The Revisionist Literary Practices of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, 1854-1892

by

KAMINA GATES

(Under the Direction of Barbara McCaskill)

ABSTRACT

My thesis explores black womanhood and black maternity as units of political and moral power in Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *oeuvre.* By revising, reusing, and remixing language, Harper places her texts in conversation with one another and connects them through themes of black womanhood, black maternity, and political resistance. Specifically, I examine *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1854, 1857), a series of stories called "Fancy Etchings" and "Fancy Sketches" (1873-1874), and Harper's novel *Iola Leroy; Or, Shadows Uplifted* (1892). Each work explores past current events to expose problematic sociopolitical values. Harper's writing thus becomes a form of resistance and a medium to reimagine America. Her revisionist practices among bodies of work and on bodies of work launched arguments against widely-held cultural biases, and demonstrate how repetition and revision enabled writers to actively engage social and political issues during the nineteenth century.

INDEX WORDS: Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, African American Literature, Black Womanhood, Black Maternity, Repetition, Revision

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KAMINA GATES

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KAMINA GATES

Major Professor: Barbara McCaskill

Committee: John Lowe
Cody Marrs

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Interim Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

"Write, out of the fullness of your heart, a book to inspire men and women with a deeper sense of justice and humanity."

'"Doctor,' replied Iola, 'I would do it if I could, not for the money it might bring, but for the good it might do. But who believes any good can come out of the black Nazareth?"

"Miss Leroy, out of the race must come its own thinkers and writers. Authors belonging to the white race have written good racial books, for which I am deeply grateful, but it seems to be almost impossible for a white man to put himself completely in our place. No man can feel the iron which enters another man's soul." --Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, *Iola Leroy* [1]

To write is to impart knowledge and to change the lives of others. In the exchange of opinions above, Iola Leroy, the main character of the eponymously named novel by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, attends a *conversazione* with Doctor Latimer, who is a mulatto man and a firm believer in uplifting the black community. The epigraph above focuses on the part of the conversation where they discuss what black writers can do for the black community. As her character Iola Leroy demonstrates here, and in the majority of her poetry and prose writings of the nineteenth century, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper understood the significance of black women becoming recognized as storytellers, and of their stories being included in American

1. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, *Iola Leroy; Or, Shadows Uplifted*, ed. Koritha Mitchell (Broadview Press, 2018), 238.

literary culture and society. Harper's lifelong mission and career, which spanned six decades, were inextricably connected to the overall well-being of her race, and of American society as a whole. Her *oeuvre* positions women as intellectual agents of change in the black community, who fight for their dignity, humanity, and visibility in a country which would rather erase their existence. My thesis examines how Harper launched arguments against political and social issues plaguing the nineteenth century through techniques of revision and re-assemblage of her thoughts, ideas, and language in earlier versions of the same texts.

The literary selections which I have chosen for this project are her poems "Eliza Harris" from the *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (1853) and a revision of it which was published in *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1854), her prose fiction "Fancy Etchings" (1873) and "Fancy Sketches," (1874), and her novel *Iola Leroy* (1892). Altogether, they cover three eras in American history—the Civil War, the Reconstruction, and the post-Reconstruction decades. During each era, meanings of motherhood and uplift evolved, as did the role of black women as inspirational and intellectual leaders who developed strategies of uplift and social progress in their communities.

Motherhood for black women was affected by slavery. Female slaves served a commercial purpose to their enslavers by producing more valuable property for them. In addition to serving a commercial purpose, black mothers could also be separated from their children through the sale of either mother or children or both, which further denied black women full control of their family lives. As meanings of motherhood evolved, black women also became stereotyped as mammy figures. According to this characterization, they were considered devoted mothers foremost to white children, which downplayed their ability and desire to mother their

own children.[2] In each of Harper's literary selections, the black women characters challenge these perceptions of them in popular culture by working outside the domestic sphere.

The literary selections I have chosen reveal the different and evolving ways black women uplifted themselves and their communities. In her 1875 speech, Harper states, "Women, in your golden youth; mother, binding around your heart all the precious ties of life, let no magnificence of culture, or amplitude of fortune, or refinement of sensibilities, repel you from helping the weaker and less favored. If you have ampler gifts, hold them as larger opportunities with which you can benefit others."[3] This quotation signals that racial uplift for black Americans, especially those who were more fortunate in the post-Reconstruction era, meant helping others attain true freedom through full citizenship, economic independence, and education. Racial uplift in the context of my project begins as the move to attain freedom. as a mother escaping slavery in Harper's poetry and obtaining freedom for her family. Beyond escaping slavery, uplift for other black women characters in Harper's later oeuvre comes from an education and the desire to work outside the home. Education allows women to improve their lives as well as the lives of their families, but more importantly, an education enables the improvement in the lives of other black Americans. Education for black women also connects to their attainment of economic independence and it advances the racial uplift for all African Americans by enabling black women to support themselves and their families. Black women in Harper's works, however, move beyond merely serving the family as a political purpose, and

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2. Dorothy E. Roberts, "Racism and Patriarchy in the Meaning of Motherhood," *Penn Law: Legal Scholarship Repository,* (1993): 7-13.

3. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, "The Great Problem to be Solved*"* (1875), in *A Brighter Coming Day,* ed. Frances Smith Foster (The Feminist Press,1990), 222.

also attempt to serve the community and achieve a greater good for all. In each literary work, the female protagonists reveal connections to these meanings of black motherhood and racial uplift.

Harper was born free in Baltimore, Maryland, on September 24, 1825, and died on February 20, 1911, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her parents died before her third birthday. She was then raised and educated by her uncle, the Reverend William Watkins.[4] Once Harper completed her education and before she became a well-known abolitionist, essayist, lecturer, novelist, and poet, she worked as a domestic servant and a school teacher.[5] In 1853, Harper became committed to the antislavery cause due to the passing of a Maryland law, which allowed free blacks who entered the state to be sold as slaves.[6] Seven years after committing herself to abolition, she married Fenton Harper, an African American widower, and together they purchased a farm close to Columbus, Ohio. Once married, Harper temporarily retired from the lecture circuit; while married to Fenton Harper, she became the stepmother to his three children by a previous marriage, and gave birth to her daughter, Mary, in 1862. It was not until Fenton's

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4. Terry Novak, "Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911)," in *African American Authors,1745-1945: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Emmanuel Nelson (Greenwood Press, 2000), 213. Novak indicates Harper was educated at the William Watkins Academy for Colored Youth and while she lived there, "she received a much deeper education regarding racial pride and the importance of the abolition movement" (213). And at the time of her birth, Baltimore was a slave city.

5. William Still, *The Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, &C., Narrating the Hardships, Hair-breadth Escapes, and Death Struggles of Slaves in their efforts for Freedom, As Related by Themselves and Others, or Witnessed by the Author; Together with Sketches of some of the Largest Stockholders and most Liberal Aiders and Advisers of the Road,* (Porter & Coates, 1872), 755. Still notes that in 1853, a year before Harper devoted herself to the anti-slavery movement, Maryland passed a law declaring that free blacks coming to the state could be sold into slavery (757).

6. Hazel Carby, '"Of Lasting Service for the Race': The Work of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper" in *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist,* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 65.

death in 1864 that Harper decided to return, of necessity, to work as a public speaker in order to support these children.[7]

Before Harper married, and a year after Maryland passed its slavery law in 1853, she published *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects.* This collection of poetry was extremely successful and popular, so much so that it was republished in 1855 and again in 1857.[8] In an introduction to *Poems on Miscellaneous Subject,* Frances Smith Foster states, "Heroic women dominate the poems in this collection. Their faith and the urgency of their causes enable these women to demonstrate outstanding ability and strength."[9] Adding to what Foster says, Stephanie Farrar's article on maternity and black women's citizenship indicates that "Harper featured slave mothers in numerous antebellum poems that demonstrate slave humanity by showing slave mothers as fully maternal."[10] The female protagonists in Harper's poetry establish a connection between the political and social by being mothers and heroes who try to obtain freedom for themselves and their children. The women in Harper's poetry are faced with the political challenge of asserting their autonomy and voices in a racist society, yet they still remain committed to bringing change to their communities.

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7. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader*, ed. Frances Smith Foster (The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1990), 18.

8. Before publishing *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects,* Harper published a collection of poems titled Forest *Leaves,* which is thought to have been published in the mid-to-late 1840s.

9. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader*, ed. Frances Smith Foster (The Feminist Press: City University of New York, 1990), 55.

10. Stephanie Farrar, "Maternity and Black Women's Citizenship in Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's Early Poetry and Late Prose," *Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 40, no. 1 (2015): 56.

In addition to her poetry, Harper portrays heroic women in her short fiction, where she illustrates the importance of black women in the familial sphere. Less than ten years after Fenton's death and after the birth of their daughter, Harper began publishing a series of short stories titled "Fancy Etchings" and "Fancy Sketches." Since many of the original publications in these two series no longer exist or have been lost, scholars often times overlook "Fancy Etchings" and "Fancy Sketches" and their connection to Harper's earlier and later publications. Published in the *A.M.E. Christian Recorder,* a major periodical for African American readers during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the stories in these series focus on conversations between black female family members in which they discuss issues concerning the fraught and racist nineteenth-century political environment, as well as other common themes in Harper's writing such as women learning so that they can uplift others and a woman's role in the domestic sphere.[11] Carla L. Peterson notes that "these conversations initiate and encourage discussion among representatives of the diverse 'socio-ideological belief systems' within the black community concerning the past history, troubled present, and future direction of Africans in America."[12] These conversations are meant to challenge, inform, and expose the problems the black community faced during the nineteenth century. The conversations also encourage education within the black community, and they implore black Americans who have an education to help the less fortunate members of their communities. The scant body of literary

11. The *Christian Recorder* was a weekly periodical published by the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

12. Carla L. Peterson, "Literary Transnationalism and Diasporic History: Frances Watkins Harper's 'Fancy Sketches,' 1859-60," in *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation,* ed. Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer Steward (Yale University Press, 2007) 193.

criticism on Harper's "Fancy Etchings" and "Fancy Sketches" invites these stories to be positioned in conversation with *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* and *Iola Leroy; Or, Shadows Uplifted* in order to determine how black men and women must come together to form a community for themselves in the broader American landscape.

The common themes of black womanhood, black maternity, and political resistance in *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects,* "Fancy Etchings," and "Fancy Sketches" are also prevalent in Harper's novel *Iola Leroy; Or Shadows Uplifted*. While the novel contains sentences and phrases from Harper's other works, it remains creative, original, and powerful, especially when considering its message on finding one's role and purpose in a community and accepting one's racial background. Some early critics of the novel believed Harper celebrated the white bourgeoisie, their values, and the possible cultural assimilation of Iola.[13] This criticism is disputed by the scholar Hazel Carby, who instead argues that "Harper did not assume that black intellectuals should appear acceptably white. In fact, Harper introduced two characters who were representative of both the progress and fruition of black education and future intellectual leadership of the race."[14] Carby's argument about *Iola Leroy* aligns with my own beliefs about Harper's novel: Iola's self-acceptance allows for the uplift not only of one person and her family, but also of the black American community as a whole. In this regard, community becomes an extension of family: their well-being and uplift matters when thinking about Harper's overall message.

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13. Michael Borgstrom, "Face Value: Ambivalent Citizenship in *Iola Leroy," African American Review* 40, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 779.

14. Hazel Carby, '"Of Lasting Service for the Race," 91.

At the center of Harper's works are black women and what they do for their families, the black community, and America. My thesis focuses on what I believe to be an overlooked aspect of Harper's work: how she revises, reuses, and remixes language. Through themes of black womanhood, black maternity, and political resistance, Harper creates different representations of black women showing the power they hold and the influence they have over the communities to which they belong. By analyzing *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects,* "Fancy Etchings" and "Fancy Sketches," and *Iola Leroy; Or, Shadows Uplifted*, I seek to understand the importance of Harper's revisionist practices and to understand how these practices launched arguments against widely held cultural biases and helped Harper actively engage social and political issues during the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER TWO

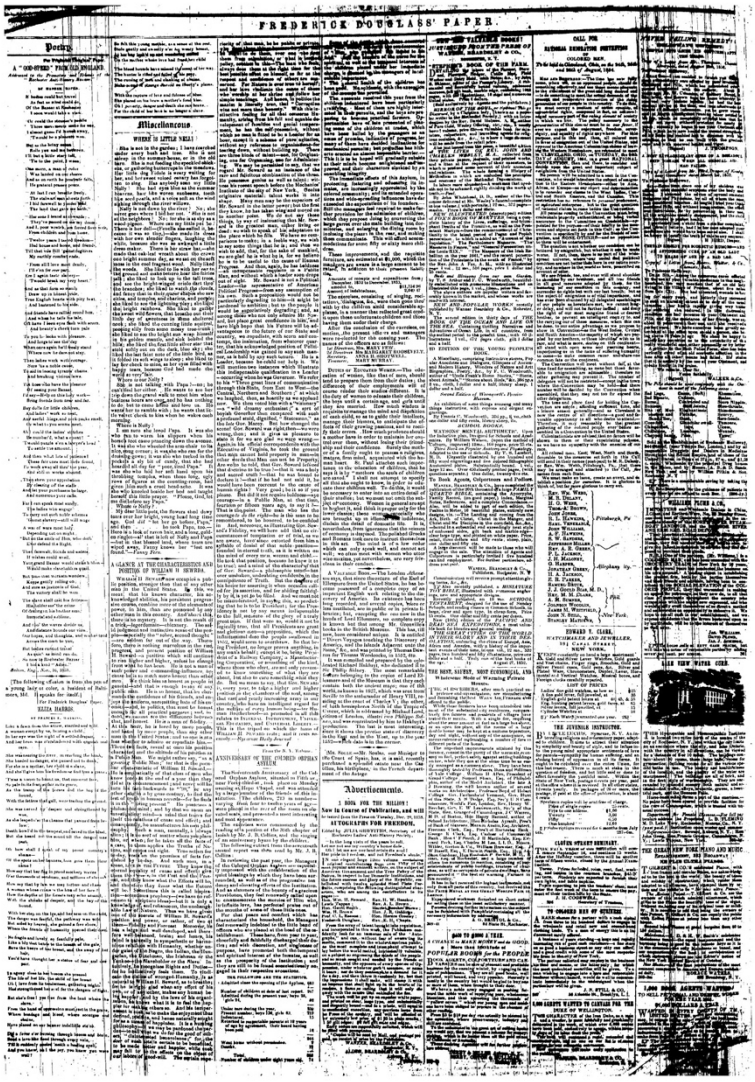
THE POWER OF REVISION IN "ELIZA HARRIS"

Harper's poem "Eliza Harris" retells the harrowing story of a major character from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Harper first retells the story of Eliza Harris in the *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (1853) and again, with revisions, in her book of poetry, *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1854).[15] While a number of critics have written about Harper's "Eliza Harris," few have focused on the significance of revisions Harper made between the two publications. The inclusion of revised versions of this work in various venues allows Harper to reach several audiences and appeal to a wider range of people, while also allowing her to experiment with nineteenth-century poetry, and actively engage with the political issues plaguing the black woman and her family. Each time the poem is republished with revisions of language and punctuation, Harper reiterates how black women and black mothers are units of political and moral power. By enabling her to create versions of the poem which appeal to a wider range of people, revision becomes a strategy of persuasion and a way for Harper to tell readers that she wants them to challenge slavery and help enslaved people become free. In the version of "Eliza Harris" which was published in the *Frederick Douglass' Paper,* Harper is direct, bold, and emotional with a forceful tone. With the second version of "Eliza Harris" that was published in *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, Harper becomes more subtle and indirect to demonstrate the humanity of Eliza Harris. Furthermore, we readers see how Harper plays a delicate game because she accuses readers of being complacent about slavery, but at the same time, she wants them to

15. This chapter will not explore Harper's version of "Eliza Harris" published in *The Liberator* (1853) because it is riddled with printer's errors and typos, making it challenging to understand and analyze in connection with the other versions.

feel and be transformative. In retelling Eliza Harris's story, Harper makes the case for black women's intellect and power.

The venues where Harper published her work prove equally as important as what she writes and the message she conveys. The image to the right (Fig. 1) shows the poetry page of the *Frederick Douglass' Paper,* the first version of "Eliza Harris" situated in the bottom left corner and written by a young, not yet married Frances E. Watkins. The *Frederick Douglass' Paper* has a long history, and an understanding of its history sheds light on why Harper published her work in the influential newspaper. The *Frederick Douglass' Paper* was in print from 1851-60, but before it was known as the *Frederick Douglass' Paper,* it was known as *The North Star*[16]. Published in Rochester, New York, and with Frederick Douglass as the only editor, the purpose of *The North Star*, as I. Garland Penn states, was "to attack slavery in all its


FREDERICK DOUGLASS' PAPER.

Poetry.

Miscellaneous

Advertisements.

16. In 1851, due to financial difficulty, Douglass merged *The North Star* with the *Liberty Party Paper.*

forms and aspects; advocate Universal Emancipation; exact the standard of public morality; promote the moral and intellectual improvement of colored people; and to hasten the day of freedom to our three million enslaved fellow-countrymen."[17] Although the paper's name changed, its focus never did. The historian David Blight offers further insight into *The North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper* by indicating that the papers were meant for both black and white readers, but Douglass intended to help free and enslaved black Americans.[18] In addition to the information Blight provides, Benjamin Fagan explains that "[Douglass] had intended the *North Star* to be the organ of a transatlantic community. The *North Star's* financing, production, and readership all underscored its international roots and routes."[19] By publishing her bold and direct retelling of Eliza Harris's story in a newspaper dedicated to attacking slavery and with a readership not only in America, but also in Europe, Harper widens her readership and calls attention the stories of women by women.

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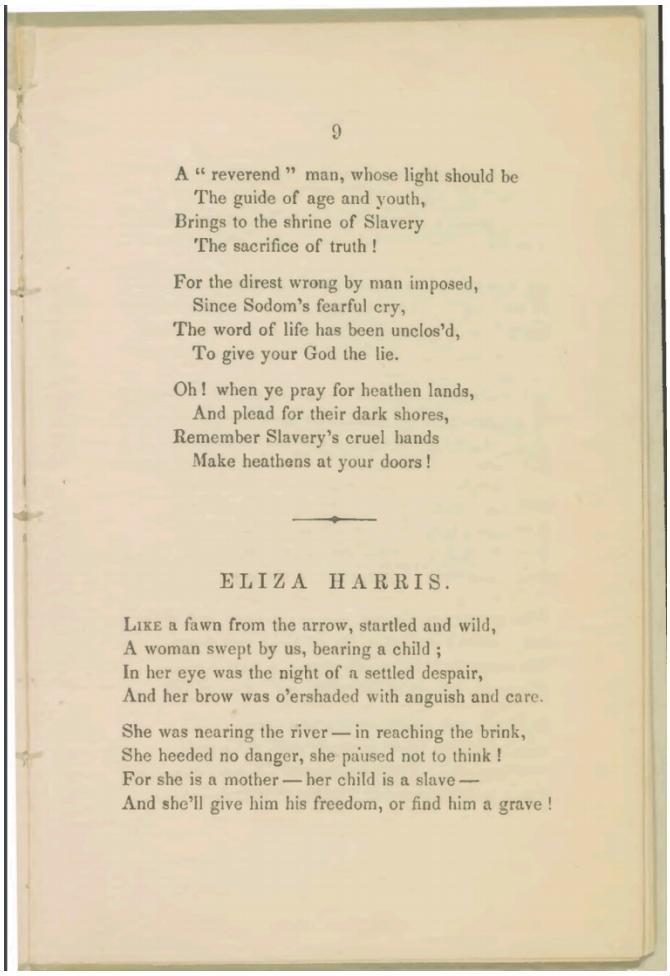
17. I. Garland Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 67.

18. David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 191.

19. Benjamin Fagan, *The Black Newspaper and the Chosen Nation* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 77.

The second version of "Eliza Harris" was published in Harper's book of poetry, *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1854). This book contained forty pages of poetry and prose. *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* was Harper's second book and it included a preface by William Lloyd Garrison, the editor of *The Liberator* (1831-65). The book of poetry was extremely successful and in its first five years, ten thousand copies were sold. Figure 2 presents an image of the initial two stanzas of "Eliza Harris" from Harper's book. It was originally published by J. B. Yerrinton & Son, Printers in Boston.[20] In 1857, *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* was republished by Merrihew & Thompson, printers in Philadelphia. Boston and Philadelphia were meaningful places to publish this book of poetry by a born-free African American woman in the mid-nineteenth century because of their growing black communities and their connection to ports and trains. Harper's book of poetry continued to be reprinted, and the 1871 version was the twentieth edition.[21]



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A " reverend " man, whose light should be
The guide of age and youth,
Brings to the shrine of Slavery
The sacrifice of truth !

For the direst wrong by man imposed,
Since Sodom's fearful cry,
The word of life has been unclos'd,
To give your God the lie.

Oh ! when ye pray for heathen lands,
And plead for their dark shores,
Remember Slavery's cruel hands
Make heathens at your doors !

ELIZA HARRIS.

Like a fawn from the arrow, startled and wild,
A woman swept by us, bearing a child ;
In her eye was the night of a settled despair,
And her brow was o'ershaded with anguish and care.

She was nearing the river — in reaching the brink,
She heeded no danger, she paused not to think !
For she is a mother — her child is a slave —
And she'll give him his freedom, or find him a grave !

20. Terry Novak, *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*.

21. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader*, ed. Frances Smith Foster (The Feminist Press: City University of New York, 1990), 55.

Critics agree that Harper's poetry has been largely neglected and many past critics believed what W. E. B Du Bois stated when he said, "She was not a great singer, but she had some sense of song; she was not a great writer, but she wrote much worth reading." Contemporary critics, however, understand the importance of Harper, her poetry, and what she was fighting for. Melba Joyce Boyd writes that "what distinguishes Harper's poetic voice is her capacity to demonstrate how racism, sexism, and classism are intricately intertwined in American culture. Her focus on the slave woman in her abolitionist poetry is an examination of sexism in a racist institution to the benefit of privileged aristocracy."[22] Building from what Boyd writes, another critic, Michael Stancliff, explains that the black women in *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* are "core feminist precepts of Harper's fictious dramas of persuasion [which] were in the multiple editions of her first book, *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects.* The heroines of these poems, who suffer at the hands of men and male institutional authority, suffer very specifically as subjects of state-sanctioned acts of domination, violence, or neglect."[23] I agree with both Boyd and Stancliff, but would go one step further and to say that Harper and her poetry played a seminal role in the nineteenth century.

In Stowe's novel, Eliza Harris is an enslaved woman, with an enslaved husband named George and a kind mistress, Emily Shelby. Like other enslaved women, Harris believes in the power of God and His ability to save people from the horrors which surround them. Harris runs away when her enslaver, Arthur Shelby, attempts to sell her son Harry because of financial difficulties. Before Shelby can sell Harry, Harris escapes with him and they cross the icy Ohio River. Harper's poem

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22. Melba Joyce Boyd, *Discarded Legacy: Politics and Poetics in the Life of Frances E.W. Harper* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 14.

23. Michael Stancliff, *Frances Ellen Watkins Harper: African American Reform Rhetoric and the Rise of a Modern Nation State* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 44-45.

maintains key connections to this original story of Eliza Harris from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, such as Harris's choosing to cross the Ohio River during winter, her arrival in freedom, and the people who help her when she arrives. In the novel, however, Harris and her son Harry are aided by a succession of allies who support her during the escape from the plantation, as well as once she arrives to freedom. "Eliza Harris" by Harper acknowledges these parts of the original story, but in the poem, Harper revises Stowe's novel by excising original characters, such as Harris's husband George, Mr. Shelby her enslaver, and Senator Bird, a man who took in Eliza and Harry after they escaped. By removing these characters specifically, the focus of the poem remains on Harris and Harris alone, on the interior life of one woman. The singular focus on Harris also allows Harper to present a different character to readers. One key difference from Stowe's in Harper's portrayal is Harris's mental strength; by placing an emphasis on Harris as a mentally strong mother, Harper challenges nineteenth-century notions of what a black enslaved woman could be and do. In the nineteenth century, black women were not included in the definition of "woman": they were overly sexualized, taken advantage of, and relegated to the shadows. Harper, however, creates a protagonist who challenges what it means to be a black woman in the nineteenth century, as well as a mother.

During the era of slavery, black womanhood and black maternity were problematic because black women had no control over their bodies or families. The bodies of black women served a commercial purpose in terms of labor and reproduction, and black women's bodies were used and taken advantage of by white enslavers. Patricia Hill Collins explains that:

> [C]ontrolling Black women's reproduction was essential to the creation and perpetuation of capitalist class relations. Slavery benefited certain segments of the U.S. population by economically exploiting others . . . . Under such a system in which the control of property is fundamental, enslaved African women were valuable commodities (Williams 1991). Slaveowners controlled Black women's labor and commodified Black women's bodies as

> units of capital. Moreover, as mothers, Black women's fertility produced the children who increased their owner's property and labor force (Davis 1981; Burnham 1987).[24]

The control enslavers had over black women's bodies extended to the black family; an enslaver could tear the black family apart at any moment by selling a child, a mother, or both. In choosing to run away, Eliza Harris and other enslaved mothers who ran away from their enslavers reject the idea of black mothers and women serving the state because of how freedom allows the black woman to take back control of their bodies as well as their children's bodies. Because of slavery's ownership over the black woman, both black maternity and black womanhood were devalued and even ignored, and the extractive system of slavery reinforced the abilities of white enslavers to inflict violence upon the bodies of black women. Since slavery defines black people outside of humanity, Harper challenges this definition and shows that black women are more than the commercial purpose enslavers considered them to be.

The version of "Eliza Harris," which was published in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, begins with an epigraph that states, "The following effusion is from the pen of a young lady of color, a resident of Baltimore. It speaks for itself."[25] The inclusion of an epigraph was probably the editor's idea, but by including it, the *Frederick Douglass' Paper* prepares readers for the powerful and heartfelt story from a woman of color. By indicating that the poem was written by "a young lady of color," the editor signals that unlike Stowe's novel, the author of this poem is respectable, pious, and black. By emphasizing that the author is black, the editor acknowledges that there will be differences in the story because the black female author understands the plight

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24. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 57.

25. Frances E. Watkins, "Eliza Harris."

of other black women. The use of the term "young" also indicates age differences between Harper and Stowe, which implies varying viewpoints. When Stowe published *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she was in her early forties, but when Harper published "Eliza Harris" in the *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, she was in her late twenties. The next part of the epigraph states that Harper is "a resident of Baltimore [,]"[26] which is a way to telegraph to readers that she is involved in the abolitionist movement. By the mid-nineteenth century, Baltimore was a sanctuary for fugitives on the run from slavery because of its geographical location and various transportation options such as trains and the port. For example, Frederick Douglass escaped slavery on September 3, 1838, by traveling north via train and boat from Baltimore through Delaware, a slave state, and finally arriving in Philadelphia. At the time of his escape, he dressed as a sailor and had borrowed the papers of a free sailor he knew.[27] Douglass wrote about his escape from slavery in his first autobiography, the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass. Written By Himself.* (1845); however, he chose to omit many details regarding his escape because he did not want to endanger the lives of those who assisted him. In his later autobiography, the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881), Douglass provides a more detailed account of his escape. By providing Harper's location in Baltimore, *Frederick Douglass' Paper* thus reinforces her commitment to the abolitionist movement and to the protection of enslaved persons who are on the run. By ending the epigraph about Harper with "It speaks for itself [,]"[28] the epigraph

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26. Frances E. Watkins, "Eliza Harris."

27. Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: The Illustrated Edition* (Minneapolis: Zenith Press,) 87-89.

28. Frances E. Watkins, "Eliza Harris."

conveys that the poem tells the truth about black women which should not be questioned and needs no further explanation.

Harper's version of "Eliza Harris" published in the *Frederick Douglass' Paper* contains twenty stanzas in total, most of which are four-lined ballad stanzas. There are, however, two stanzas with two lines, and six single-lined stanzas, which stray from Harper's usual poetic form, the four-lined, ballad stanza. Ballads were commonly used among antislavery activists such as the Hutchinson Family Singers because of how melodic they were and because they were easily remembered, which allowed for them to be turned into songs for antislavery meetings. The Hutchinson Family Singers sang songs such as "Get Off the Track!" and "Slavery is a Hard Foe to Battle," which shows their support for black Americans, and also social reform.[29] The ballad's shortened stanzas can suggest speed, fear, and fright. In the poem, one-lined and two-lined stanzas first appear in the third stanza when Harper provides a brief description of Harris's physical appearance, and continues when she describes the animals that chase Harris and her son, concluding with a statement about America's shame, which refers to slavery and the conditions of black Americans. When describing Harris's physical appearance, Harper writes:

> 'Twas a vision to haunt us, that innocent face,
> So pale in its fear, so fair in its grace,[30]

These two lines by themselves reveal the importance of Harris's physical appearance. It is as if Harper wants the physical image of Harris to haunt those who read about her. Having a

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29. Scott Gac, *Singing for Freedom: The Hutchinson Family Singers and the Nineteenth Century Culture of Reform* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 249 and 254-255.

30. Frances E. Watkins, "Eliza Harris."

two-lined stanza dedicated to a black woman's appearance highlights the importance of what being on the run does to one physically. Although flight and fear can change the way a woman looks, they do not change her character. Harper's acknowledgement of Harris's "innocent" and "pale" or fearful face shows readers that black women are people, too, and just like others, they experience moments of fear that impact their physical appearance. In the same stanza, Harper describes Eliza as "pale" and "fair," which suggest that Eliza looks like a white woman. The implied comparison between Eliza and white women would allow Harper to garner sympathy and appeal to white readers' sense of female vulnerability. Hazel Carby argues that "historically the mulatto, as narrative figure, has two primary functions: as a vehicle for exploration of the relationship between the races and, at the same time, an expression of the relationship between the races. The figure of the mulatto should be understood and analyzed as a narrative device of mediation."[31] If we are to analyze Harper's depiction of Eliza with these two primary functions, Harper then understands that in order for white readers to recognize the suffering of a black mother, she must have a character who connects to them, which she does through the color of Eliza's skin. By doing this, Harper shows the limited ways in which white readers would understand the plight of the black mother.

Extending Carby's argument, the literary critic Teresa C. Zackodnik explains that "the white skin [or near white skin] of the tragic mulatta, then, would register sensibility and suffering, 'presence of mind,' and also facilitate a degree or identification between the white abolitionist and the enslaved. Moreover, the tragic mulatta keeps such sufferings sufficiently distant to permit the contemplation of their disturbing nature; she is 'near white' or white in

31. Carby, '"Of Lasting Service for the Race," 89.

appearance only, so that her sufferings remain those of the enslaved African American."[32] The white appearance of Eliza's skin creates a link between the character and white readers, which could heighten their concern about black mothers. The image of a tragic mulatta aids Harper's protest against the political issues plaguing black women and creates an image of a vulnerable black mother and woman in need of rescue.

Another example of a two-lined stanza from the version of "Eliza Harris" in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* places importance on the black mother's strength and determination. Harper writes:

> Death howl'd in the tempest, and raced in the blast
> But she heard not the sound till the danger was past.[33]

These lines are an indication of Harris's mental strength, along with her determination to save her son. The emphasis here is on the enslaved mother's focus and fortitude of physical strength. In contrast, the version of "Eliza Harris" from *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects,* focuses on the mother's feelings as well as her strength. Harper now writes:

> She was nerv'd by despair, and strengthened by woe,
> As she leap'd o'er chasms that yawn'd from below;
> Death howl'd in the tempest, and rav'd in the blast,
> But she heard not the sound till the danger was past.[34]

This version of the poem exemplifies in more detail how Harris as a mother knows and hears the dangers that follow her and her son. Although Harris is nervous, full of "despair" and "woe," she is also strong, which propels her to keep running and fighting for her child's freedom. The

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32. Teresa C. Zackodnik, *Mulatta and the Politics of Race* (University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 62.

33. Frances E. Watkins, "Eliza Harris."

34. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day,* 61.

physical leaps which Harris makes "o'er chasms" conveys her metaphorical transformation from powerless slave mother to an agent of her own freedom and her ability to be a mother outside of the control of enslavers.

Unlike the "Eliza Harris" published in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, "Eliza Harris" from *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* is significantly shorter and only contains twelve four-lined ballad stanzas. In this version of the poem, Harper eliminates the two stanzas that said:

> Did the fever e'er burning through bosom and brain,
> Send a lava-like flood through ever vein,
> Till it suddenly cooled 'neath a healing spell,
> And you knew, oh! the joy! you knew you were well?
>
> So felt this young mother, as a sense of rest
> Stole gently and sweetly o'er *her* weary breast
> As her boy looked up, and, wondering smiled
> On the mother whose love had freed her child.[35]

Harper now ends the poem by writing:

> The bloodhounds have miss'd the scent of her way;
> The hunter is rifled and foil'd of his prey;
> Fierce jargon and curing, with clanking of chains
> Make sounds of strange discord on Liberty's plains.
>
> With the rapture love and fulness of bliss,
> She plac'd on his brow a mother's fond kiss:--
> Oh! poverty, danger, and death she can brave,
> For the child of her love is no longer a slave!

These stanzas focus on the cruelty and inhumanity of slavery, which contrasts how a mother's love can conquer everything. Additionally, by talking about how the bloodhounds

35. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day,* 62.

have missed her scent and by referring to Harris and her son as prey, Harper highlights how slavery defines black people outside of humanity. The final stanza mentions love, a mother kissing her child, and how she confronted various scenarios, which differentiates this black mother from the dogs that are chasing her. Ending the poem this way serves as a subtle reminder that slavery is not over. This one mother is free, but not all black mothers are free, which begs the question of how many more mothers and children are suffering because of enslavers during this time period. Although it is joyous that Harris and her son escaped slavery, this ending is a Pyrrhic victory because only one mother and child are free.

Other revisions between these bodies of work, between "Eliza Harris" in *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* and the earlier version in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, include changes in punctuation and language. When Harper makes subtle changes to the punctuation, she usually switches commas with semicolons or dashes, adds an exclamation point, or replaces a period. These acts of revision may not seem important, but punctuation plays an important role because of how it can impact the reading and understanding of a sentence or idea. Punctuation marks also indicate how a sentence should be read, and when Harper first uses a period and then switches to an exclamation point, her tone changes as well as her point of emphasis. For example, in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Harper writes, "Oh how shall I speak of my proud country's shame--."[36] In comparison, the version from *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects,* includes an exclamation point after the "Oh." Harper now writes, "Oh! how shall I speak of my proud country's shame?"[37] In the first example, there is no inflection and no point of emphasis

36. Frances E. Watkins, "Eliza Harris."

37. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day,* 61.

on what Harper says, but in the second example, the exclamation point adds emphasis and strength and passion to Harper's feelings about her country's shame. By questioning her readers directly in the second version, Harper invites them to more actively engage with the poetry and question the United States's institution of slavery as well.

When Harper revises the language she uses, "Eliza Harris" becomes more grammatically fluid, and her tone and emphasis change. Yet, Harper's case against slavery remains strong, as do the images of a resilient black mother and woman. The retelling of Eliza Harris's story allows Harper to challenge the erasure of black womanhood and black morals, but most importantly black maternity, in depictions of enslaved Americans. This poem becomes a protest against the system of slavery and the ability it has to tear the black family apart. When Harper writes about Harris as a mother, her tone is emotional yet powerful and through this, Harper maintains the black woman's humanity and strength, which in turn becomes another form of protest. This idea is exemplified by the second stanza in the *Frederick Douglass' Paper* version of the poem, where Harper writes:

> She was nearing the river, in reaching the brink,
> She heeded no danger, she paused not to drink.
> For she is a mother, her child is a slaver,
> And she'll give him his freedom or find him a grave.[38]

In the 1854 *Poems of Miscellaneous Subjects,* Harper instead writes:

> She was nearing the river—in reaching the brink,
> She heeded no danger, she paused not to think!
> For she is a mother—her child is a slave—
> Or she'll give him his freedom, or find him a grave![39]

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38. Frances E. Watkins, "Eliza Harris."

39. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day,* 61.

Harper changes “drink” to “think” and makes various changes in punctuation. The first example, although powerful, is subtle in tone, especially because Harper only uses commas and periods. Furthermore, the use of the phrase “she paused not to drink” at the end of the second line is Harper’s way of showing readers that a black mother will do anything for the family unit. Refusing to pause for water, even though she and her child probably need it, creates an image of true determination to be free for the black mother and woman. The second example reveals more emotion because of its exclamation points and dashes. Without changing the meaning of stanza, it does reveal a change in emphasis and tone. Also, a change in the word “drink” to “think” highlights that while on the run, Eliza does not have time or pleasure to stop and think slowly about the decisions she is making; every minute matters. Nevertheless, Eliza is associated with mental capacity throughout, by making urgent, split-second decisions. The idea of being able to think on her feet repudiates nineteenth-century slaveholders’ notions that slaves were weak at problem solving and thinking quickly on their feet.

An example of this from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* comes from Eliza herself; part of Eliza’s original escape plan involved taking a ferry, but since the ferry is no longer running, Eliza has to quickly devise a new plan, which she does. Her new plan, however, must be changed because Mr. Haley, the man who is hunting her, arrives in town. Enslaved fugitive women like Eliza are forced to think quickly and make split-second decisions because they are powered by the prospect of freedom as well as their families and the love they have for their children. Linda Brent (a pseudonym for Harriet Jacobs) similarly repudiates nineteenth-century slaveholders by hiding in a crawl space for seven years and writing letters to her master from there. In order to survive, keep their families together, and make it to freedom, black slave women had to make quick decisions

that sealed their fates, which shows that they were not weak problem solvers, but actually extremely intelligent and sophisticated.

Harper's versions of "Eliza Harris" repudiate the laws of slavery and confronts and challenges ideas that a woman's African heritage makes her any less of a person. Another example of active engagement through Harper's poetry are the stanzas in "Eliza Harris" which are concerned with America. In these lines, Harper is inherently political because of how she questions the law. In writing about the law and questioning it, Harper embodies a more masculine tone. In *Frederick Douglass' Paper,* Harper writes:

> Oh how shall I speak of my proud country's shame—
>
> Of the spots on her banners, how give them their name?
>
> How say that her flag in proud mockery waves
> O'er thousands of bondmen, and millions of slaves?
> How say that by law we may torture and chase
> A woman whose crime is the hue of her face?[40]

40. Frances E. Watkins, "Eliza Harris."

Harper's tone becomes stronger and fiercer, showing that women can question the wrongs of society and that they too belong in the conversation regarding politics. The American flag represents America's hypocrisy. Because of slavery, the American flag is no longer beautiful, and the country's reputation is stained. This frontispiece image from William Wells Brown's *Antislavery Harp* (1848) shows a black man who is hung from and chained to the nation's flag, which exemplifies how the flag is dishonored and the nation is corrupted due to slavery. In the image, the flag pole has a liberty cap, and the flag itself contains twenty-six stars, thirteen blackened, and five stripes. Below the image, there is a poem by Thomas Campbell in which he writes:

> United States! Your banner wears
> Two emblems—one of fame ;
> Alas, the other that it bears
> Reminds us of your shame.
>
> The *white* man's liberty in types
> Stands blazoned by your *stars* ;
> But what's the meaning of your *stripes* ?
> They mean your *negro's scars.*

As Campbell's poem explains, the flag represents both the white man and the black man as well as America's fame and shame. The shame is suggested by the image of the black man

tied to the flag pole. The poem does not mention the liberty cap, which was a symbol of freedom. The liberty cap juxtaposed with the image of a black man tied to the American flag is another way to call attention to the hypocrisy of the American flag, but also America as a country. In the poem "Eliza Harris," Harper, like Brown and Campbell, confronts the hypocrisy of the American flag and what it stands for, especially when flying over enslaved people. The American flag is a national symbol and represents the nation and the people who make up America, but to fly a national symbol over black Americans is hypocrisy because they are not free, they do not have voices, and are not considered people. Therefore, the flag waves in mockery because it is not a true symbol of American people or values.

In the 1854 version of "Eliza Harris," Harper revises these lines and instead chooses to state them as questions. Harper now writes:

> Oh! how shall I speak of my proud country's shame?
> Of the stains on her glory, how give them their name?
> How say that of her banner in mockery waves—
> Her "star spangled banner"—o'er millions of slaves?
>
> How say that the lawless may torture and chase
> A woman whose crime is the hue of her face?[41]

By restating these lines as questions, Harper once again places herself in conversation with her readers and by engaging with them, she challenges them to think about the questions themselves, and the answers she might provide. Like the other version, Harper's tone of voice in this revision remains the same, but her delivery is different. Placing these lines together emphasizes America's problems in an understated way, which brings more attention to the connection between them and black women. Ultimately, these lines in each version of the poem show the disposition of black

41. Harper, "Eliza Harris," 61. The second stanza actually has four lines in total, but I only show the two that correspond to the previous version.

mothers and black women while simultaneously allowing the women to embody masculine American values, which prove a black women and mothers can be nurturing, safe, and loving as well as protectors and breadwinners.

Eliza Harris and other enslaved mothers, as Harper illustrates throughout *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects,* are not simply victims of slavery, but heroes for themselves and their families. Eliza Harris exemplifies protest and resistance because she refuses to give up on keeping her family together. The dangers Harris faces come from the system of slavery, the natural world, and those enslavers chasing her, but as Harper illustrates through various revisions, the system of slavery must be challenged and so must the laws. Harper's changes between publications not only strengthen her argument but make obvious the ways in which she engaged social and political issues during the nineteenth century. In each poem, Harper's message remains the same, yet she refines her words, remixes them, and even completely changes them to create a stronger story and repudiation of those who support slavery. Through revision and repetition, Harper rejects perceived notions about black womanhood and black maternity and instead shows black women as strong, nurturing, and deserving of a place in American culture.

CHAPTER THREE

THEMATIC REVISION IN "FANCY ETCHINGS" AND "FANCY SKETCHES"

Set during the Reconstruction era, "Fancy Etchings" (1873) and "Fancy Sketches" (1874) are groups of short stories originally published in the *A.M.E Christian Recorder*. There are five stories in total; however, only three are extant and the other two are missing. Due to these gaps, my chapter will only explore three of the five stories.[42] Each involves members of the same family engaging in important conversations relating to such topics as education within the black community, a black woman's career, communal knowledge, and racial uplift. Although Harper changes the title of the series from "Fancy Etchings" to "Fancy Sketches," the stories remain connected and the main characters intact. The short stories are thought to be somewhat autobiographical, and if they are, the biographical material provided in Chapter One reveals Harper's feelings about the unmet promises of Reconstruction such as education, equality, and civil rights for black Americans, as well as her belief in black women's ability to change and influence the black community.

The series serve as a form of resistance and a call to action for black women, and they reveal how the black family is a unit of political and moral power. "Fancy Etchings" and "Fancy Sketches" are stories that are in conversation with and connected to *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects,* specifically "Eliza Harris," through themes of black womanhood, black maternity, and

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42. Although these stories are anthologized in Frances Smith Foster's *A Brighter Coming Day*, this book does not include the full versions of each. In her introduction to these stories, Foster notes that only fragments remain, which explain why only three of the five are included, as well as why there appear to be gaps in the time when they were published.

political resistance. They do not contain the same language used in "Eliza Harris," but the themes of black womanhood, black maternity, and political resistance remain present throughout. Yet, Harper thinks about each differently in comparison to her works from the periods of enslavement and Civil War, since black women during the Reconstruction era faced additional challenges such as equal protection under the law and access to adequate educations. For Harper, the meaning of black womanhood changes from women being voiceless to women having voices and being considered agents of change in the black community. The role of the black mother changes in these works as do the ways in which black women uplift their community and resist the unmet promises of the Reconstruction era.

Like "Eliza Harris," "Fancy Etchings" and "Fancy Sketches" are forms of resistance and examples of protest through literature. Each story reveals Harper's strong belief in communal knowledge as well as or in addition to individual literacy as a means of uplifting the black community. One is needed for the other to occur. Communal knowledge means placing responsibility on educated black Americans and calling for them to educate and help those less fortunate than themselves. When discussing the importance of education, Harper herself says in *A Factor For Human Progress*, "the question worth asking is not simply, What will education do for us? but, What will it help us do for others?"[43] Education is not only important for individuals because of what it gives them, but it is also important for what it gives others. Harper again exemplifies this idea in the same essay when she states, "for the best test of a good education is not simply what we know, but what we do, and what we are."[44] Ultimately, an education is only

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43. From *A Factor For Human Progress: African Methodist Episcopal Church Review 2,* published in 1885. Reprinted in Foster, *A Brighter Coming Day*, 276.

44. From *A Factor For Human Progress: African Methodist Episcopal Church Review 2,* published in 1885. Reprinted in Foster, *A Brighter Coming Day*, 280.

good when a person uses it to not only help herself, but others, too. In Harper's *oeuvre*, this collection of fiction emphasizes the roles of black women's actions and voices as mechanisms of change in the black community.

"Fancy Etchings" and "Fancy Sketches" together demonstrate how women in the same family navigate diverse opinions and biases about education, black women's career options, and black women's lives. Although the stories were published during the Reconstruction, the characters in them are born at different times in American history and hold unique views about living and surviving. Their backgrounds reveal the personal struggles they face and how they negotiate their place in a broader American society and in the black community. As Carla Peterson states, "All five sketches blur the lines between public and domestic spheres, and challenge traditional views of men and women's proper place."[45] Expanding on Peterson's statement, I think that Harper's stories challenge what many Reconstruction-era readers thought a woman should be; the stories are attentive to the ways in which what once worked in the past, in terms of gender roles and levels of education, for one black woman, no longer works for the younger generation. Harper's emphasis on these different belief systems are an important aspect of the narrative and reveal how during this period of racial uplift, building up the black community was important for the entire race's future success.

As Frances Smith Foster indicates, Harper was a frequent contributor to the *A.M.E. Christian Recorder* where "Fancy Etchings" and "Fancy Sketches" were published during 1873-74.[46] The *A.M.E Christian Recorder* was a weekly newspaper, that as Eric Gardner explains,

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45. Peterson, "Literary Transnationalism and Diasporic History," 197.

46. Foster, *A Brighter Coming Day,* 10.

"was conceived by African Americans, edited by African Americans, written primarily by African Americans, and largely distributed by African Americans to an almost completely African American audience—a periodical that, in the midst of a sea of failed print ventures by members of all races in the nineteenth century, survived and influenced a readership across the nation."[47] Furthermore, Benjamin Fagan asserts that like other black newspapers, the *A.M.E. Christian Recorder* covered a range of topics and included a substantial amount of fiction as well as poetry.[48] Publishing in a venue which prioritized black voices and black people illuminates Harper's commitment to her community, as well as the potential influence her writings could have over the lives of black Americans.

"Fancy Etchings" and "Fancy Sketches" share the viewpoints of three very different black women. Each conversation focuses on Jenny, the protagonist, who is a recent college graduate and poet; her sister, Anna, who is a teacher; and their Aunt Jane. The stories also focus on the fictional towns of Moontown and New Paradose. Moontown's name is likely derived from the word "moonstruck," which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "distracted or dazed as the result of some mental obsession."[49] The definition of "moonstruck" connects to Moontown's name because the residents lack a social culture and do not care about newcomers, according to Jenny. Unlike Jenny, however, Anna believes that her sister does not know the residents well enough and thinks they are instead focused on what she describes as "industry,

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47. Eric Gardner *Black Print Unbound: The Christian Recorder, African American Literature, and Periodical Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 4.

48. Benjamin Fagan, *The Black Newspaper and the Chosen Nation.* 144.

49. *Oxford English Dictionary* Online, s.v. "Moonstruck," accessed online June 10, 2019, https://www-oed-com.proxy-emote.galib.uga.edu/view/Entry/121959?redirectedFrom=moonstruck+#eid

staidness, and respectability."[50] The descriptions provided by Jenny and Anna depict the residents of Moontown as intensely focused on their lives, themselves, and what they have to do. Similarly, the name "New Paradose" is a play on words and means "new paradise" for black Americans. With the replacement of "-dise" with "-dose," Harper implies that the town and its residents need a dose of something new. "Dose" is also sonically similar to the verb "doze," which further suggests that the residents are oblivious and indifferent to what is happening around them and the people which they are. When talking about the city of New Paradose, Jenny states, '"It seems to me that matters are constantly getting into some kind of snarl. I should think that the efficiency of the schools would be impaired by their dissensions.'"[51] Due to this statement, the dose of something new that New Paradose needs could be teachers who are not interested in discord, but in education, which is why Anna is moving there to teach. Although fictional, the stories and their women protagonists discuss issues which concerned black women and the black community during the Reconstruction era. Through their conversations, the women reveal the changing meanings of black womanhood and racial uplift since slavery.

In Harper's first story, published April 24, 1873, readers follow a conversation between Aunt Jane and Jenny. The story opens in Jenny's home, a private space where we are privy to a personal and contentious conversation. The conversation is personal because it deals with two family members and complicated because Aunt Jane and Jenny have different views on Jenny's desire to become a poet. We are informed from the beginning of the story of the importance of an education and of Jenny's desire to educate and help others through poetry. Poetry allows Jenny a public voice and a potential way to impact the lives of others. Jenny believes that many

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50. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day,* 228.

51. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day, 227.*

men and women live difficult and unfulfilling lives, and her poetry, if possible, would "introduce the most entrancing strains of melody."[52] The desire to influence the lives of both men and women through poetry shows how Jenny cares about others and wants them to live fulfilling lives. Additionally, during Jenny and Aunt Jane's conversation, Aunt Jane says, '"I am glad, Jenny, that you feel so, for I think the intellect that will best help our race must be heart supplied: but do you think by being a poet you can best serve our people?'"[53] Aunt Jane's statement about intellect and the heart show that although she believes in intellect as a key component to helping others, it alone is not effective. Intellect which is "heart supplied" will best serve the black community instead, and those who educate must be compassionate and understand the power each person holds. In speaking with Jenny about the importance of "heart supplied" intellect, Aunt Jane makes the case for women's powerful role in social change because they are more in tune with their compassionate emotions and feelings and not socialized to suppress them as much as men. Furthermore, "heart supplied" signifies that those who want to make an impact in the black community must be introspective and improve themselves first before attempting to help and uplift others.

Jane's questions to Jenny as to why she thinks poetry will be the way she best serves their people illustrates their different belief systems. Poetry is how Jenny aims to share her intellect and it is the tool by which she reimagines America for the black community. Jenny's poetry would potentially place a different interpretation or meaning on American society because it would be written by an educated black woman, which provides an alternative perspective to both white and black male poets including Herman Melville, who wrote "Formerly a Slave" (1866),

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52. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day,* 225.

53. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day,* 225.

and James M. Whitfield, who wrote "Poem" (1867). As a black woman poet, Jenny would have likely written about similar themes as these, but from a woman's perspective. The focus of Jenny's poetry, could move beyond topics of inequality and uplift, which would allow her to disrupt the sadness of life and write with "entrancing strains of melody."[54]

Furthermore, Jenny's trust in God and her strong connection to her family provide some insight into what her poetry reimagines for America. In her conversation with Aunt Jane, Jenny states that "the best way to serve humanity, is by looking within ourselves, and becoming acquainted with our powers and capacities. The fact is we should all go to work and make the most of ourselves, and we cannot do that without helping others."[55] Jenny's statement to Aunt Jane affirms that her poetry could potentially reimagine an America where morals are valued, and where Americans, black or white, treat each other with respect and dignity. Her poetry would also portray America as a country with citizens who believe in high ideals such as lending a helping hand to the less fortunate, having integrity, and believing in the word of God. In regards to what Jenny's poetry could do for the black community, Hazel Carby explains that "Harper had a vision that women were potentially capable of transforming society, but although this vision was not limited to what women could achieve from the hearthstone, Harper did regard the home as a crucial sphere of women's influence."[56]

Harper confronts the lack of education in the black community as a whole and simultaneously advances her message of helping others. Jenny's desire to become a poet is rooted in her desire to learn more about herself, uplift her community, and educate those who

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54. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day,* 225.

55. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day,* 225.

56. Carby, "Of Lasting Service for the Race," 69.

have not had a formal education. Jenny says, '"Aunty I want to learn myself and be able to teach others to strive to make the highest ideal, the most truly real of our lives[.]"'[57] As Frances Smith Foster describes, writing and poetry are only beneficial to Harper if used in conjunction with actively helping out and uplifting others.[58] Although Foster is writing about Harper's Reconstruction poetry, the same ideas are connected to Harper's series of short stories. Jenny states, for example, "I think poetry is one of the great agents of culture, civilization, and refinement."[59] Jenny shows she believes in poetry as more than just a career option, also it is an agent of social change. Jenny believes in poetry because she thinks it can refine people and their ideas. This belief in poetry and literature functions as a form of protest against widely held notions that black Americans were stupid; the written word and in this case, the poet's word is cast as a liberatory tool.

Additionally, Jenny points out a connection between poetry and religion when discussing the power of poetry and its ability to impart change. By relating poetry to religion, Harper confronts Aunt Jane and others who do not find writing poetry to be a prestigious profession or believe that it can inspire change. During this time period, many members of the black community had deep faith in religion and God and by reinforcing the idea of poetry as a vehicle for religious ideas, Harper highlights the power Jenny will have with black women and the black community. Poetry and religion both require imagination and faith, and so when writing about high ideals and noble deeds, Jenny can write using a melody, synonymous for her writing poetry,

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57. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day,* 225.

58. Frances Smith Foster, "Doers of the World: The Reconstruction Poetry of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper," in *Written By Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892* (Indiana University Press, 1993), 135.

59. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day*, 225.

which makes religious teachings and messages easier to understand. Furthermore, poetry is beautiful and melodic and to connect that with religion and high ideals makes those more appealing as well, while reinforcing their importance. Acknowledging the connection between religion and poetry is a way for Jenny to convince Aunt Jane that people will learn from her poetry. Poetry has the ability to help those in the current moment, but also in the future, because it lives on, even when the writers do not.

In the next publication of "Fancy Etchings" on May 1, 1873, Aunt Jane and Jenny continue their conversation. Aunt Jane begins the dialogue with Jenny by discussing Uncle Glumby, the first male family member mentioned in either story. Uncle Glumby is Aunt Jane's older brother, who is characterized by being insensitive and not having an imagination; Aunt Jane attributes Uncle Glumby's unpleasant attributes to the fact that he is the oldest child. Not all children who are the oldest are grumpy and unpleasant, but since their parents were both young and poor when they raised him, it is likely that Uncle Glumby did not have the most pleasant childhood. Furthermore, Aunt Jane suggests that her brother, Uncle Glumby, took on traits of their parents: "Is it not, sometimes the case that parents stamp certain mental traits upon their children's character[?]"[60] Beyond simply telling us that he is grumpy and unpleasant, Uncle Glumby's invented name reinforces his negative personality; his name symbolizes stubbornness, obliviousness, and unpleasantness. Because his name is an example of word and sound play, Harper conjures other words and meanings. Glumby's name is associated with other words such as "glum," "lumpy," "dumb," and "numb," which further suggest that he is uncomfortable to be around, tough to persuade, stubborn, not analytical, and oblivious to the societal changes occurring around him. Ultimately, through the name "Glumby," Harper stresses the personality

60. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day*, 227.

evocation of patriarchal black men. This does not mean, however, that all black men are this way. Through the name "Glumby," Harper criticizes the idea of men having all the answers about women and society. What worked in the past for Aunt Jane and Uncle Glumby's parents will not work for Jenny and Anna. These women are living in a different era and are not bound to the patriarchy or the way Uncle Glumby thinks. Uncle Glumby as a character embodies the patriarchy because he believes and focuses on the roles he thinks women should have—the roles of homemaker and mother.

When Aunt Jane questions Jenny about Uncle Glumby's views on her becoming a poet, she also brings up the question of what a man thinks in terms of a woman's job, which calls attention to the role of black men and the power they held during the nineteenth century. Harper is not grouping black and white men together. She does acknowledge that like white men, black men are powerful, but their power differs in relation to American society and culture. Harper believed that white men's power came from "the government's willingness to protect them more than others. To put this another way, white men's power derived not from their mature development but from their status as the favored children of the national family."[61] Black men, however, were not considered people and were not protected by the government. Instead, black men were stripped of their humanity due to slavery and taken advantage of. Because of this, black men wanted to vindicate themselves and have control over their bodies, but also over black women, and the black family. Uncle Glumby's image represents a black man who reinforces superiority over black women, but Harper challenges him and the narrow, domestic roles which women were circumscribed to, through Jenny and her sister Anna. The careers of both Jenny and

61. Corinne T. Field, "Frances E. W. Harper and the Politics of Intellectual Maturity," in *Toward an Intellectual History of Black Women* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 119.

Anna, a married teacher, are outside the domestic sphere and each woman does something that helps the black community as a whole.

In short, Uncle Glumby does not support Jenny becoming a poet, and Jenny quotes how "'He says, it is all moonshine, that poetry is like the measles, it generally breaks out in the young; and that in a few years I will be over, what he calls, my new fancy.'"[62] Because of Jenny's young age, Uncle Glumby chalks up her desired career as a poet and her poetry to youth and naiveté. The quotation, also, exemplifies how some black men regarded the careers of black women outside the domestic sphere. Paula Giddings explains that "To men's minds, for a woman to work—especially when it wasn't a question of dire necessity—undermined Black manhood and race as well."[63] Many thought a black woman's place should be in the house taking care of it and raising children. Black men who were tempted to embrace such narrow roles for black women were likely trying to emulate white families to aspire for the attainment of higher social and economic classes. Uncle Glumby's beliefs on this topic are antiquated, especially since reality and society demanded something different for so many black women. For black women who worked outside the home, as Patricia Hill Collins indicates, "the issue was less of achieving economic parity with their Black male counterparts and more one of securing an adequate overall family income."[64] His belief that black women should remain in the domestic sphere appears to be Uncle Glumby's way, as a black man, of aspiring to what white families have. With this belief system, Uncle Glumby does not account for the differences between black and white families.

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62. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day*, 226.

63. Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York, William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1984),60.

64. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 60.

Also, in this quotation, Harper presents two meanings of the word "fancy." In terms of what Uncle Glumby says about Jenny's poetry, "fancy" suggests Jenny's poetry is a hobby and only a temporary, trivial interest. Yet when connected to the title of the stories, "fancy" implies beautiful and elaborate writings. "Fancy," as *The Oxford English Dictionary* explains, is also "synonymous with imagination; the process, and faculty, of forming mental representations of things not present to the senses; chiefly applied to the so-called creative or productive imagination, which frames images of objects, events, or conditions that have not occurred in actual experience."[65] With this meaning, Harper could be specifically gesturing to the strength of black women's creativity and the reality of black women being passionate about assuming the role of artist. By suggesting Jenny's writings are beautiful and elaborate, Harper challenges gender roles by showing that when women are able to create outside the domestic sphere, the work they create can be considered equally impactful and significant. "Fancy Etchings" and "Fancy Sketches" show that black women are capable of creating beauty in more than one capacity; the homes which black women take care of are beautiful, and so, too, are the children that black women nurture and raise. Writing and poetry reveal a unique form of beauty and can be considered a way to nurture the community. The ability for a black woman to create meaning through writing supports the idea that educated black women have many talents outside the domestic sphere, and when given the opportunity to flourish, they can make a lasting impact on the community.

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65. *Oxford English Dictionary* Online, s.v. "Fancy," accessed online August 5, 2019, https://www-oed-com.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/view/Entry/68025?rskey=6rUCJr&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid

The importance of education and educating others in the black community remains a main focus as the story continues. Harper shifts focus from Uncle Glumby and his thoughts on Jenny becoming a poet back to communal knowledge and educating others through the introduction of Jenny's younger sister, Anna. Through Anna, a teacher, we again see a black woman concerned with communal knowledge and racial uplift. By educating others in the community of New Paradose, Anna not only gives the people more freedom, but she uplifts them, connects them, and builds on their sense of community. To teach is a mechanism for freeing individuals and helping the overall community, but in her discussion with Jenny, Anna does not talk badly about the people of Moontown. She instead takes what many, like Jenny, might consider to be the faults of Moontowners and turns them into positives, which becomes a way of uplift. Additionally, Anna states how she believes physical objects from a place make an impression on people and mold them; for the people of Moontown, the leveled land and slow river have made an impression and influence the people, which for Anna does not take away from what they have to offer.[66] The landscape can potentially influence the residents of Moontown because they're surrounded by it every day; the slow river could influence their pace of life and inadvertently cause them to slow down or do everything at a slower pace. The leveled land could be considered the foundation for the town and it might cause the residents of Moontown to be grounded and rooted in what they consider comfortable lives.

During her conversation with Jenny, Anna makes her point about connecting people through education by stating, "I fear that part of our intellectual people stand too much alone and unrelated."[67] Black intellectuals are separated from black Americans because of their educations,

66. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day*, 228.

67. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day*, 227.

but if black intellectuals joined forces with ordinary black Americans, both groups could gain knowledge from the other and simultaneously become closer and build a stronger community. Anna's statement further indicates that an education should not separate people who belong to the same community because they are all in need of one another. The desire to build a stronger community on the part of black intellectuals, not only allows them to serve others, but it also aims to take away divisions within a community that has already been divided.

As the series continued, Harper changed the title to "Fancy Sketches," and published another story in the A *M.E. Christian Recorder* on January 15, 1874.[68] Like the others, this final story is again a continuation of the conversation in the earlier stories between Aunt Jane and Jenny. This story, in part, focuses on a friend of Aunt Jane's, as well as the future of women, womanhood, and what black Americans can achieve. More specifically, Jenny discusses issues such as women's suffrage and the integration of black and white children in the classroom. In discussing the future of the woman, Jenny's emphasis on inclusion becomes a way for Harper to show how she cares for and has an interest in a better society not only for all women, but also the entire black community. When talking with Aunt Jane about the passing of a Civil Rights Bill, Jenny asks, "[W]hat are we going to do for ourselves, to diversify our industry, build up our character, better our condition, and intensify our spiritual life?"[69] Jenny's entire conversation

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68. The reason why Harper changes the title from "Fancy Etchings" to "Fancy Sketches" is unknown. And since *A Brighter Coming Day* only has some examples from the series, it is hard to determine when exactly Harper changed the titles.

69. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day*, 230. The Civil Rights Bill mentioned in this part of the story could be the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which was also known as the Enforcement Act. This bill guaranteed all Americans, regardless of color, access to public spaces such as public schools, churches, and cemeteries. The bill was first introduced in 1870 by Charles Summer and was signed into law.

with Aunt Jane exposes widely held cultural biases which rationalize why women cannot vote and why their voices are not heard and considered. Besides being able to vote, a better society for Americans during the Reconstruction era means having equal protections under the law, a public voice, industries, and opportunities which propel them forward and better the conditions of their lives. In terms of black women, a better society for them would include work outside the home, a public voice, and visibility in American society. Combined, all of these characteristics would combat both racism and sexism by challenging black women's bondage and erasure, which would allow them the chance to not only to influence their communities, but also to be influenced by their communities. As the story comes to an end, Jenny continues her conversation with Aunt Jane and reiterates her hopes for her community; Jenny's belief in education and educating others never changes, nor do her thoughts on racial uplift and betterment of her community. If anything, her conversation with Aunt Jane makes them stronger and demonstrates the power of women and how what they say and think matters and has lasting effects on the community.

Themes of black maternity and black motherhood in "Fancy Etchings" and "Fancy Sketches" are not explicitly discussed, but Harper portrays them in a subtle manner throughout each story. Aunt Jane's relationship with Jenny suggests a maternal and mentoring connection between them and through their continued conversations, Harper illustrates that a mother does not always have to be the birth mother. The conversations between the women indicate the significant influence Aunt Jane holds over Jenny. By having conversations and through asking questions, Aunt Jane challenges Jenny's ideas and forces her to think beyond what she already knows. This image of Aunt Jane reinforces her role as a maternal figure and shows the power she holds in the domestic sphere. Harper further asserts the power black women mothers have in

shaping future artists and leaders by having Aunt Jane encourage Jenny to pursue her dream as a poet, a pursuit which remains outside the domestic sphere.

Harper affirms the power black women and black mothers hold in the home when Aunt Jane converses with Jenny about a wide range of issues plaguing black Americans during the Reconstruction era. Who Jenny is and what she wants to do with her life has been influenced and encouraged by Aunt Jane through their conversations. Aunt Jane appears to be a moral compass for Jenny, and by questioning and talking about various topics, Aunt Jane and Jenny combined show readers how the black family is a unit of political and moral power. The women in the stories were born during different times, but each one knows and believes in the power of black women. Different acts of service such as teaching and educating through poetry by Aunt Jane, Jenny, and Anna, can be considered another form of motherhood, and by showing an alternative image of black maternity and black motherhood, Harper reinforces how black maternity and black motherhood continue to evolve.

The evolving meaning of black motherhood can also be seen through the use of terms such as "Aunt," which Harper subverts. During slavery, honorifics like "Aunt" and "Uncle" were used by white enslavers to refer to old enslaved persons, who were usually obedient and unquestionably loyal to their enslavers. With Aunt Jane, Harper depicts an "Aunt" who is ambitious for her young niece and for other black women and desirous of them to claim their power. There is precedent for this in Harper's "Aunt Chloe" poems, which she first introduced in *Sketches of a Southern Life* (1872). In these poems, Harper portrays an older, formerly enslaved woman who possess wisdom and insight. Through this depiction, Harper subverts and changes the meaning from an old derogatory meaning to an empowering one.

In “Fancy Etchings” and “Fancy Sketches,” Harper works through issues of womanhood and in doing so, reveals how different forms of labor influence black women’s lives and affected their communities. Each story tackles a different issue which affects the black woman and her connection to the black community, but the overarching themes of black womanhood, education, and racial uplift connect each story. Together, the stories and conversations which take place are a form of active engagement and political resistance. Aunt Jane and Jenny resist problematic societal norms like women only staying in the home and not having a public voice. The women face antiquated beliefs together, which build upon the connection they have as women. In creating “Fancy Etchings” and Fancy Sketches,” Harper plays a seminal role in challenging ideas about what type of work women were capable of doing and continues portraying strong and thought-provoking black women.

CHAPTER FOUR

REPETITION AND REVISION IN *IOLA LEROY; OR, SHADOWS UPLIFTED*

In Harper's stories of black women, she simultaneously provides a scathing analysis of slavery and its effects on the black family, and each of her female protagonists maintains her humanity and dignity. In *Iola Leroy; Or Shadows Uplifted* (1892), Harper again examines the literary, political, and social intent of her main female character through the themes of black womanhood, black maternity, and political resistance This novel, like her poem "Eliza Harris" and short fiction "Fancy Etchings" and "Fancy Sketches," uses the technique of revision to present different yet meaningful stories of Iola's separation from her family. The repetition throughout the novel of stories of black families that have been separated allows Harper to emphasize not only the importance of black maternity, but also the reasons why black families should remain intact. Harper also revisits two of her poems, "The Slave Mother" and "The Rallying Cry," in order to add depth to her main character and present her as a paragon of respectable womanhood and political progress for black people.

This novel differs from "Eliza Harris," "Fancy Etchings," and "Fancy Sketches" because it is an example of what the scholar Koritha Mitchell classifies as a sentimental romance, a long fictional work characterized by its ability to garner sympathy and inspire readers to help others from suffering. Mitchell explains that "in both life and literature, women who know how to 'feel right' will be rewarded with husbands and children to guide and nurture."[70] Additionally, in her essay titled '"Of Lasting Service for the Race': The Work of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper," Hazel

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70. Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 26.

Carby asserts that "*Iola Leroy* needs to be assessed not only in formal literary terms but also with close reference to its political intent, as a novel which was written to promote social change, to aid in the uplifting of the race."[71] For Iola, finding a husband and being in the home are not her main goals.[72] Similar to Harper's other female characters in "Eliza Harris," "Fancy Etchings," and "Fancy Sketches," Iola is the embodiment of a strong black female who is concerned about keeping her family together, developing into an influential person, and helping others in her community.

Through repeated stories of family separations, this novel functions as a powerful reminder that all enslaved families had a connection to familial separation because no one was spared from this threat. Iola's story of separation from her mother, Marie, and her brother, Harry is not the only story of separation which is retold: Robert, Iola's long-lost uncle, is separated from his mother as well. Before meeting Iola Leroy and learning her family history, readers are first introduced to Robert (also known as Bob) and other enslaved persons when they are described as waiting for the Union Army to arrive and liberate them from slavery. Uncle Daniel, unlike Robert, is an older enslaved man who will not leave the plantation and his mistress because he gave his word to his master, Marse Robert, that he would stay with the white family. Tom Anderson, another enslaved man, has joined the Union Army with Robert, and he is the reason Iola has been saved from her abusive slaver master. When talking with both of these men, Robert tells them why he is leaving his plantation: He says, "I ain't got nothing 'gainst my Ole Miss, expect she sold my mother from me. And a boy ain't nothin' without his mother."[73] Robert's retelling of his story at the beginning

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71. Carby, "Of Lasting Service for the Race," 63.

72. Mitchell, *Iola Leroy,* 26.

73. Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 74.

of the novel sets up the book's theme of the importance of both black maternity and the black family. Robert's statement to Uncle Daniel connects to both the political and social: it challenges those who believe in the system of slavery and the separation of families for monetary gain, and it proves that even though enslaved children are young when they are separated from their families, the trauma of separation stays with them forever.

When talking to Dr. Gresham, a white doctor in the Union hospital and a potential romantic suitor, Iola recounts the reason why she was separated from her family:

> I was brought hurriedly from the North, and found that my father was dead; that his nearest kinsman had taken possession of our property; that my mother's marriage had been declared illegal, because of an imperceptible infusion of blood in her veins; and that she and her children had been remanded to slavery. I was torn from my mother, sold as a slave, and subjected to the cruel indignities, from which I was rescued and a place given to me in this hospital.[74]

In her own retelling, Iola explains that after her father's death, his cousin, Alfred Lorraine, had control of the family property. He did not believe in marrying for love. Lorraine also did not support her white father Eugene Leroy's marriage to his mulatta wife Marie. When most characters retell Iola's story, however, they do not share all the details as Iola does. This story, however in fact, is retold by not only Iola but also by other characters such as Robert, Col. Robinson, Marie Leroy, Harry Leroy, Dr. Latimer, and the Bishop at the Methodist conference, all of whom solidify its importance and illustrate Harper's belief that it is morally wrong to separate black families and that those who facilitated such separations did irreparable harm to the black community. Each

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74. Harper, *Iola,* Leroy, 139. Dr. Gresham is only a potential romantic suitor for Iola because even though he loves her, if they marry, he wants Iola to hide her true identity as a black woman and instead wants her to pass as white.

time a character retells her story, what they omit and/or include illuminates meanings about motherhood, womanhood, and/or community.

When Col. Robinson, the commander of the post, retells Iola's story to Dr. Gresham, for example, he leaves out many of the harrowing details regarding her separation from family and simply states that, '"Miss Leroy was a slave.'" He adds, "In these States the child follows the condition of its mother. This beautiful and accomplished girl was held by one of the worst Rebels in town."[75] This quotation functions in two ways: by stating that Iola was held captive "by one of the worst Rebels in town" Col. Robinson alludes to the vulnerability of black women because of sexual predation. Through the power of understatement, Col. Robinson's retelling demonstrates how black motherhood is exploited. Although he does not go into detail about Iola's parents, how they met, and how Iola was away at school when she learned of her blackness. By only revealing that Iola was enslaved because of her mother, Col. Robinson does not give light to slavery's inhumane treatment and simplifies the trauma Iola and her mother experienced, which takes away from the complexities of black maternity.

Every time Iola's story is retold, the characters who retell it are describing the story of the tragic mulatta. Iola, as Teresa C. Zackodnik explains, "represent[s] the mulatta as passing for a 'true woman,' a performative act that not only challenges the notion that white women have an exclusive and inherent access to the intelligible form of womanhood in the nineteenth century but one that also reconstitutes true womanhood as an identity acknowledging the lived experiences of African American women."[76] Although many only see Iola as the tragic mulatta because of how

75. Harper, *Iola* Leroy, 100.

76. Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race*, 83.

she was separated from her family and her eventual marriage to Dr. Latimer, a mulatto man who rejects his whiteness, Harper's depiction shows black women in a more complicated light. Iola is the tragic mulatta, but she moves beyond this category because of how she represents intelligence, grace, and dignity; and her character illustrates how the characteristics of virtuous and "true" womanhood are not exclusive to white women. Characters such as Col. Robinson, the Bishop, Robert, and others who retell Iola's story constantly remind readers of this notion as well.

Iola and her brother Harry are eventually reunited at the Methodist Conference, but before they are, Harry tells their mother Marie of his plans to find Iola. On the day of the conference, Harry arrives after the morning session and before the Bishop retells Iola's story of separation.[77] When speaking to the people gathered at the conference, the Bishop says:

> I have an interesting duty to perform. I wish to introduce a young lady to the conference, who was the daughter of a Mississippi planter. She is now in search of her mother and brother, from whom she was sold a few months before the war. Her father married her mother in Ohio, where he had taken her to be educated. After his death they were robbed of their inheritance and enslaved by a distant relative named Lorraine. Miss Iola Leroy is the young lady's name.[78]

The Bishop's retelling of Iola's story provides members of the conference extreme detail because he is trying to gather as much information as possible which will help Iola reconnect with her family. The Bishop's granular retelling of Iola's story from the pulpit is important because so many blacks were not able to read advertisements in the newspapers or on broadsides and they relied heavily on word of mouth. Heather Andrea Williams explains that, "without knowing where their family members had gone, for that matter, whether they were alive or dead, some

77. Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 190-191.

78. Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 191.

people searched, hoping word would circulate enough to bring about a reunion."[79] How the Bishop conveys Iola's story is as important as the story itself. In addition to how the Bishop retells her story, the inclusion of information about Iola's father and mother being married, how her mother was educated, and Iola's distant relative, the Bishop tells a more complete history which shows the horrors of slavery and how the black family, especially women, were taken advantage of by laws regulating black motherhood and assigning the children of enslaved mothers as property.

As Hazel Carby explains: "The course of the novel was structured through the search of Iola for her true family and true community. Though a paternal orphan, Iola was also a maternal heiress to a black family from which she had previously been excluded. Her journey toward finding her real self, depended on finding and bringing together this family; the search culminated in the knowledge of her real community."[80] Iola's search for and discovery of her mother, Marie, and brother, Harry, also leads her back to other family members like her Uncle Robert, and people outside her family like Miss Lucille Delany, a teacher, and Harry's fiancée, and Iola's future

79. Heather Andrea Williams, *Help Me to Find My People*: *The African American for Family Lost in Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 120.

80. Carby, "Of Lasting Service," 76.

husband, Dr. Latimer.[81] Iola's journey to her family moves beyond her family alone because along the way she is introduced to the broader black community that welcomes her. To construct a community larger than her immediate family shows that Iola fully accepts these wider networks as her own. The people who are now part of her community understand her for who she is and know the pain she has gone through. Iola's acceptance of and immersion in the black community is a stark contrast to earlier in the novel when Iola does not fully understand the consequences of slavery and says, "Our slaves do not want their freedom. They would not take it if we gave it to them."[82] The larger black community are the only people who could really have known what Iola has gone through and to find them shows not only how accepting Iola is because she once believed slavery was not a bad thing, but also how accepting others are as well.

As Iola's story continues, Harper strengthens her argument by retelling or revising earlier works of her own and using them in the novel to strengthen her themes of community and freedom. One example of this is when Harper retells the story of Margaret Garner, who was the subject of

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81. In his article titled "From Mysteries to Histories: Cultural Pedagogy in Frances E. W. Harper's *Iola Leroy,"* John Ernest analyzes the significance of the names "Latimer" and "Delany." Ernest acknowledges the connection between Martin Delany, an abolitionist and co-editor of *The North Star* and Lucy A. Delaney, an abolitionist and the author of *From the Darkness Cometh the Light, or Struggles for Freedom* (1891) with Iola's future sister-in-law, Lucille Delany. Furthermore, the name "Latimer," as Ernest points out, comes from George Latimer, a fugitive slave who was caught in Boston in 1842. Lastly, the name "Iola" was the pen name for Ida B. Wells, with whom Harper had both a professional and personal relationship. John Ernest, "From Mysteries to Histories: Cultural Pedagogy in Frances E. W. Harper's *Iola Leroy, "American Literature* 64, no. 3 (1992): 509. For Harper to create fictional names based upon real African Americans pays homage to them, the work they have accomplished, and their influence over Harper. Furthermore, the connection shows how so many abolitionist and activists in the black community were intertwined and invested in the works of others.

82. Harper, *Iola* Leroy, 128.

her poem titled "The Slave Mother" in *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*[83]. Garner, an enslaved woman, ran away from her Kentucky plantation with her husband Robert and their four children in January 1856. In his book about Margaret Garner, Steven Weisenburger explains that Garner and her husband Robert made the mistake of taking shelter with other escaping members of their family in Cincinnati. Before they could leave Cincinnati for Canada, their enslaver arrived with US Marshals to recapture them. As Weisenburger states, "At the house of her cousin Elijah Kite, Margaret Garner picked up a butcher knife because—as she later explained to abolitionists—she had to put as many of her children as possible in a place where slave catchers could never reach them."[84] Although Garner tried to save all of their children from slavery by killing them, she only murdered one of the four, and the remaining family members were captured and returned to slavery.

In *Iola Leroy,* Harper condenses "The Slave Mother." The novel's version of the poem includes details about the pain both mothers and children experience, how slavery will tear apart families, and how children do not belong to their mothers. An example of this is when Harper writes:

> He is not hers, although she bore
> For him a mother's pains;
> He is not hers, although her blood
> Is coursing through his veins!

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83. In the 1857 publication of *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects,* the title of the poem is "The Salve Mother: A Tale of the Ohio, which is where Garner was captured. Additionally, this poem was not included in the 1854 publication of *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects;* it was, however, included in the 1857 publication, which is a year after Garner tried to escape.

84. Steven Weisenburger, *Modern Medea: A Family Story of Slavery and Child-Murder from the Old South (*New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 279. In this book about Garner, Weisenburger notes that until 1987, when *Beloved* by Toni Morrison was published, the story of Margaret Garner was forgotten. In Morrison's novel, Sethe, the main protagonist, was was based on Garner and her story of infanticide. It should also be noted that Toni Morrison's *Black Book* contains clippings and other news reports about the real Margaret Garner.

He is not hers, for cruel hands
May rudely tear apart
The only wreath of household love
That binds her breaking heart

These two stanzas emphasize a mother's pain due to slavery's ability to separate families and disallow her the possession of the child she birthed, even though they share the same blood. In the beginning of the novel, when Iola converses with one of her friends about slaves and freedom, she makes the claim that her family's slaves would not choose freedom because they are content living in that system. Iola's perspective here is that of a white person who cannot identify with the plight of African American women; her obliviousness to the discontentment of African American women arises because she does not know she is black. Iola's friend responds by telling the story of Margaret Garner, which shows that black enslaved mothers are far from content. Her friend says, "I do not think that the slave mother who took her four children, crossed the Ohio River on the ice, killed one of her children, and attempted the lives of the other two, was a contented slave."[85] The story of Margaret Garner shows the lengths mothers would go to in order to protect their children from slavery.

The inclusion of Margaret Garner's story here in the novel is short and condensed. By not mentioning Garner's husband, Harper chooses to focus on the black enslaved mother and her children, which emphasizes her interest in black maternity and motherhood. The novel's version also excises details about Garner's enslavers and how he and the US Marshals found her and her family in Ohio. To only speak of how Garner killed one child moves us to consider and think

85. Harper, *Iola Leroy*,128.

deeply about slavery, and the plight of enslaved mothers. This shortened retelling is just as powerful as the longer "The Slave Mother."

Another example of Harper's revision is her inclusion in *Iola Leroy* of a new version of "The Rallying Cry," which she initially published in *The A.M.E. Christian Recorder* in 1891.[86] Towards the end of the novel, when Iola, Miss Delany, Harry, and Dr. Latimer are with others at a conference discussing the welfare of the race, Harper inserts the full version of this poem. The poem, read aloud by Miss Delany, functions as a call to action for younger black Americans; since many members of the black community are gathered to discuss the race, the insertion of this poem proves meaningful because it serves as a reminder that much work needs to be done. More specifically, the poem suggests that young black Americans living and working after the Reconstruction has ended should not believe that their lives will be easy, pleasurable, or filled with wealth until they change what many white Americans think of African Americans. The novel's version of "The Rallying Cry," which changes the title, switches the order of stanzas, and partly rewords a line, demonstrates these meanings.

The version of the poem included in the novel is retitled "A Rallying Cry." The change in articles from "The" to "A" signals a call to action against a single element or event. This poem, for example, could potentially serve as a call to action against lynchings; *Iola Leroy* was published in 1892, which is the same year Ida B. Wells began her anti-lynching campaign.[87] In the novel specifically, racial violence becomes a topic of conversation when Iola has dinner with

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86. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day*, 265.

87. In 1894, two years after the publication of *Iola Leroy,* Harper published an essay about "How to Stop Lynching" in *Women's Era.* And before *Iola Leroy* or "How to Stop Lynching," racial violence was one of the many causes Harper was invested in and she spoke of lynching in her serialized novel, Minnie's Sacrifice (1869).

Robert and Aunt Linda, a former slave on the plantation; Robert states how black people, if given the power would not lynch, murder, and burn people the white Americans do. In regard to the poem, in the first stanza, Harper writes, "Have you no other mission / Than music, dance, and song?" [88] For Harper, a meaningful life comes from assisting others, and perhaps helping other African Americans escape the specific threat of racial violence. As the poem continues, Harper communicates to her readers how helping others can be difficult and dangerous, and she advises them to "shrink not from toil or hardship."[89] This poem underscores the theme of community, which is paramount throughout the novel because of how it advocates for others in need. To help those who cannot help themselves requires courage, strength, and valor, which Harper acknowledges.

To change the order of the poem's stanzas also enables Harper to engage actively with her readers. In the original 1891 poem, Harper writes:

> Engrave upon your banners,
> In words of golden light;
> That mercy, truth and justice
> Are more than godless might.
>
> Count life a dismal failure
> Unblessing and unblest,
> That seeks in ceaseless ease
> For pleasure or for rest.
>
> With courage, strength, and valor
> Your lives and actions brace;
> Shrink not from pain and hardship
> And dangers bravely face.[90]

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88. Harper, *Iola Leroy*, *231.*

89. Harper, *Iola* Leroy, 231.

90. Harper, *A Brighter Coming* Day, 265-*266.*

In the novel, however, Harper inverts the order of the stanzas by moving the first stanza to the end of the sequence. Through changes in the order of the stanzas, and in the language of the poem, Harper changes the meaning of this part of the poem. The inversion of stanzas commands young black Americans to have moral and meaningful lives. The poem's overall meaning, however, remains unchanged. The phrase the "rallying cry" in the title signals bringing people together and calling attention to the collective—the collective good. In a poem about uplift and God's ability to deliver justice, Harper focuses on groups of people creating change. Harper speaks to a younger generation and wants them to be active in the pursuit of equality for black Americans and to be persuaded by hardship. Although this poem speaks to younger generations, it serves as a reminder to older generations and others that changes in society take time and perseverance. To mention failure and hardship before honor, truth, and justice highlights how the fight for equality is difficult and may be a long one, but ultimately will be rewarding.

The novel's focus on black women and their families connects Iola Leroy and her fight to Harper's earlier story of "Eliza Harris," as well as to Jenny's desire to be a poet in Harper's earlier "Fancy Etchings" and "Fancy Sketches." Each woman, in her respective way, uplifts her community—Eliza by escaping slavery and keeping her family together, Jenny by fighting to become a poet, and Iola through getting a job as a saleswoman, working outside the home, and dedicating herself to the race. For Iola, however, racial uplift does not become an integral part of her story until she finds her family. When Iola decides to work outside the home and consistently tells employers that she is black and not white, she fights for the respect of her people, and in doing so, she shows her commitment to them. When in conversation with one of the ladies she works with, for example, Iola states her desire to attend church services with her own people.[91]

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91. Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 199.

This statement functions as a form of political resistance because of how Iola is not embarrassed to be black. Although she can pass for white, she chooses to expose her true self, which resists ideas that blacks wanted to be white and part of the white community. In being honest about who she is and where she comes from, Iola acknowledges allegiance to her black community. She simultaneously protests the ill treatment of black women not only in the workplace, but also in society. The acknowledgement of her community and the loss of her job hinders Iola individually because she is not yet able to work outside the home and earn her own living, when thinking about the larger picture, the lack of a job helps her demonstrate the importance of the black community and black women collectively.

When talking with Uncle Robert, Iola says, "I have a theory that every woman ought to know how to earn her own living."[92] Iola repeats this idea, albeit with different language, by stating, "I think that every woman should have some skill or art which would insure her at least a comfortable support."[93] The belief that women should work outside the home functions in two ways for Harper, who makes it known that black women need to work outside the homes not only for themselves, but also for the good of their families. Work outside the home for black women becomes a way for them to learn skills which gives them the freedom to not depend on men alone. Ultimately, the desire for black women to make their own living and do work outside the home allows Harper to tell readers how women can be useful in multiple ways and that, they, too can contribute to the improvement of families and society.

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92. Harper, *Iola Leroy*,198.

93. Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 201.

For Iola, to find a job outside of the domestic sphere also exposes racist tendencies in the North. When Iola searches for a job, she insists on telling her coworkers that she is black and not white. Once her coworkers find out this information, they refuse to work with her, which showcases how those in the North are racist as well. Another example of this northern racism is when Iola goes to New England to teach and she meets with a matron. Iola informs her of her blackness by saying: "'I must be honest with you; I am a colored woman.' Swift as light, a change passed over the face of the matron. She withdrew her arm from Iola, and said: 'I must see the board of managers about it.' When the board met, Iola's case was put before them, but they decided not to receive her."[94] This example exemplifies how even in the North, black Americans were still seen as non-citizens and inferior to white Americans, and therefore not fully accepted. The repetition of such examples of potential white employers rejecting Iola because of her blackness elucidates how racist tendencies were not just part of the South; they, too, existed in the North and in some ways prevented Iola from easily finding a job outside the home.

As the novel concludes, we see that by finding her family and dedicating herself to her people, Iola can move on and help those black people who have not had the same privileges as she does. In a conversation with Dr. Latimer, Iola states that "'I wish I could do something more for our people than I am doing. I taught in the South till failing health compelled me to change my employment. But, now I am well and strong, and I would like to do something of lasting service for the race.'"[95] The desire to make a lasting change is one that will solidify Iola's place as a black woman and her place in American society. To "be of lasting service" to the black

94. Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 200.

95. Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 238.

community is to improve the community and makes the members better collectively than they would be alone. *Iola Leroy; Or, Shadows Uplifted* thus is the story of a black woman fighting to better herself through reconnection to her family and community, and her fighting for her community by trying to help them surmount racism and the obstacles of post-Reconstruction era life.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

"Write, out of the fullness of your heart, a book to inspire men and women with a deeper sense of justice and humanity."

"'Doctor,' replied Iola, 'I would do it if I could, not for the money it might bring, but for the good it might do. But who believes any good can come out of the black Nazareth?"

"Miss Leroy, out of the race must come its own thinkers and writers. Authors belonging to the white race have written good racial books, for which I am deeply grateful, but it seems to be almost impossible for a white man to put himself completely in our place. No man can feel the iron which enters another man's soul." --Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, *Iola Leroy* [96]

I conclude this project the way I started it—with the same quotation from *Iola Leroy; Or Shadows Uplifted* (1892). I want to emphasize the power of black women writers and their ability to change lives through storytelling. Through repetition, revision, and reassemblage of her thoughts, ideas, and language, Frances E. W. Harper created representations of women such as Eliza Harris, Jenny, and Iola Leroy who are powerful and who possess a deep sense of justice and a desire for a better and stronger society that includes black people, especially black women. Each of Harper's fictional women demonstrates her strength, her belief in the familial until, and the will to survive in a country not meant for her.

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96. Harper, *Iola Leroy; Or, Shadows Uplifted*, 238.

The works from Harper's *oeuvre* which I have examined are forms of protest and catalysts for social change because of how they challenge the erasure of black womanhood and make visible the realities of black maternity. Through this kind of protest, Harper implores readers to learn from the mistakes of the past and to create a better future. Because she chooses to write about women and women's perspectives, Harper's critique of America is one that reimagines a more inclusive America. The more attention we readers pay to her revision, repetition, and remixing of language and ideas in Harper's work, the more we realize the importance of what she is fighting for.

As I conclude my thesis, I would like to reflect upon Harper and her accomplishments as a black female writer in the nineteenth century. Harper cared for other people, and their well-being, and she believed in the power of education and uplift. Thinking back on her beliefs and the messages she presents in each work, I wonder what she would say about America today. More specifically, I wonder what she would think of the events affecting black women and the black community today. Harper's message spans time and can currently be applied to black women, the black community, and also Americans in general. I think she would likely acknowledge the progress which has been made, but she would also tell black women to keep fighting for topics about which she wrote, such as equal protection under the law and better educations, and to fight for other topics such as equal pay and the elimination of the high maternal mortality rate among African American women.[97] Harper makes it clear that the

97. For further information about black women's high mortality rate, see "Maternal Mortality in the Twenty-First Century." In *Medical Disorders in Pregnancy*, *Obstetrics and Gynecology Clinics of North America.* And for further information about equal pay, see "Equal Work." In *Maryland Law Review.*

continued use of black female voices changes people, spaces, and places; black women have the ability to change aspects of life for not only themselves, but for the whole black community.

With each literary work and with each female protagonist, Harper proves that black women matter and should not remain voiceless. Her works, however, do not only advocate for the voices of black and for black women to uplift other black women: they advocate for black women uplifting the entire black community. I believe that although much progress has been made in terms of the black community helping out one another, Harper would continue to advocate for racial uplift, especially in times of political discord. The theme of racial uplift is one that Harper could speak about across time. I would argue that her work does do this; racial uplift never changes, and Harper's belief that those who are more fortunate must help the less fortunate resonates today and will continue to resonate in the future.

Harper's work for me—the writer, critic, black woman living in twenty-first century America, and as an American—is challenging, eye-opening, impactful, and thoughtful. I believe in her message and what she fights for, and I also believe that her work should be widely circulated today because we could all learn from what she was writing about in the nineteenth century. To have a voice and to use one's voice is to change lives and impart knowledge upon others; and although it may be difficult and uncomfortable, helping others, if given the opportunity, is what matters most. Harper's work teaches this, it reiterates this sentiment, and it continually challenges readers like me to understand and do this. And as a black woman living in the twenty-first century and as an American, I want the best for my community and I want America to be a place where black women are fully accepted and encouraged, but I also want a country that understands the importance of black Americans. Harper's *oeuvre* captures the importance of black women and black people and she continually explores why we are so

important to America as a whole. Reading and understanding her work has taught me about my own voice and how important it is that I help other black Americans, because when I help them, I help the whole community. As Harper once said, “We are all bound up together in one great bundle of humanity, and society cannot trample on the weakest and feeblest of its members without receiving the curse of its own soul.”[98]

98. Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day,* 217.

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