in Ocean City.

For years our home did not have a catchy name, just a board with my dad’s name. However, at the annual 4<sup>th</sup> of July softball game, one of my cousins suggested our house should be christened Uppie’s Skybox, in honor of my father, who refereed all of the softball games. Of course, during the game he would be sitting in the window, entertaining visitors, far removed from the action, not paying close attention. He was always called upon to make the call when a play was in question, however, and he made his call based on no knowledge of whether the person was safe or out. With the big picture window, the description “Uppie’s Skybox” seemed apt and stuck.

I grew up in Wilmington, one of two children. My father was a physician and my mother was trained as an RN. When we were kids, my parents would move us to the beach around Memorial Day and we would remain here through Labor Day. My dad would drive in most nights and back to Wilmington the next morning. There were hardly any traffic signals between Topsail Island and Wilmington so driving back and forth was a breeze. There was only a very small grocery store in Surf City and it was extremely expensive. My mother would have to go to Wilmington or sometimes Holly Ridge to shop for groceries.

When my dad was first interested in purchasing the property, one of his major concerns was that there was no phone service in Ocean City. A lawyer in Wilmington who was assisting in the development of our community had a home in Surf City. He told my dad that he could give the hospital his phone number and he would personally drive the 3 miles to our house to let my father know he was needed in town. That helped seal the deal.

When we built, we did have electricity, a pump for water, and a septic system. The gentleman who built our home was a carpenter from Fayetteville, NC. He built many of the original homes in our community which closely resembled ours. The interior is juniper not knotty pine as many believe. The juniper is extremely strong, water resistant and many boats have it as their interiors. At that time all of the ocean front houses were built with cinder block foundations, abutting the dune. This proved to be a major design flaw for many of the homes were destroyed in Hurricane Hazel and (subsequent hurricanes). The beach was flattened and many homes did not have one cinder block remaining. We had damage on the south side of our house and were able to have our

house lifted and pilings put in to help the house survive future storm surge from hurricanes.

We were the 7<sup>th</sup> home to be built in our community. Our house abutted the dune. Consider having to walk down 3 cement steps from the front porch to get to the dune, walk towards the ocean, then up over a higher dune and then down to the shore. At that time, it was 250 feet from the road to the high water mark. Today, 2012, it is closer to 140! Lots of beach erosion over the years.

Can you imagine the joy as a child of being able to run totally free with family and friends, frolicking in the water, building sand castles and villages, having few rules or restrictions except those related to water safety? As children we slept late and then stayed on the beach all day. The summer was a true 3 month vacation for us. When we were young our parents would go out on the beach and watch us in the water. As we got older, we could all swim, knew the water safety rules and could play in the water without supervision from the shore. There were rules we were expected to follow. First and most important, was to be no screaming or yelling as that indicated someone was in distress. If one person yelled, everyone had to come out of the water. We learned to police each other as well as visitors to the beach. We also knew that we had to stay in front of our house (or the house of the person who was responsible for us). It was loads of fun fighting the currents to stay where we were supposed to be! I guess that is why we all grew up with strong legs! One day when I was in my 40's, I was in the water with 2 cousins. We kept trying to stay in front of the house where my dad was watching from his seat in front of the window. Then one of us started laughing, saying, we are adults now. We don't have to stay in front of the house anymore. When we went inside, however, my dad was a little disappointed that we had not restricted our movements. You see, he was up in age, hadn't gone in the water in years, but always enjoyed watching us enjoy the ocean.

As the day would grow to an end, we would drift to our respective homes for dinner and then back out again, often playing softball on the beach. At dark, we would sit outside, staring at the stars, telling stories, playing tag or other games. We often ended the evening playing cards, Bid Whist, Dirty Hearts or Pinochle.

Always the older ones taught the younger ones. There were often several games going on with the adults in one part of the house and kids in another. We kept very late hours but we had not where to go, no time to be there.

### **Crabbing**

One of my favorite pastimes as a child was crabbing. My mom would save the chicken necks and backs, allowing them to rot for a day or so before we went crabbing. Sometimes we used fish heads. Either way, they needed to rot and be smelly to attract the crabs. They were tied to the end of a sting with a fishing weight. There was a stick on one end which could be pushed into the sand. One could feel the crabs nibbling and pulling on the string. You pulled the string in slowly and gently lifted it just enough to put the net under it in order to scoop up the crab.

We had 2 favorite crabbing holes. One was the crab hole at the sound (which is directly behind this house, at the end of Green St.) and the other was the inlet (the end of North Topsail Beach). Each had its pluses and negatives. The sound was close and it wasn't too far to have to carry things. The negatives were the mosquitoes and deer flies as well as snakes and alligators! I always felt scared when I went over there.

The inlet was always fun but coming back to the car was a chore. Can you imagine that when I was a child that there were no more than 15 houses between my house and the north end of the island!!! It was totally deserted with only a road and the remains of a military observation tower at the end.

I knew when I awoke and saw the tide table on the kitchen counter that we were going crabbing at the inlet. My mom drove a baby blue Cadillac and had a blue sailor's cap with a madras crown. She would put the crab basket in the trunk and hang the crab nets out the window. With the wind blowing we would head north to the inlet, about a 15 minute drive. Each year the configuration of the tide pools up there was different, dependent on storms and dredging efforts.

My mother would throw the smaller crabs back to grow more for next year! One summer, the crabs were huge and they just kept biting. She did not want to leave any that seemed to want to go home with us. She made the boys take off their jeans, tie knots in the legs and she filled them with crabs! Walking back over the hot sand with heavy bushel baskets of crabs as well as jeans heavy with them was no fun but the eating was great!

As an adult it amused me that my mom's favorite method of taking crabs out of the basket to put them in the pot was the use of a 2 pronged fork. With both she and my dad having medical training and with tongs in our house, she always liked to spear them, with at least one ending up on the floor, claws extended and ready to attack! I think she did that just to give us something else to enjoy!

### **Fishing**

Fishing was a favorite pastime also. As children we were all taught to fish and loved it. We fished from the shore as well as from the Ocean City fishing pier which was destroyed in Hurricane Bertha, 1996. In the fall, people stood shoulder to shoulder, pulling in as many fish as there were hooks on the line! Spots were the favorite and featured fish for the fall. We used shrimp for fishing but blood worms are a favorite bait these days. Now a fishing license is required to even fish from the shore!

### **Community Activities**

Each year we looked forward to new families building in our community. One year a family from Gastonia built. They had 8 children, 6 girls and 2 boys. You can imagine how great it was to have a family with such diversity of ages that all of us had new friends. We no longer had problems finding enough people to play softball or anything else. We always had someone old enough to drive us to Surf City to buy ice cream or to do just about anything imaginable.

## **Storms**

Over the years, Uppie's Skybox and this community have endured many storms and natural disasters. There is a section in this book with pictures of this house and area after various hurricanes. When I was still very young, my mom thought she would like to remain at the beach during a hurricane. Even after the experience with Hazel, she had this idea. She lasted as long as it took for her to see the waves crashing over the end of the fishing pier (which was built quite high above the ocean). Lucky that she did leave because, although we did not sustain significant damage, the dunes were severely damaged, the roads were covered with sand, electricity was out and our well was polluted with salt water.

Uppie's Skybox survived a tornado in 1973. My father, my husband, 2 sons, my brother and a friend were in the house. There was a hurricane that possibly would come up the coast. We decided we would remain at the beach until we needed to evacuate. The house immediately south of us was vacant. The next house south, the home of my high school English teacher, was vacant, but only because she awoke in the night and something told her to return to Wilmington. At about 7 am we heard this loud CLAP. My father rushed us all downstairs. We looked across the road and saw debris on fire as well as cars moving on the road. It took us a few minutes to realize that there must have been a tornado. The roofs on the 2 houses south of us were gone and that was the debris burning. All the screens on the south side of our house were gone. We were spared for a reason.

## **Shells**

One of the positives with storms is that there are usually shells washed up on shore. Being a property owner we can get on the island soon after storms and have an opportunity to walk the beach. Each of the beautiful shells you see in Uppie's Skybox was found after a storm (except for the coral that was purchased Hawaii and Tahiti, a white conch purchased by my dad in the Caribbean and the sand dollars which can be purchased at the beach shops on the island). They all have special stories and can be connected to a specific storm or to someone who found them and shared them with us. I have a listing further in this book which tells the story of each. Please leave them here for us and for others to enjoy who come to Uppie's Skybox.

## **Church**

The Wade Chestnut Episcopal Chapel is across the road on Hwy 210, just a block or so south of Green St., near Carver St. It is a white house with a red cross on the front on the west side of the street. There are services there every Sunday from Memorial weekend through Labor Day weekend, 11 am. There is a repast in the community center immediately after the service.

I have had some of the most wonderful experiences of my life in this house. I hope you will take away some memories for a lifetime also. I will continue to update the history of my wonderful experiences here. I hope you will enjoy your stay in Uppie's Skybox and choose to come again.

APPENDIX D

OCEAN CITY PROMOTIONAL FLYER<sup>42</sup>

For Further Information, Write:  
**Ocean City Developers, Inc.**  
 WADE H. CHESTNUT, Secretary  
 Box 619 HOLLY RIDGE, NORTH CAROLINA

**Ocean City Beach** NORTH CAROLINA  
 • Swimming • Boating • Fishing  
 • Hunting • Recreation • Sports

**OCEAN CITY BEACH**  
 NORTH CAROLINA

This Folder  
 Designed by T. C. Jervay

**HOW TO REACH OCEAN CITY BEACH, NORTH CAROLINA**

Located on Topsail Island Between the Inland Waterway and the Atlantic Ocean

**A GOOD PLACE TO BUY, BUILD, PLAY, AND LIVE!**

More and more, vacationists are turning to this island paradise to rest and play. Many are returning to buy, build, and live.

Ocean City Beach, eight miles from Holly Ridge, North Carolina, is under development by Ocean City Developers, Inc.

Ocean City Beach is about midway of Topsail Island, on which it is located. The island is approximately twenty-five miles long.

Ocean City Beach is bounded on one side by the Inland Waterway and on the other side by the Atlantic Ocean.

To the Eastern end of the island one finds New River Inlet which abounds with fish, crabs, and oysters.

Stump Sound, to the North, is widely known for its choice seafood. Close by is the Gulf Stream where deep sea fishing is at its best.

Bathing is enjoyed, and surf fishing has made Ocean City Beach equally so famous.

There is a growing colony of business and professional men and their families, who find welcome relief from their every day cares.

The building program, which is underway, indicates that Corporation officials have laid careful plans, thus guaranteeing an orderly development of Ocean City Beach. Home owners are assured of peace and quiet, because the business area is situated on one end of the development, while the private cottages, with their bright and varied colored roofs, are on the opposite end.

For the tourists, modern and attractive Ocean City Motor Court has been constructed. Especially popular are the three-room family apartments. All units have private baths and innerspring mattresses.

Ocean City Terrace, a three-story tower-like structure, cares for vacationists. A modern dining room provides tasty and fresh food. Seafood is a specialty. Music and dancing are available on the second floor, where a roof garden is found. The commissary sells beachwear, souvenirs, and notions.

Bath houses provide for renting of suits and changing facilities.

All in all, Ocean City Beach is the South's most beautiful and promising beach development.

**Ocean City Beach, N. C. - The South's Most Beautiful Beach Development**

<sup>42</sup> Designed by T.C. Jervay. Courtesy of Kenneth S. Chestnut, Sr.