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CARIBBEAN FOLK: ENGENGERING THE COLOR CLASS POLITICS OF CLAUDE MCKAY'S BANANA BOTTOM

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Charmaine DaCosta

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Introduction

The English-speaking Caribbean of the early twentieth century, nearly 100 years subsequent to the abolition of slavery in the region, was an exceedingly challenging and arduous place in which to live for blacks and whites alike, however, the nature of these difficulties was often predicated upon the color of one's skin. While the black person lived under the mantle of disenfranchisement, limited or no opportunity for progress, and the stigma of the inherent worthlessness of one cursed to have been born in black skin, whites lived with the fear of a black rebellion, sickness and even death from diseases for which they were constitutionally ill-equipped, as well as the burden of fashioning a viable society out of disparate peoples thrown together and forced to coexist in the aftermath of an artificial society dismantling, which had been built upon commercial greed.

Blacks and whites lived within the confines of a peculiar but generally accepted set of rules in which societal demarcations, the basis of which extend to life in the context of the larger Caribbean culture, dictated life constructed upon race, ethnicity, skin color, class and gender. This stratification, referred to by Patricia Hill Collins as "interlocking systems of oppressions,"[i] strictly speaking, separated the populous not simply on a black white vector but multi-dimensionally on a gradating continuum of shade on a spectrum from black to white, that defined the extent to

which the individual could rise to prominence, or not, the religion(s) one practiced, whom one could marry, and, even more subtly, the extent to which one had the right to hope.

But, did there exist another way of being? Was it possible to be black and dignified, black and worthwhile, black and self-sufficient; not within the context of blackness in a white slaveocracy or post plantation society, but simply as a human being?

Claude McKay's critically acclaimed 1933 novel, *Banana Bottom*, is a rich, spellbinding critique of the dynamics that comprise the life of the folk and explores the color, class, and gender issues indicative of the Jamaican societal norms of the early 20th century. As Carolyn Cooper puts it, the choices "for girls it is the blighting early pregnancy that seals her fate; for boys it is the nonspecific threat of not 'getting anywhere' in life."[ii]

The work's protagonist, Bita Plant, is a study in the exploration of the authority of patronage, the opportunity and attendant expectations of a European education for the colored masses, and many the faceted potentialities of the outcomes of higher education in the limited environment of Jubilee and Banana Bottom. Cooper calls this the "recurring fairy-tale motif of Afro-Jamaican folk culture…the instrumentality of book learning as an engine of upward social mobility."[iii]

Fictional works of literature are not perfect reflections of society but rather, reflections of reality as perceived by the author. The novel engages in a discourse of self-love and self-acceptance that eludes most of the Banana Bottom inhabitants.

This sad state of affairs, this making of a people the 'other' in his own country, was sustained for much of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century and, though it still seems to be that case for many Caribbeans of a darker hue and particularly in Jamaica, the island in which this drama is staged, there is hope that, with a new cultivated sense of self, the cycle of self-hate will finally come to an end. Employing a close read of certain textual elements, I will demonstrate how Claude McKay's Banana Bottom attempts to situate racial, social, and gendered predispositions of the marginalized masses, as well as their level of complicity in their disenfranchisement.

CLAUDE MCKAY

Claude McKay was born on September 15th, 1889 in Sunny Ville, Clarendon, in the island of Jamaica. His parents, land-owning farmers, were successful, by modest standards, and respected community leaders[iv]. In his own words in his autobiography, *My Green Hills of Jamaica*, McKay writes, "In our village we were poor enough but proud peasants. We had plenty to eat. We had enough to wear, a roof against rain, and beautiful spreading trees to shade us from the sun."[v]

Unlike most blacks whose ancestors had been brought to the Americas as slaves, McKay could trace his maternal ancestry back to Madagascar and his paternal roots to the Ashanti people. Indicative of the rebellious nature of the typical Jamaican slave, McKay's Madagascar clan kept themselves together, while being sold, by threatening to kill themselves should any of them be separated. With this as the lens through which he saw the world it is no wonder he was hard pressed to acknowledge any form of racial inferiority, which was the hallmark of the

colonized mindset. "With the blood of such rebels in his veins, and their memory to stir it, Claude McKay grew up proud of his race and with no disposition to apologize for his color."[vi]

But McKay did not come upon these ideas in a vacuum. He was strongly influenced by the books he read starting at about the age of six when he moved to Montego Bay to live with his brother, who was a schoolteacher, and his wife. His parents had determined that it was time for Claude to start getting a formal education. By the age of ten, Claude had developed into an avid reader and a poetic prodigy. The books he read by famous free thinkers stretched his young mind and his brother encouraged his passion for reading, even though his new knowledge ran contrary to those things he had learned in Sunday school. His brother, the church's organist, however, had a more philosophical than religious appreciation of church and so encouraged the young enthusiast to continue in his pursuit of knowledge.

Claude was sixteen years old by the time he moved to Kingston and became exposed to the poverty and oppression of an urban city. Here, even the police who are charged to protect and serve become the new enforcer for the white ruling class, "the black policeman is seen as the henchman of the White Oppressors."[vii] Still, these hardships did not prepare him for the hardships he would later experience in New York.[viii] Claude believed that blacks ought to have more pride in themselves and expressed as much in his poetry and other writings. Believing that there existed an inextricable interdependence between Black Nationalism and Socialism, McKay articulated the underpinning of the black power movement long before Kwame Nkruma et al conceived it. His Marxist ideology, gained upon his introduction to the

writings of Karl Marx while living in England in 1919-1920, had him identify squarely with the proletariat and, marrying his art with his politics, he briefly became associate editor of the Liberator, a socialist publication formerly known as the New Masses, and in which he had published previous works including *If we must Die*, written in response to the lynchings of the "red summer" of 1919.

Deciding to live the socialist life, McKay moved to Russia in 1922 where he was enthusiastically received. He became the darling of the Soviet party but quickly recognized that he was nothing more than fodder for communist propaganda as it pertained to racial equality. According to Max Eastman's biographical notes in Selected Poems of Claude McKay, "There being no Negroes in Russia, and one very much needed to demonstrate the new race solidarity, Claude was taken up–and played up…Adopted as a kind of mascot by the Red Army and Navy."[ix]

McKay moved to France after a year in Russia, where he had become ill and had subsequently gone to Berlin, Germany for treatment. The poet, ever politically astute, had been most critical of the position of the French press regarding its coverage of the occupation of the Rhineland by the French and their use of Senegalese troops (Senegal being a colonial territory of France), whom they believed posed a treat to the racial purity of the Germans through miscegenation. Even the thought that blacks were a threat to whites based upon the possibility of interracial coupling was offensive to McKay and was clear indication to him that Europe had its own brand of racism.

While other black writers and politicos, including the much venerated Frederick Douglas, touted the French for their "liberte, egalite, fraternite…he

(Douglas) liked Paris because he did not feel any color prejudice there,"[x] McKay believed that French aloofness fueled the impression of liberalism while the display of tolerance served to disguise their deeply rooted xenophobia, which played itself out fully in its colonization and mistreatment of Senegal. The underlying insincerity of French liberality was easily discerned in the attitudes of the aristocracy and comments of art critics. Regarding Ira Aldridge, the most famous Negro actor of the day, critic Theophile Gaurier wrote, "I was anticipating a loose-jointed impetuous manner, somewhat wild…probably to appear cultured as a white man, his style was sober, steady, classical and majestic."[xi] And about Phyllis Wheatley, Abbe Gregoire wrote that her accomplishments were "proof that the black race could elevate itself to civilization" [xii] thus establishing that the overwhelming presupposition of the black is that his natural state is that of savage.

In McKay's mind, white education necessitated that they, whites, hold a person of color as a being consistent with inferiority or something exotic. McKay was willing to stare this callous hypocrisy in the face, unlike most blacks or whites for that matter, making it plain that he saw things for what they truly were, and that he was not afraid to challenge the status quo. He railed against Senegalese troops fighting in Germany because he believed that this directly fostered French domination over French West Africa. In fact, while American blacks who fought for France were treated well by the French, courtesy of their being Americans, the Senegalese, who were French colonists, were treated quite poorly and put on the front lines in combat as they were considered the most expendable of the fighting force. "French whites denied the black man even mere physical equality." [xiii]

Meanwhile, McKay bemoaned the short memories of the black intelligentsia who forgot about, or ignored, the exploitation of Africans in the presence of smiling faces and kind words. Blacks who were treated well in France seemed to be ignorant of the atrocities visited upon the French colonies while they castigated other European countries engaged in identical activities such as Belgium in the Congo. The assumption was that the blacks did not want to know, perhaps because while whites may criticize the system and be celebrated for their perspective, the black person who dared to speak out often found himself cast out as a social leper.[xiv] McKay considered "French hypocrisy" the best propaganda in the world because they hate colored people yet pretend to be liberal.[xv] He found the French to be narrow minded, that they neither knew nor cared for the outside world simply because it was not French. "They tolerate strangers and allow them to do as they please as long as they don't meddle in French national affairs or …hurt their (French) pride. [xvi]

It is from this rich, thoughtful, color consciousness that McKay writes *Banana Bottom*, imbuing his protagonist with all of the pride and tenacity and sensitivity of a people marginalized yet finding joy in the life they live.

BANANA BOTTOM: THE STORY

The novel is established in a country mountain village on the occasion of the return of Bita Plant to Banana Bottom, or rather, to Jubilee, where she had been in residence at the mission house as the adoptive daughter and "The pride and joy of the Reverends Malcolm and Priscilla Craig." (11) As the story unfolds, we learn that

Bita had been raped seven years prior by Crazy Bow, a third generation progeny of the Scotsman who founded the village and set the slaves free prior to the emancipation of slavery in the British colonies, itself then 100 years post emancipation and laboring under the color, class and gender issues of the era. Bita, though aware of the advantages of her education and position at the mission, steadily grows dissatisfied with life with the Craigs. The dissatisfaction grows as Bita gradually starts to yearn for certain natural, un-manipulated, unadulterated beauty and freedoms of the peasant life she has left behind. Things seem to be going according to plan when Bita is betrothed to, Herald Newton Day, her male counterpart whom the Craigs have been grooming to take over the church when Reverend Craig retires, and although he leaves Bita cold, she has been trained to take this position so she is honor bound to do her duty. But after an unfortunate affair involving inappropriate behavior with an animal, Newton Day is forced to leave Jubilee and the island all together. The plan dead, the Craigs are devastated. But, suddenly free of this encumbrance, Bita again feels the walls of her life closing in around her and she rebels by keeping company with Hopping Dick, a person deemed undesirable by the Craigs. When her recalcitrance could no longer be tolerated she is made to choose either marriage to the undesirable man or submit to the rules of the mission. She chooses marriage but Hopping Dick, who, having no such intention, is forced to admit that he was only having a good time enjoying the newfound celebrity of being Bita's escort and couldn't marry her:

> 'I can't get married now,' he said. 'I don't hab no house.'…Hopping dick had never thought that his little philandering would have carried to such a crisis. He had been prancing proud of the opportunity of going about in the company of the most cultivated

> Negro girl in Jubilee. How it had enhanced his prestige among his associates of the Saturday-night dances and card parties and in the grog shops!
> But for all his vanity he had never entertained the slightest possibility of Bita becoming his wife. Bita was…the young lady of the Jubilee mission. He had never thought of her out of that setting. (223-224)

Bita is forced to leave the life of relative ease in Jubilee at the mission house and return to Banana Bottom to the familiar folkways she has longed for. Before long, Bita finds true love with Jubban, a drayman, an honest man of few words but strong character, who has been raised by her father, and the two live happily ever after, proving that one cannot find true happiness trying to be someone one is not.

BITA (BITTER) THE BLACK GIRL

The story emphasizes that the protagonist's Christian name in full being Tabitha, she has come to be known as Bita for short. But throughout the work, major characters have been given names that speak to either their character or a personal flaw. It's no surprise that the community gossip is Sister Phibby Patroll who walked 15 miles overnight to deliver the news of Bita being raped. "Sister Phibby Patroll…first to take the story to the Craigs in Jubilee…the town was fifteen miles from Banana Bottom." (15) 'Phibby' audio phonically resembles 'fib', as in, to tell tales or trivial lies, and Patroll references walking about steadily and with purpose. The combined effect of the name communicates the willingness of Miss Phibby to walk seemingly any distance, and at any time, to be the bearer of news, good or bad. As for Bita Plant, "bitta" is the pronunciation of the word 'bitter' in Jamaican vernacular. Bitter plant, or bitterroot, is the common name given to certain medicinal types of plants in Jamaica, employed in traditional folk remedy of

common ailments. The colloquial understanding is that the bitter plant, typically crushed and then steeped in hot water and taken as a tea, though not pleasant tasting, once administered, produces the most efficacious results and therefore worth the distasteful exercise of taking it.

I am at once taken by the dual understanding of this heroine's name; a bitter experience allows her to escape the mundanity of the life prescribed for members of her color and class in Banana Bottom into a life of education, travel and "gentle living" in Jubilee and in Europe. On the other hand, she is a black girl and that bitter pill will have to be swallowed regardless of whether she is educated in England or had never left Banana Bottom, in the eyes of many who choose to cling to the color codes that define the lives of Caribbean people. A black woman must be content with being treated as an object of ridicule or worse. By way of illustration, when Bita refuses the advances of the vulgar Marse Arthur, he responds with the insult, "Be damned wid you!...Wha' de hell you putting on style. You ought to feel proud a gen'man want fer kiss you when youse only a black gal." To add insult to injury, Marse Arthur continues to remind Bita that "fer all you ejication an' putting on you nuttin' more'n a nigger gal."(262)

Negotiating race and color had been, and continues to be, challenging at best in the Caribbean stemming from the multitudinous sets of rules to be considered and navigated based upon the appearance of an individual. To further entrench the social order of color, there is a firmly established protective barrier erected on each rung of the color ladder that allows for pass-through from higher to lower but not the reverse. Therefore, while someone on the highest social order, whites, may

condescend to grace the affairs of a person of color uninvited, the same liberty is not condoned in the reverse. H. Hoetink, in his study of the variants of Caribbean relations for the Institute of Race Relations in London in 1967, borrowed much material from a study called *De Gespleten Samenleving in het Caribisch Gebied*, by Von Garcum, originally published in 1962, in the Netherlands. This work covered the varying approaches of Iberian and Northern European colonialization of Caribbean and the resultant and enduring class disparities of manumitted persons. Hoetink erroneously situates Brazil in the Caribbean, though this may have been done for purposes of dealing with the whole concept of slavery in the Americas outside the United States. Nevertheless, many of the claims he makes regarding the British Caribbean in regards to the stratification of society by color, are echoed in the works of other Caribbean writers including V. S. Naipaul, Michelle Cliff and Claude McKay.

In Trinidad, Hoetink writes, "The highest social stratum consists almost exclusively of whites, the intermediate one of coloureds and the lowest socio-economic groups consist of Negroes."[xvii]

Added to the complexity of the color question, there exists the question of 'shade' and the possession of features typically recognized as 'African', which complicate not only economic prospects but that of love and marriage as well.

> The closer the approximation to European features, the more likely is the individual man both to get acceptance as an individual and to achieve mobility by marrying someone even closer to the European in skin colour, hair and facial characteristics.

> Very dark-skinned women of the coloured intermediate group are in a difficult position as regards chances of marriage because of the emphasis on racial characteristics as a factor in social mobility. They often remain unmarried or marry someone of lower social position than himself or herself, for 'the great importance attached to skin colour tends to override the desirability of marrying into a good family on the part of many dark-skinned men.'[xviii]

In British Guiana the situation is stated thus, "the white group forms the top of the social pyramid…cohesive, small in numbers…homogeneous…relations to the rest of the population is maintained by means of an 'intricate, …covert mythology of racial purity.'"[xix]

Hoetink goes on to give a very casual treatment of the situation in Jamaica by acknowledging that this island mirrors the same attitudes. If one were in doubt however, McKay's novel paints a perfect picture of the color-, class-construct that defines relations in Banana Bottom. Throughout the work there are references to color and the positions to which one was either relegated or elevated depending on ones particular shade. Paying credence to the ideology of the day, black skinned peasants, McKay suggests, have no real aptitude for book learning but do well in some kind of trade, "many of them had a real aptitude for the needle, when figures and letters bounced off their little tight-rolled kinks and could not get into their heads at all. (142) Still, there were those whose tight-rolled kinks still allowed figures and letters to pass through into the brain, yet they were not allowed to pass into the professional sphere befitting their educational achievements. The result of

this being passed over, many dark skinned men go off to seek their fortunes in the United States or more likely Panama, where work was plentiful for a strong black man. One such villager of the darker hue did just that as, "The Civil Service Exam…had been abandoned for a system of selection…recommendation by people in respectable, responsible positions…in order to limit the Civil Service posts to light-colored middle class and bar aspirants from the black peasantry." (234-5) On the other hand, the lighter skinned could expect, "post and telegraph offices…a haven of employment for poor light-coloured women of gentle breeding." (182) Similarly, smart, light-skinned individuals could also find employment as clerks and sales girls in prosperous commercial villages.

Work was not the only place where class and color clashed. Banana Bottom's tea dances were occasions for the peasants to revel in ways not approved by high or middle class society, or the church. Bita being encouraged to go to a tea dance and to further compound matters by being goaded into dancing was a significant step in regression from her new station in life, as defined by her education. The dance symbolically brought "down the barrier between high and low breeding and common pleasures." (84)

Common pleasures to which one can assume blacks have a proclivity, according to the commonly held beliefs, are sexual indiscretions. Black women use their bodies for trade. They give themselves to white and light skinned men, live in long term unions in the absence of the security of marriage as "concubines," to use McKay's indelicate term, or have children, "one, two, three, some as many as five, without the benefit of a steady mate." (51)

Nevertheless, McKay seems sympathetic to the plight of the dark woman who compromises herself in order to keep food on her table and a roof over her head. In his poem "The Harlem Dancer" he states that what one sees in a woman who gives herself away in order to survive is not the woman at all, just a representation of womanhood, a shell, with no real person inside:

> Applauding youths laughed with young prostitutes
> And watched her perfect, half-clothed body sway;
> Her voice was like the sound of blended flutes
> Blown by black players upon a picnic day.
> She sang and danced on gracefully and calm,
> The light gauze hanging loose about her form;
> To me she seemed a proudly-swaying palm
> Grown lovelier for passing through a storm.
> Upon her swarthy neck black, shiny curls
> Profusely fell; and, tossing coins in praise,
> The wine-flushed, bold-eyed boys, and even the girls,
> Devoured her with their eager, passionate gaze;
> *But, looking at her falsely-smiling face*
> *I knew her self was not in that strange place*.[xx]

McKay recognizes that a woman forced to resort to this kind of survival strategy must deaden herself inside in order to endure the touch of men like Marse Arthur and Busha Gengley who don't see them as entirely human but rather, pieces of flesh that satisfy biological urges but little more. The less than honorable Busha Gengley, possessing of a "robust and purely animal sexuality (had)…many concubines, from black to near-white as well as an array of children" (129) did not take kindly to black girls who didn't know how to fit in to the established system of things so he did not hesitate to reveal that he believed Bita unfortunate to "have been educated above her station…A girl like her is bound to be unhappy in the long run." (129) But, Gengley possessed a narrow, though not unique, view of black

people; all his life he had been "so absorbed in the bodies of Negroes that he had never had any time to find out anything about their souls." (130)

At the root of this however, there lies the succinct understanding of each member of society of who he is and where he belongs within the system. Each one is responsible for keeping up his end of the bargain according to class stratification:

> 'Thas de best way to tek life. We hab to respectin' our bettahs. De lower mus' look up to the higher an' de higher to the highest. That's de way life is plan' an' we hab to fallaw de plan, or dere wouldn' be any kind of a life to speak of.' (108)

Louise Bennett adds another perspective to the color class conundrum in postulating that blacks of the lighter hue are not so much proud of their light skins as they are angry that they are not actually white and so compensate by lording it over their darker brethren, treating them with contempt. In her poem "Colour-Bar" Bennett makes two important assertions that seem to reflect the collective consciousness of Banana Bottom. The first is that although issues of race had become matters of interest to the Crown and debated often in the House of Commons, the problem was not with relations between blacks and whites as it was between blacks and browns, since blacks would rather be white and, because they are not, take out their frustrations on each other. The second assertion is that neither education nor religion will eradicate these color issues.

> Sir Lyle eena House o' Commons
> Dah-talk bout "colour-bar"
> But right eena Jamaica we
> Dah-have big "colour-war."
>
> Po' Sir Lyle hooda shock fe know
> Dat de colour fight dung yah
> Is not wid black an w'ite, but wid
> Red nayga and black nayga

Some o' de red-kin nayga feel
Soh bex dat dem noh w'ite
Dat dem start fe cuss black nayga,
An soh dem ketch a fight…

Since edication an religion
Kean stop de colour war,
We need a dose o' fire fe
Bun dung de colour bar.[xxi]

Bita Plant is, though representative of the blackest of the Negro people in Banana Bottom, the antithesis of the self-deprecating black's longing for white skins. And, while one might be tempted to credit education with Bita's remarkable sense of self, I believe that this quality, as Louise Bennett expresses in Colour-war, was not achieved through her formal education in a foreign environment but rather, the natural outgrowth of being early initiated into the rites of healthy amour-propre by observation of and reinforcement in her home where she was showered generous measures of love by her father and stepmother. She "had been given lots of rope to roam around...and much petted by her father and stepmother." (7) This combination of love and freedom developed in Bita a confidence that would sustain her throughout the period of her separation from her home to live with the Craigs and ultimately from everything familiar to be educated in England.

Jordan Plant, though very much a part of the Banana Bottom community was not a man who thought little of himself. And though a proud man, he did not engage in the scurrilous behavior of the local "fancy" men, nor did he treat Bita with the lack of natural, genuine affection so well represented in the novel as the norm in Negro relations. He worked hard and, tied to the land, he was a prodigious acquisitor of land and natural entrepreneur with a successful farm of over one hundred acres. All

these unspoken experiences would have equipped Bita with an almost innate understanding of her worth that coupled with familial love would have developed in her a confidence and self-respect that is difficult to learn without early and constant reinforcement.

CLASS CONSTRUCTION: BITA PLANT & HERALD NEWTON DAY: THE NEW BLACK MIDDLE CLASS

The education of Bita and Herald Newton Day is a variation on the color barrier erected between the white, planter class aristocracy, represented in Banana Bottom by Busha Gengley and the Reverend and Mrs. Craig, and the black peasantry; fairer skinned Negroes who are referred to as colored generally hold this line. "The 'coloured' group stood between the mass and the…governing classes…all the white-color jobs of business and government were reserved for it." (5) In the case of the Craigs, they cast themselves in the role of creator since the adoption, education, and grooming of Herald Newton Day as successor of Reverend Craig and Bita as the perfect accompaniment to Newton Day as wife. This is a social experiment that goes as strangely awry as Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly's biological experiment with the monster, Frankenstein. The experiment was doomed to failure from the start because there is no natural love for blacks in the Protestant religious orders, which are based upon that religion's materialism. In his own words McKay says in his essay, Why I Became a Catholic:

> If I were asked to put my finger on the greatest weakness of the American Negro, I should point to his imitative Protestant and Anglo-Saxon way of thinking and acting and his native acceptance of the materialistic protestant god of Progress as his own. Fir it

> seems to me that Protestantism is inimical and fundamentally opposed to the natural development and the intellectual and spiritual aspirations of the Negro.[xxii]

These pronouncements, written in his self-imposed exile near to the end of his life while he lived as a ward of the Catholic Church, do not seem to be motivated by any love of God but seem reflects his early training in the ways of the free-thinkers who believe that religion as a whole is responsible for the problems of mankind. But more on this point later.

It is interesting to me that McKay develops such a close relationship with Walter Jekyll when he seemingly held white people in general in such low esteem. Eugenia Collier asserts that McKay sees whites as being purely motivated by greed, materialism and a thirst for power and, as a result, "white people had lost their ability to respond to life in a natural spontaneous manner…Black people had to retained these values."[xxiii] If the preceding be true, blacks having been trained into the white educational establishment succumbs to the white mores, they too will fall into this unnatural way of being.

It is no surprise therefore that Herald Newton Day falls victim to the white educational system's trap of unnatural manners. Employing etymological principles to the names of principal characters, one can clearly recognize the societal context within which the discourse of the novel is situated. Newton Day therefore, is clearly the herald, the announcer, the one who marshals combatants, or in this case the good people of Jubilee. More germane to the application of the name in context of the novel however is Herald as the one who precedes or foreshadows.[xxiv] Newton is

derived from Old English and signifies new. The name also suggests new town. Day is endemic of daylight and one might leave it at that, but I believe the more meaningful allusion is to time, era, or season. Therefore, Herald Newton Day represents the one announcing the arrival of a new day or new era in postcolonial black society. "Herald Newton was a clean-cut type of the new generation of Negro students of theology...He possessed a good clear voice…but to the critical ear there was a sound of too much oil on his tongue…self-satisfaction." (97) And, since a herald is sent on behalf of, and as emissary to a king, it is to be understood that Herald Newton Day is himself part of the establishment on assignment from the white ruling class represented by the Craigs. The fact that he is a preacher, however, says he is the emissary of God, but of a God that the author distrusts. He must therefore fall, and does.

He falls, not because of the education itself but because he has internalized the white ways of being, which is a symbol of unnaturalness. He delights in being called Reverend and Doctor, although he is yet to be given his certificate of completion at university, and wont on account of the fall. He practices his sermons over and over and is puffed up with pride at his own accomplishments and his brilliance. He does not think of others, only of how he looks in their eyes and how they fit into the schema of his future plans and their material beneficence of which he could be availed. Bita is only as important as her usefulness to his career aspirations. In fact, Newton Day is too self-involved to recognize that Bita, his intended, is less than enthused by his presence. His effusions are met with monosyllabic responses to which he is oblivious. On the first occasion of their being

alone the exchange was one-sided at best. The dialogue begins on the occasion of the carriage ride to the mission house after Herald's first sermon at the Boxton Hall,

> Driving back to Jubilee with Bita, Herald Newton took the opportunity of letting her know his thoughts.
> "I think the sermon made a good impression," he said. "I did my best."
> "The people liked it," said Bita.
> "Oh yes, the way they crowned it. I poured all I had into it although it was only a bush village. I kept imagining al the time that it was a bigger and a better audience. That's the way, to practice in the small places, so that when you come to the big you won't feel intimidated."
> "Yes," said Bita.
> "I haven't had a chance yet of anything at Jubilee…But the day when I mount that pulpit will be a day. I want to beat the Rev. Craig at his best."
> Bita said nothing. (98-99)

The conversation continues in this vain until he announces that he isn't sure how Bita feels about it but, "I know my father will be very happy. And Mrs. Craig too. Everybody would be happy if we both got married." (99) Although one is fully aware that this is the plan all along, one would think that a many who has been highly and specifically educated to be the partner of another would be able to manage at least feigned interest in the person as a person rather than as the object of a transaction. Clearly, Herald Newton Day has, in concert with McKay's views on detrimental cultural assimilation, contract the deadliest of white diseases, materialism and power hunger brought on by religion, making him unable to act or think in a natural, spontaneous manner.

Herald Newton Day not only wants to be like Malcolm Craig. I believe he wants to be Malcolm Craig in the same sense that he wants Bita to be and

think "'just as Mrs. Craig would. For you have been trained like a pure-minded white lady." (100)

Bita could not think of being anyone but herself and says as much to Newton Day on one of their more effusive encounters, "I can't imagine anything more tragic than people torturing themselves to be different from their natural unchangeable selves." (169) Regardless of her puritan education and sojourn on 'the continent', she didn't try, and had no desire, to exist apart from her natural self. This to me is the hallmark of Bita's education and the very core of McKay's discourse on self-love. On the other hand, the trauma of this unnatural duality in his life was too much for Herald Newton Day and solicited a psychological break that would prove his undoing. Quite suddenly, "Herald Newton Day descended from the dizzy heights of holiness to the very bottom of the beast…(He) had suddenly turned crazy and defiled himself with a nanny goat." (175) Frankenstein transform from magnificent creation into gruesome monster overnight.

> "Despite the best civilizing efforts…the new day of promise that is heralded does not dawn, the strain of the high calling to the ministry an the demands of its rigorous rhetorical language causes Day's precipitous collapse."[xxv]

MRS. CRAIG, PATRON SAINT

One might be stricken with curiosity as it regards the deep and abiding interest the Craigs have for Bita and Herald Newton Day. Although there have been stories of white people taking in orphans and strays or

other unfortunates from the lowliest of families, that is not the case of either Bita or Herald.

Bita, it has been established, is from a peasant family. However, the Plant family is no ordinary peasant family for Jordan Plant is one of, if not the most, successful farmers in the peasantry of Banana Bottom. Assiduously enterprising, Plant took his meager beginnings and diligently and painstakingly added to his property by various creative means including taking the deed of an elderly peasant's property in exchange for victuals and lodging for the rest of said gentleman's life, which was a matter of a few years, at which point, despite attempts of the old farmer's family to retain the property in the family, Jordan Plant easily won the case since he was careful to make the deal binding. Of Jordan Plant the narrator says:

> The hunger for land was strong in him. He added by purchase and other means to his mother's lot until now he possessed over a hundred acres in separate lots of the best land in the Banana Bottom region. The finest of all, a piece of twenty-five acres, planted with cocoa and bananas, he had gotten from an aged slave who quarreled with his family, quit his house and went to Jordan with the title of his property in his hand and asked in exchange for it to be cared for until his death. Jordan took the old man in and nourished him, putting up with all his vagaries. And after six years the old man died and Jordan took the land. The old man's family, represented by three sons, instituted a long lawsuit over it. But Jordan, with the title in his hand and the deed that the old man had signed with a cross for his name, finally won with costs. (54-55)

There are two rather revealing concurrent themes running in this excerpt from *Banana Bottom*; first Jordan Plant is a good businessman and a forward-thinking farmer. He is presented with a wonderful opportunity to expand his holdings and he takes advantage of it. The other less flattering is

that Jordan Plant may be a good upstanding citizen in Banana Bottom but, like Bra Anancy[xxvi] he is a cunning opportunist, maybe even a trickster, and will do what he has to in order to get what he wants. Furthermore, he might be a pillar in the church but his hunger for land allows him to overlook a basic moral principle and take advantage of a family's vulnerability for his personal gain, thereby denying three sons inheritance of property that would have been theirs had their father not decided in haste to sell their birthright for the proverbial mess of pottage.

Herald belonged to a prominent family in the Jubilee Free Church. Deacon Day, the senior Deacon and his wife, "had a good house…and, unlike many of he peasants… was now the free owner of his home." (95) While it is true they were not rich, the Days managed handsomely and need not pack their child off to the good pastor and his wife to be raised. As I alluded to earlier in this paper, the prospect of engaging in class construction is one answer to the why question. There is another more personal and twofold reason, however, which dates back to Malcolm Craig's father, Angus Craig, and his unfulfilled desire to see a successor for the Jubilee Free Church rise from the peasant classes into the seat of leadership. In addition, with Patou and invalid mentally and physically, the Craig's have no heir to continue their work and Herald would have been the perfect candidate to fill the role of son and heir. Herald represents for Malcolm Craig, a "fulfillment to the pioneer purpose that lay behind the founding and building of Jubilee and

the perfect crowning of Angus Craig's thought." (36) To Mrs. Craig, "The hope of the colony lies in his type." (36)

There is, however, a small wrinkle to this plan, a plan that would have suited Malcolm Craig just fine; Mrs. Craig, having given birth to a male child who is deformed, cannot bear to raise a boy who did not spring from her own loins. It was decided to simply give Herald the benefit of a good island education under their hospices with the expressed understanding that he was being educated to take his place at the head of the Jubilee Free Church at the appointed time. The Craigs were certain they had made the right choice.

When Bita meets with her unfortunate incident, Mrs. Craig's idea to adopt Bita solved two strong aspirations for the Craigs; Mrs. Craigs would be able to replace the defective Patou with a whole child, albeit a black one, that did not remind her constantly of her failure to produce a perfect boy child, and, the issue of finding an appropriate match for Herald Newton Day is taken care of in one fell swoop.

To Mrs. Craig, Herald is less a human being than he is the representation of a concept, an experiment in class building. Within the construct of the concept of this type, the emergent black, educated middle class, Bita is now the addition that presents the picture of the perfect wife and helpmeet to Herald Newton Day. This is the idea that motivates the Craigs, or at least Mrs. Craig, and of which she is very proud. Or had been until Bita started exerting her individuality.

Priscilla Craig is a study in the complexity of human motivation. She is at once the vanguard of Christian charity and self-serving, opportunistic manipulator. McKay would make the argument that both are the same. But assuming they are not, on the one hand Mrs. Craig seems genuinely stirred to help Bita, "her whole being was moved with compassion for the girl. She felt hurt to the quick that a child…should be blunted in the blood like that." (17) But before one can become comfortable with the idea that the magnanimity of Priscilla's offer to educate Bita was purely altruistic, the narrator quickly gives her a motive. "The incident gave her the idea of taking Bita to train as an exhibit…Mrs. Craig wanted to demonstrate what one such girl might become by careful training." (17) The author sets up the reader to immediately dislike Mrs. Craig, or at least to distrust her.

Besides Bita, Mrs. Craig is the most introspective character in the work and is therefore at a disadvantage with the reader who is privy to her innermost thoughts in a way that isn't possible with most of the characters who people *Banana Bottom*. She is conflicted about the people amongst whom she is forced to live, "semi-savages" whom she fears that her mission work is endangered because of "the careless living and grin of the blacks, who shouted to the Christ God in the church in the day time and muttered incantations" (93) to another at night.

Probably the defining thing about Priscilla Craig is her son, Patou, who "could not talk and had developed into an adult without getting past the creeping stage." (27) She is driven by the shame of having produced

only one offspring who lives in a "cripple-idiot state." (27) Her failure to have a normal child drives her to 'create' the ideal child out of those crippled by color but not by faculties. She could salvage something of her life in tropics by producing something necessary and worthwhile.

When Bita, therefore, starts to chafe under Mrs. Craig's suffocating rules after Herald Newton Day's failure to live up to his prescribed training, Priscilla starts to experience a mother/maker emotional conflict that threatens to part the veil of Christian charity behind which she comfortably situates her motivations and designs for Bita. She decides to take things into her own hands and deal with Hopping Dick herself when he shows up at the mission to escort Bita to an event. "I think…your acquaintanceship with Miss Plant should come to an end." (209) When she is informed that Bita has actually invited Hopping Dick to the Mission, Priscilla cannot contain her displeasure and insists that Bita sever all ties for the sake of her reputation and the image of the mission. When Bita refuses Mrs. Craig "realized that her experiment had failed" (219) and that all hopes for her life's work had died with it.

> There was a great lump in Priscilla's throat and a feeling of deadness in her precise spirit as Bita drove away, leaving a sensation as if…she were crushed into a little nothingness in an eternity of futility. (225)

At first one believes that Priscilla is broken hearted over the broken bond between herself and Bita until one is drawn into the larger framework of the working of her mind. Her experiment having failed, Priscilla Craig is honest with herself for the first time about her life, her faith and her deep-

seated dislike and distrust of the people she has lived amongst and ministered to for the greater portion of her life. She has become a sad, broken woman.

> She had no heart left for that civilizing work. She was strangely a stranger in that tropical strange land…she had never really acclimatized, never really understood the people…she had spent a lifetime working without faith…in obedience to the spirit of tradition…without faith, much less love, for the work and the people…lacking in the pure wine of faith and the saving principle of grace. (225-228)

By this account, it would appear that the maladies of self-deception, self-denial and self-loathing, are not conditions that are particular to blacks. Indeed, Priscilla Craig labored under the weight of her own mental prison that finally brought her to the end of herself.

BITA'S RAPE

There are complications presented by the rape and its timing. Bita being at the time 12 years old and she being the initiator of the first contact with Crazy Bow suggests to me that there is a telltale sign pointing the reader to Bita's coming into her sexuality; an inevitability that needed to be delayed at all costs in order to any black woman to be able to attain any measure of success, intellectually, socially, and professionally in twentieth century Jamaica. Bita's self-reliant and independent spirit, from childhood, indicated the need for stern fetters; "She learned to climb all the mango and star-apple and naseberry trees on her father's place…And she could swim, and ride a horse bareback." (7) This eventuality of growing up to have a meaningful life, while possible, is highly improbable in color/class prison of a rural Caribbean village where the average woman of color was destined to have "children,

one, two, three, some as many as five, without the benefit of a steady mate and were heavy-footed, flabby breasted and worried under the weight of motherhood." (51)

Sister Phibby, the chief blabbermouth in a village of many gossips, announces the rape of Bita to Mrs. Craig who, moved chiefly by the relationship between Mr. Plant, Bita's father, and the Reverend Craig and herself takes Bita into their home and raises her as her own child.

Remarkably, is that Sister Phibby places the responsibility of the rape on Bita who at the time was only the tender age of twelve. Bita's innate confidence is condemned as over-womanish, "But she was ober-womanish ob a ways the folks them say." (16) When Mrs. Craig protests that that was no reason for a child to be mistreated Sister Phibby further drives home her point by casting Bita in the role of temptress and moreover, she absolves Crazy Bow of any culpability declaring him crazy that no man can be expected to resist so great a temptation. "'Temptation, Missis,' sighed Sister Phibby….'and the poor fool was mad! What kyan a poah bady do ag'inst a great big temptation?'" (16) Sister Phibby reinforces the dominant thought about rape, which generally places blame on the victim of the act. In this case, not only is blame placed on Bita, but also, Crazy Bow is actually cast as the victim. The blame-the-victim mentality is not unique to Banana Bottom and Sister Phibby; indeed, its insidious presence in the human psyche has passed into the 21st century and is still being used, though not as virulently, to further terrorize women who have been unfortunate enough to be raped.

> The socioeconomic status, race, or sex of an actor may influence attributions about the behavior of that individual. The application for unemployment benefits by middle-income persons or by whites (both increasingly common phenomena), for example, may be

> attributed to different causes than applications for such benefits by members of the working class or by blacks. These different attributions, in turn, may influence the outcomes of such applications, or the self-esteem of the applicants and their families. Each of these factors— socioeconomic status, race, and sex— is the basis of a societal stratification system. The influence of such variables on the process of attribution, though not entirely ignored, has received little theoretical or empirical attention.[xxvii]

If this theory holds true, the victim is blamed because of reasons that have nothing to do with the act itself but based upon the societal evaluation of the victim, which is society's attempt to make sense of the world. Put another way, had Bita, the dark skinned nymph of a peasant family not tempted the light-skinned descendant of the savior of the community, he would never have committed such a heinous act. "Explanations of this tendency to blame victims focus on the psychological motivations…to attribute blame to victims because they need to believe the world is just."[xxviii]

Jordan Plant, caring father though he seems to be, is not over anxious about the rape. He isn't angry. He simply wanted to "hush the matter up" (10) but because of Phibby's loose lips the news, having already been spread throughout the community, he is just happy that Bita is going to be taken away and given a new start with the Craigs.

What is the reason for Jordan Plant's inaction? Could it be that he felt guilty for not having realized the potential danger Bita might have faced being constantly in the company of a man twice her age?

> Crazy Bow was a frequent visitor at Jordan Plant's, often eating with the family…he would take the fiddle down from the wall and play. And sometimes he did play in a way that moved Jordan Plant inside and made tears come to his eyes…Bita was often with her

> father when Crazy Bow played…village children were afraid of him, but Bita was not. (7-8)

Should he have seen the signs and curtailed her exposure to Crazy Bow? We will never truly know the extent of Jordan Plant's feelings because McKay doesn't bother to elucidate but I suspect that he must have been secretly chastising himself for tacitly encouraging a friendship that compromised his only child. Furthermore, it must have come as a complete shock that someone who had become a trusted family friend had undermined his trust and violated his daughter. The one glimpse into the soul of Jordan Plant, which inimically expressed the depth of Jordan Plant's suffering with regards to his daughter being violated, comes at time when, having returned to Banana Bottom, Bita makes a public appearance upon returning home from studying in England:

> Bita stood up and, saying nothing introductory, she began calling out every syllable clearly as she had learned to speak English. Once she caught her father's eye tear-dimmed, for he was remembering that it was right after Bita had received a Sunday-school prize for good conduct that the rape occurred. (62)

Could it be that Jordan Plant's desire to own the 'State House clouded his ability to react appropriately to rape? The 'State House, short for Estate House, is the last of the land purchased by the first Adair that still remains in the family. The land that abuts and runs parallel to Jordan Plant's property is a key piece of property for Plant, who believes that land acquisition is the surest road to success and, having started out with twenty five acres, has since acquired over one hundred acres. But, "Jordan also had his eye on the fine remnant of the Adair property with the crumbling 'State House." (55) Possibly he was one of the villagers who were "sentimental about Crazy Bow because of his antecedents." (9) The story is that

Crazy Bow's great grandfather, had come to the region from Scotland the "Scotchman" bought the plantations in the area, set the slaves free and marrying one of the blackest of them settled down with a "Negress" who "bore him plenty of children," (3) the third generation of the clan, Adair, to which Crazy Bow belongs. Bita, also, does not seem to have any feelings about the rape either. One would have expected the third-person narrator to put the reader inside the head of the protagonist at this the pivotal point of the story and the helix upon which rests the evolution of Bita Plant from ordinary peasant to prized, poised, educated member of the best family of the town. Bita is strangely silent. Our narrator does not overtly insert himself in the process. We get nothing save the she walked painfully and then when pressed revealed her deflowerer.

Does McKay blame Bita for the rape? Does Bita blame herself and, does McKay and or Bita agree with the town's people that this is the best thing to have happened given her limited opportunities for success under normal circumstances? I can't say for certain because Bita is strangely non-introspective about the life-altering event except as it pertains to the mocking folk song written to mark the event.

> You may warp her up in silk,
> You may trim her up in gold,
> And the prince may come after
> To ask for your daughter
> But Crazy Bow was first (14)

On the same occasion of Jordan Plant tearing up when her remembered the event that preceded "the rape," Bita, witnessing the tears, "intuitively aware, was

assaulted by the same thought and the ribald ditty brutally pounded in her memory, 'Crazy Bow was first|\|Crazy Bow was first.'" (62)

I am confounded about what sense of worth and dignity the residents of Banana Bottom could possess when they are willing to hold up a child to this kind of harsh ridicule and mockery. I am further perplexed that others are envious of Bita for having been raped because of the resultant rise in good fortune and, gossiping though they were, "there was not a dark family in Banana Bottom and that gorgeous stretch of tropical country that did not wish one of their children had been in Bita's shoes and had been the victim of Crazy Bow." (29) This ironic twist reveals the underlying disregard for black girls in a community where the poorest members of the community, "especially girls with illegitimate children, who were legion," (52) could not even feed their families and resorted to farming the children out to more affluent homes.

The text's unvoiced supposition is that Bita had only been 'slightly' raped, or not raped at all, because she was a naturally sexual child. Certainly the account of the incident does not present much of a case for Bita except when one considers that she is a mere child and Crazy Bow a fully grown man:

> *Crazy Bow was twenty-five and Bita past twelve, and neither Jordan Plant nor Naomi Plant nor even the wags of Banana Bottom gave the slightest thought to the companionship*…One Saturday noon Bita and Crazy were *romping** together in the *caressing** fox-tail grass sloping down to the Cane River…As they romped, Bita got upon Crazy Bow's breast and began rubbing her head against his face. Crazy Bow suddenly drew himself up and rather roughly he pushed Bita away…Crazy Bow took up his fiddle and…began to play…a sweet tea-meeting love song…Bita…listened in the attitude of a bewitched being…she began kissing his face. Crazy Bow tried to push her off. But Bita hugged and clung to him passionately. Crazy Bow was blinded by temptation and lost control of himself and the

> deed was done. Aunty Nommy discovered that Bita had had her *first sexual affair*. "Befoh de time." (9-10) (Italics for emphasis)

There is so much wrong with this passage that I don't know where to begin. Friendships between adults and pubescent children that result in "romping" in "caressing" grass is problematic at best and Bita should never have been allowed to become so familiar to a male friend of the family. The situation being what it is however, it is not surprising that a young, impressionable, girl on the verge of womanhood might be fascinated by, even infatuated with, a person of Crazy Bow's reputed, considerable gifts as a musician.

Collier, in her assessment of the rape in her piece wrote, incredulously, she thought Bita's rape by Crazy Bow, was a "sexual initiation…a natural act in an idyllic setting" meanwhile there is something, she believes, "unnatural" about the sex life of the married couple, the Craigs, who, because of their more repressed, unnatural sex, produce a deformed child.[xxix]

Bita is a victim of society, of Crazy Bow and also of the critics who believe there is something natural about what Crazy Bow did to her. She is not in a position to be responsible for her actions regardless of whether she threw herself at Crazy Bow or not.

Modern readers will perhaps recognize Bita as a foreshadowing of Dolores Haze who, twenty-two years later would become another ill-fated female figure taken advantage of by an older man but blamed for being systematically raped because precocious nature. In the case of Dolores

Haze, nicknamed Lolita by her assailant who, having moved into the Haze household as a boarder begins to have inappropriate feelings for the adolescent Dolores. He bemuses Lolita and her mother with made up stories of his past and over time develops a sexual relationship with the child.

> We sat on cushions heaped on the floor, and L. was between the woman and me (she had squeezed herself in, the pet). In my turn, I launched upon a hilarious account of my arctic adventures. The muse of invention handed me a rifle and I shot a white bear who sat down and said: Ah! All the while I was acutely aware of L.'s nearness and as I spoke I gestured in the merciful dark and took advantage of those invisible gestures of mine to touch her hand, her shoulder and …finally, when I had completely enmeshed my glowing darling in this weave of ethereal caresses, I dared stroke her bare leg.[xxx]

H.H., the narrator, mesmerizes Lolita with his storytelling in much the same was as Crazy Bow mesmerizes Bita with the fiddle. But he has an excuse; he couldn't help himself because Bita is to blame for being a nymph whose temptations are more than men more than twice her age can resist. H.H. who suggests all girls between the ages and nine and fourteen are "nymphic (that is, demoniac); and these chose creatures I propose to designate as 'nymphets.'"[xxxi] In other words, men cannot be expected to do anything other than succumb to the temptation of the nymph since she is a demonic agent.

Aunty Nommy's evaluation of the situation being that Bita had had her first sexual affair before time is also quite shocking. Clearly, this inappropriate contact is not considered a serious crime in Banana Bottom except where it impacts a girl's future opportunities.

Remarkably, it appears as though crimes of sexual violence against women are commonplace and are sometimes utilized as a means of courting black women. "It was not considered an unusual practice for a black rustic to accost a maid and force her to love if he could. Many a love match had begun that way, some ending in happy union." (263-264) This pervasive undercurrent of routine violence against women, and sexual violence in particular, aptly demonstrates Kamugisha's assertion that "Caribbean women's citizenship is constrained by gendered violence."[xxxii]

Therefore, when Bita refuses to acquiesce to Mrs. Craig's exacting house rules about what she, Bita, can and cannot do, Mrs. Craig's sense of entitlement over Bita's life and by extension Bita's body is violated. Mrs. Craig is moved to do violence to Bita in the form of character assassination when Bita insists on seeing Hopping Dick, the equivalent of the town dandy with whom she claims to have fallen in love, so, "to account for it she had come to the conclusion that at bottom Bita at bottom was a nymphomaniac." (221)

Bita is furthermore cast as the sensualist, disposed to swim naked and "enjoy the water cooling on her breasts." (117) Does someone like this get raped or does she offer herself to be 'loved?' This seems to be the subtext of the narrative as it unfolded. In fact, she is expected to be content to suffer all varieties of mockery and personal violation, physical and psychological and still manage to act as though all is well.

Bita was made the butt of the joke in the troubadour's ditty "Crazy Bow was first" and it seems as though she was expected to accept that as normal and move on. Tack Tally, having come upon Bita swimming in a lake proceeds to hide her clothes forcing her to run around naked trying to find them. Bita, not amused by his idea of fun, let him know as much. He on the other hand considered his callous, demeaning action himself trying to "mek a little pleasantry wid you as a genelman and you not a lady as big as to apreachiate it." (131)

The indignity a woman is made to suffer in this society is myriad but the black woman is forced to endure the most ignominy. Violence against women seem to go by unnoticed except for the songs written to commemorate every episode that causes pain, embarrassment and shame for a woman. So enduring has been this stain on the Caribbean psyche that the disenfranchisement of women from their bodies has persisted into the twenty-first century and into the courts of law:

> The Caribbean state repeatedly reinscribes the patriarchal understanding of the public/private domain, which has been tirelessly critiqued by generations of feminists, and, as a result of women's second-class status, can claim that the fundamental rights and freedoms provided by Caribbean constitutions do not protect against gender discrimination; nor should they do so as, according to the Jamaican attorney general, this is not a matter of the 'utmost importance'. One should not be surprised, then, that in the Jamaican parliament in 2003, one legislator could suggest that schoolgirls under sixteen undergo virginity testing.[xxxiii]

The 'ownership' of the woman's body rests with the man. In the case of the black woman the lack of agency is a twofold gender/color quotient where she is not only 'owned' by the man but by the white patron who

deigns investment in her. A striking example of this male ownership compounded by the comic relief it provides society is the case of Gracie Hall, a young woman from the region who, having gone to Kingston, the urban capital, to be trained as a seamstress, had returned home. The unfortunate young woman, having lived in the 'big city' had forgotten the strict rules by which most towns-people lived and, espying a merry-go-round set up for the amusement of the locals, she straddles the motorized pony and commences to enjoy the harmless fun of the ride. Unbeknownst to her, her father got wind of the transgression. "Her father, upon hearing that she was riding, hurried over to the place…and slapped her off the horse." (105) They wrote a song about it:

'Oh, Breddah Hall, an' where was you
When Gracie went a-ridin'?
Good Breddah Hall, we know is true
Dat Gracie went a-ridin'

'Merry-go-roun' is come to town
An' naygurs ridin' ebery way.
Oh, Breddah Hall, you' gal gone roun'.
Today is Gracie ridin' day.

'Oh, Breddah Hall, doan' be so cross
'Cause Gracie went a-ridin'.
Knock off you' gal, but not d hoss
Dat Gracie went a-ridin'…

'Merry-go-roun' is come to town…' (105)

The song seems to suggest in the third stanza's last two lines that it's ok to knock Gracie off the mechanical horse as long as the merry-go-round itself is left intact, thus ascribing value to the inanimate object but not to the person riding.

Another discourteous little ditty referring to a girl losing her virginity appears in the story for no apparent reason:

> 'Gal, you' virgin is bruken,
> Gal, you' virgin is bruken.' (65)

None of this is news to anyone with even a glancing acquaintance with the Anglophone-Caribbean and, alas, much of the African diasporic territories. "So yu tell, me tell, so tell di whole a we find out she a de one story we a tell. Oman story."[xxxiv] We are all telling the same bitter story of being woman and black, woman and marginalized, woman and victimized, woman as other. We only think the story is unique to ourselves until we start to tell it. In this identical vein, V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street* contains innumerable accounts of female victimization, both from men and from the women themselves who are beaten by their men, work to support them and become "the friend of many men"[xxxv] in order to support themselves and men who often have no visible means of support. These same men, for various reasons not addressed in this paper, engage in systematic denigration of women through physical violence.

> George's wife was never a proper person. I always thought of her jusa sa George's wife…too, George's wife was always in the cow-pen…He had his wife and his daughter and his son. He beate them all. When the boy, Elias grew too big, George beat his daughter and his wife more than ever.[xxxvi]

George's wife grew thinner and thinner until she died while his daughter just giggled all the time. So women join in the 'fun' and laugh at themselves or simply say nothing. Carolyn Cooper makes a point that I have heard repeated by my grandmother, my mother and my aunts growing up in Jamaica. The saying is, "we tek bad ting mek laugh". Cooper's phrase

embodies the sentiment although she substitutes the work 'joke', a more fitting choice, over the vernacular choice of 'laugh', which is verb rather than the necessary noun. She further adds a reason, in America we say we laugh to keep from crying. Here they sing songs and make jokes to retain a semblance of sanity. "We know how fi tek bad tings mek joke. Stop yu from go mad off yu head."[xxxvii]

If we are to understand that women are apt to make light of these less than idyllic circumstances in an effort to stay sane, can the same be suggested of the black man who has little or no means to success if he is landless and jobless in rural postcolonial Caribbean countries? The answer might very well be answered by observing similarly disposed black men (the term here speaks to race not color/shade) in urban centers and rural towns with no job, no prospects and little hope except to make it as the next rapper trading trashy lyrics about somebody's daughter he calls a bitch, money and jewelry and cars, non of which he is likely to own standing on the street corner, like Tack Talley or Hopping Dick. A parallel can also be drawn within the African-American communities of today, which, by and large, though cognizant of the social dilemmas that have marked black people's otherness in any society, still turn an almost conspiratorial blind eye to the instruments of oppression in our midst. According to Collins:

> Strong pronatal beliefs in African-American communities that foster early motherhood among adolescent girls, the lack of self-actualization that can accompany the double-day of paid employment and work in the home, and the emotional and physical abuse that many Black women experience from their fathers, lovers, and husbands all reflect practices opposed by African-

> American women who are feminists. But these same women may have a parallel desire as members of an oppressed racial group to affirm the value of that same culture and traditions. Thus strong Black mothers appear in Black women's literature, Black women's economic contributions to families is lauded, and a curious silence exists concerning domestic abuse.[xxxviii]

WHITE MAGIC: THE SORCERY OF WHITE SKIN

Freedom from slavery did not necessarily constitute freedom from white superiority complex fostered by blacks because blacks still deified white skin. A kind of white magic is exerted over the mind of the people; the reverence for white skin keeps blacks mentally enslaved. Blacks are easily conned by whites but exercise more astuteness with other blacks. In the time of Malcolm Craig's father, a white church clerk called Jacob Brown, had, through craftiness, drawn away many of the parishioners of the Free Church. The senior Rev. Craig espoused that, "the black folk, having been freed from the bondage of unrewarded toil they needed also to be freed from the white magic so that they might develop as a people…it was the magic of the white skin that made possible easy conquests of the Jacob Browns." (26) Conversely, blacks are more critical of leaders of their own tribe and, "quicker to question the neat phrases of a ready tongue." (26)

No one is immune to this disease and Bita seems beset with a mild case as she compares Herald Newton Day and the Reverend Malcolm Craig. "She had a deep affection for Malcolm Craig and rapidly appraising Herald Newton could not visualize his measuring up to the gaunt and ascetic figure of the present incumbent in the pulpit at Jubilee." (99) This conclusion was reached upon Herald Newton's declaration that he wanted to best Craig on that elder's best day. In Bita's

consciousness that was not an attainable feat for Herald Newton Day. But lest I do Bita a disservice, I will concede that her conclusions probably owed much to Newton Day's narcissistic self-consciousness than to any conviction of inferiority based upon color or race.

The black individual in slave societies post manumission, suffered from a psychological impairment marked by the self-abasing acceptance of his own mediocrity fostered by early indoctrination into the rhetoric of the superiority of whites and the corresponding inferiority of blacks underpinning the plantation system slave economy. These indelibly ingrained stains of subservience, mediocrity and worse, are evinced in the shoddy comportment of characters like Hopping Dick and Tack Talley, men who medicate their despair and hopelessness with crass language, rum and the bodies of the women they use for sport, men quintessentially reflecting Cooper's sentiment, "not getting anywhere in life." Tack Talley, for instance, returns from Panama, where he had gone to work on the canal as a laborer, with plenty of fine clothes and jewelry but live in a one-room, dirt-floored hut with his mother. A man who thought highly of himself would probably have brought his money home and bought some land and tried to make something of himself and probably gotten a home of his own. But not Tack.

> "In spite of all his cash…many fine panama suits and jewellery [sic]…he had no place to keep them but the tin trunk in the dirty hut…his main pride was to show himself a dandy in the street…rum shop and tea-meeting booth." (146)

Today the same phenomenon can be seen in many major cities where a multitude of black men of any age can be seen driving expensive cars, wearing expensive clothes and jewelry but living in rooms or someone's basement. The stain

is still present though we are at almost one hundred fifty years removed from slavery in the United States and closer to two hundred years distant in the case of the English Speaking Caribbean.[xxxix]

Busha Gengley believes blacks like Bita should not be educated as they might be inclined to use that education against "us, we the white race." (130) He espouses Kipling who wrote, "'East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet.'" (130) Still, he exerts his superiority through his sex, fathering a multitude of colored children by many colored women commodifying them much as a slave owner commodifies his chattel, caring nothing for their souls but only what he can reap quantifiably in physical output. (129-130)

But, the most striking archetype of the white magic is Squire Ginser. He at once establishes himself as superior to the black natives and somewhat of a peer, almost. The peculiar man is essentially 'slumming' but he is doing so out of no sense of obligation. Indeed, he is inserting himself into the lives of the people, not as a fixer, but as an observer and cataloger of their behavior, their mores and folk ways. He positions himself as a friend of the peasantry, but really, he is not. He is a researcher who, because of his pedigree is allowed to take liberties others would not dare. "The peasants were his hobby."(71)

Ginser is from an aristocratic English family. He leaves his home and forsakes his riches to live a meager life in a hut containing no extravagances save his piano. But while Ginser imagines he is living Spartan lifestyle, the absence of visible wealth is the surest sign of wealth in his case. He needn't work save for collecting samples of folk songs and observing native behavior. Yet he is never hungry, always has

enough for guests who drop by and is always counted on the outbid everyone at a tea- meeting because he had the means to do so. He exerted his will on the peasantry ever so subtly with his money and the populaces believe in the power of his strong English pound, a representation not just of money but authority, class and color.

But the people of Banana Bottom, reminiscent of the Jacob Brown effect, are strangely un-suspicious of Ginser and in fact, seem to take pride in the his deigning to see them as people. "A big gen'man who showing that though he's a highmighty he can appreciate ordinary folkses an' what we doings. Wese proud a him coming here causen we know dat him come among us not to laugh at we fun but to enjoice it." (78) The squire on the other hand says he can tolerate the peasants "'easily and with pleasure' because the peasants were like foreigners to him so he couldn't measure them by his code of conduct but rather study theirs." (82) Thus, the squire exhibits, according to Collins, the "either/or dichotomous thinking of Eurocentric, masculinist thought,"[xl] establishing that Ginser is benighted as the superior and the simple villagers inferior in the discourse of race that "requires that one side of a dichotomy be privileged while its other is denigrated. Privilege becomes defined in relation to its other."[xli]

In an enlightening exchange at Bita's first tea-meeting, the customary bidding for the cake that is to be presented to the queen of the dance commences. After a while, with Ginser in the lead several of the young men decide to pool their resources in order to outbid Ginser. Finally, "Squire Ginser said a guinea. And that was final. Like a swat on the heads of the peasant lads silencing their tongues. For a

guinea was unknown to peasant vocabulary. (79) Meanwhile, Ginser for his part collected and catalogued everything about the residents of Banana Bottom and everything about them made him "as happy as a child." (71) The peasants were entertainment for Ginser and he could afford to be perpetually entertained. The peasants, on the other hand, "among themselves they said he was a lord." (71)

His white skin compounded by class and social standing makes him the most respected man in Banana Bottom. Proving that the sorcery of the white skin is not specific to blacks the reader witnesses Mrs. Craig who wouldn't condescend to attend a tea-meeting falling under its power prompting her to be inclined to forgive Bita's indulgence in attending a tea-meeting upon hearing that Squire Ginser had escorted her to the low-brow affair. "At the mention of Squire Ginser's name Mrs. Craig's feeling and her attitude underwent a magical change…for Squire Ginser was held in high esteem everywhere." (91) Mrs. Craig is not alone in having fallen under the spell of the Squire. But, more than the effect of his intellect and obvious breeding, his refusal to engage in sexual pleasures with the natives, thus, "he dominated the mind of the gentry because of his intellectual and his main quality…lived aloof from sexual contact…not a blemish on his character.'" (92)

At the tea-meeting where we first meet the 'anthropologist' he is first prepared to dislike Bita but was quickly won over by this woman who had been sent to his own country to be cultivated and having done so arrived at "a different charm of refinement of her own." (81) She, on the other hand, is curious about him and fascinated that a man with his obvious intellect, charm and money would deign to make his home in Banana Bottom while she had been sent to his country to obtain

the culture to which he had been born. Bita and Ginser develop a relationship in which she practically becomes the student of Ginser's 'free thought' philosophy and her education is rounded out in a more worldly direction in which her prior training to become the wife of a preacher would not have taken her.

She is once again the subject of a pet project. But Bita is astute and what she learns under Ginser, as she had done in England and at Jubilee, she internalizes, taking what she finds useful and discarding that which is not and in the end is a person with a mind and a worldview of her own.

BITA AS FEMINIST – TAKE ME AS I AM

Bita defies the odds; the 'rape' does not define her. The church does not define her. She is not defined by her education and, although, greatly influenced by the squire, she is not defined by the greater knowledge she accessed while under his mentorship. She is who she is. She likes who she is and where she comes from. She luxuriates in the sheer beauty of every given moment. Her love is pure because there is no lack within her that she needs Jubban to fill. She is a complete human being sharing love and life with another human being, not seeking to find fulfillment in anyone outside of herself.

While most of Banana Bottom, regardless of color or class, is locked in the prescribed psychographic modalities that define their ability to rise to prominence and to live a productive life, Bita has skirted the superficial limitations of her environment and charted her own path to personal success. That success is

illustrated through the devices of repetition and diversion used by the narrator to illuminate the discourse of the color/class rubric of the postcolonial Anglophone Caribbean. Through this repetition and diversion on the class/color axis, McKay advances the story of Bita's development from neophyte academic under the mythology of advancement of the colored race through educational achievement that requires voluntarily and simultaneously subverting one's true self for the cause of racial uplift, to a fully self possessed human, more than the sum of her circumstances. Repeatedly, McKay makes reference to skin color: Bita is a "restful color of dark blooming brown" (254) Parson Lambert is ebony whiles his daughters are "cashew-brown" alluding to the fact that the good parson engaged in lightening of his line, and simultaneously improving his station by marrying someone of a much lighter shade than himself. Banana yellow and tamarind brown are also colors, pertaining to people, McKay utilizes in his descriptions.

The emblematic peasant is immobilized or regulated by his own thoughts about skin color and hair texture, "Yoni Legge…hair was straight and black and firm like horse mane…complexion…most admired and desirable among the Negroes…folk called her Coolie Gal." (64) Coolie indicates that her paternity is suspected to be not pure Negro but includes Indian blood. On the contrary, for Bita those things are irrelevant except that they happen to exist. She does not desire to be white nor does she even aspire to be light skinned or to have light skinned children, a common phenomenon in black culture. She is therefore quite unimpressed when a certain gentleman is interested in pursuing her. He and his

family on the other hand, are shocked that Bita is unresponsive to luminosity of their skin:

> In little Gingertown here lived a light-brown and local Government official who frightened his two spinster sisters by announcing that he intended to make Bita his wife. The two sisters began mourning for their brother and bewailing their predicament because of the disastrous possiibility—a brown man marrying a black woman. What did it matter that the sisters were ladies of slender education and no accomplishment or self-improvement? Their complexion was the colour of a ripe banana peel…And Bita was black…the colour of blooming brown…(he) was rejected as ineligible– to his amazement–and that of his sisters...that any black girl would refuse an offer of marriage from one from the brown plums. (253-254)

Bita is able to do what most others in this community are unable to do. She sees herself as an individual quite distinct and apart from anyone else and most importantly, she does not judge herself in relationship to others. She does not hanker for white skin. Responding to William Blake's "The Little Black Boy," where Blake, a poet from the early romantic period contends that the little Black boy is born black but possesses a white soul and longs to be white, Bita thought the poem though splendid,

> "not one to be recommended to an impressionable black child. For it was murder of the spirit, she reasoned, to cultivate a black child to hanker after the characteristics of the white. Rather teach it to delight in its own created self." (268)

She is a unique individual who is uniquely positioned to do and be what only she can do and be. She delights in her own created self.

> "Only a Nigger gal!" she undressed and looked at her body in the long mirror of the old-fashioned wardrobe. She caressed her breasts like maturing pomegranates, her skin firm and smooth like the sheath of a blossoming banana, her luxuriant hair, close-curling like thick fibrous roots, gazed at her own warm-brown eyes, the infallible indicators of real human beauty….Ah, but she was proud

> of being a Negro girl. No sneer, no sarcasm, no banal ridicule…could destroy her confidence and pride in herself and make her feel ashamed of that fine body that was the temple of he holy spirit…she knew that she was a worthy human being…she was beautiful. (266)

Trained by the Reverends Malcolm and Priscilla Craig to one day become the proper wife of the pastor of The Jubilee Free Church, Bita was never more than superficially influenced by the religion of the colonizer. Still, the influence exerted over her by the faith prevented her from embracing the traditional African practice of Obeah, the 'religion' practiced by most of the peasants of Banana Bottom. I have written religion in quotes as it refers to Obeah because of my personal experience with the practice, as my maternal grandfather was a practitioner. When one contemplates the word religion, the presumption is that there is an institutionalized set of rules covenants and codes that one must follow to include set times for corporate communion. Obeah, from my experience, has been and individual endeavor between one's obeah man and oneself. It is exemplary of sorcery or witchcraft rather than the worship of a god for the sake of worshiping. It is a primarily a self-serving practice designed to give the seeker what he or she wants in the shortest period of time and the obeah man money and prestige. Lyn Di Iorio in her book, *Outside the Bones*, writes about a practitioner of the art, "I pretended to be a witch…my spirit working was more about what people wanted…people…believed it would work for them."[xlii] In Banana bottom, the most of the peasantry held more confidence in Wumba, the Obeahman, than they did the church to which they would go faithfully on Sunday but on any given night of the week they could be found anxiously consulting with the confidante of the spirits in order to have their desires

met. One such individual is the mother of Yoni Legge. Yoni, also a believer, is a beautiful girl of uncertain paternity. She engages Bita in a discussion of the dark arts prior to her trip to the medium:

> "Tell me, Bita, do you believe in evil?"
> "You mean --?"
> "Obeah. Don't you believe it can work harm or good?"
> "No!" Bita spoke harshly. "I don't believe in Obeah. It is stupid. Beastly."
> "But the Bible says there *are* evil and good spirits, Bita. And Obeah is black people's evil god."
> "I don't have to swallow everything the Bible says. And I could never believe in a foolish thing like Obeah, Yoni, and I hope you don't either." (132-133)

It becomes apparent that Yoni has become infatuated with Tack Talley and she mistakenly believes that Bita is enamored of Tack and, in an effort to secure his love has gone with her mom to Wumba in order that he might intercede with Obi on her behalf. The peasants hide their dependence upon Obi under the cover of darkness, still it is open an secret as one is likely to be seen going to and fro the Obeahman's abode. "That night…Yoni and her mother set out for the Obeaman's cave…a few nights earlier they would have encountered Tack…they met others…a leader in the church…a woman…much resembled…Sister Phibby Patroll." (134) Banana Bottom's Obeahman turns out to be a fraud after Tack Talley, believing he has killed Yoni Legge's father goes to the Wumba's cave for help. Not finding him there he thinks he is doomed to prison and would rather die than face that eventuality. He hangs himself and Wumba, unaware of the events of recent days comes home in the middle of the night:

> As he picked his way home through the trailing ferns up the ravine, a monstrous bald-headed white buzzard flew down at him and,

> sorcerer though he was, he trembled with fear…For a white buzzard was a sign of black evil.
> Wumba quickened his pace…But as he passed under the cashew tree to enter he felt something like a soft hugging around his neck…"Yes, Lawd, ahm coming. Yes, Lawd, ah knows ahm a sinner, a wretched, wicked, lying, t'iefing an' murderin' black sinner. But, Oh Lawd, lemme go!' (149-150

Wumba finally was let go at which point he sees the body hanging from the tree and goes completely mad shouting that "judgment come" and found the church that night.

Bita's education might have made her skeptical of Obeah just as it had made jaded her toward the Bible, but the peasants of Banana Bottom and Jubilee, indeed, of the entire Caribbean can be counted among the true believers. Jamaica's Obeah is representative of traditional religions of diasporic and dispersed peoples throughout the New World. And, the same stigma that causes those island folk to try to disguise themselves and practice their rituals under the cover of darkness is the same stigma within which all non-European religious practices are shrouded, regardless of country of origin and mode of practice. In order to come out of the shadows, many have conceived an unholy union of sacred and demonic, western and first world and created a religion more spectacle than sacrosanct and in which lives Obi and a version of the Judeo Christian God. This is religious amalgamation is known in Jamaica as in forms such as Poco Mania and Kumina. Each of these involve, chanting drumming, dancing and sing and have come to be known as Jamaican folk music. As folk music, outsiders view the religion as entertainment; yet, its music has the ability to hold sway over the mind and emotions of onlookers. Bita Plant

experienced this mesmeric religious fervor after returning to Banana Bottom and was reduced to a dead faint in the midst of the spectacle.

> "With the drums tom-tomming, the little woman started rolling and jumping…As the chorus swelled…the woman bounced faster and faster…at last with a great shout she fell down like a dead person…a little girl fell down swooning…A youth fell down and then another…In the midst of them Bita seemed to be mesmerized by the common fetish spirit. It was a greater stronger thing than the Great Revival. Those bodies poised straight in religious ecstasy and dancing vertically up and down, while others transformed themselves into curious whirling shapes, seemed filled with an ancient nearly-forgotten spirit, something ancestral recaptured in the emotional fervor, evoking in here memories of pictures of savage rites, tribal dancing with splendid swaying plumes and the brandishing of the of the supple-jacks struck her symbolic of raised and clashing triumphant spears…Mesmerized by the spell of it Bita was drawn nearer and nearer into the inner circle until with a shriek she fell down." (249-250)

The Reverend Evan Vaughan referred to the scene as "not of God's spirit but the devil's". (249) Nevertheless, the spectacle of it enlivened the people and they, spellbound, follow the drummers and dancers out of the church to witness the exhibition. This exhibition is the thing to which this form of religiosity has been reduced. But, seen through other eyes, the eyes of those who believed, one was not a vulgar showman performing for the devouring eyes of the bystander that which was reverent to the participants. Derek Walcott in his essay, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory" bemoans the reality that the overarching attitude toward the faith of the African and Asian diasporas embodied in these rhythmic and vocal displays amount to little more than a shrug. Still the fact that people choose to beat drums and dance dances and sing songs in honor of their gods makes the display faith, not farce nor pantomime. To reproduce Walcott's perspective, "the

performance was like a dialect, a branch of its original language, an abridgement of it, but not a distortion."[xliii]

JUBBAN – THE UNLIKELY SUITOR

As it relates to matters of matrimony, although initially inclined to acquiesce to the plan for her life, which prominently featured marrying Herald Newton Day, the Craig's choice of an acceptable mate for Bita based upon the prevailing color class predisposition of the period, when she was relieved of the responsibility of this sentence she becomes determined to make choices not based upon societal convention nor her patron's expectations, but on her own terms.

Since education plays a major role in the marriage market, a black woman possessed of a fine English education in Banana Bottom, or Jubilee for that matter, Bita had no fitting male counterpart with whom to form a socially equivalent matrimonial union. Herald Newton Day having exited the scenario, the alternatives with which Bita is faced are spinsterhood, marrying beneath her pedigree, or exogamy. Long before returning to Banana Bottom, Bita had been faced with the question from her classmates who were confounded as to the possibility of her finding a suitable mate upon returning home:

> 'At College…the chief question the girls were always putting to one another, "What are you going to do when you are finished?" And the answer was always, "Expect to get married." The girls to get excited about the kind of man they wanted to marry and what careers they wanted their husbands to have. And sometimes they asked me, "What are *you* going to do, Bita?" Of course, I said, "Get married, too." And they'd ask, "But to who...what *kind* of man?" And I replied, "Suppose I'll find a man among my people back home." And they were all kind of shocked. You see, none of them dreamed of going to a colony…And they couldn't imagine any other kind of man worthwhile but a white one." (82)

Mrs. Craig, to her credit, was supportive of possible courtship of Bita by Andrew Larkin, a 'young' leader in he church who was very prosperous. She knew that Bita's prospect would be limited, since she had been "educated above her station." Like King Hezekiah showing the riches of his kingdom to the kings of Babylon, "There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them,"[xliv] Andrew showed Bita everything in his domain, he killed a goat and made a feast and entertained Bita and her friends. But Bita was unmoved. (184-191) She also tried to encourage a union between Bita and a gentleman "who had just graduated from a local college and expected to land a job in the Civil Service." (214) But when Bita ascertained that his family's idea of having books in the home amounted to decorative effects, for Bita, a woman who loves to read and reflect, the trip was amounted to a waste. The young man's brother informed Bita and Mrs. Craig that, "My wife and I don't read much besides the newspapers…But it's nice to furnish a room…with fine books and bookcases." (215)

Now, a newly educated black woman, Bita would have few prospects but the likelihood of settling for a Tack Talley or a Hopping Dick. Alternatively, she could immigrate to the United States to work as a domestic in urban centers such as Harlem where:

> Waves of migrants from the South and immigrants from the West Indies pushed out the boundaries of black settlement, so that by 1930, blacks, now numbering over 200,000, almost one fifth of whom hailed from the West Indies.[xlv]

Jubban the drayman, although not the fairytale choice of a mate for Bita, was Bita's choice for herself. She exerts agency over her body and mind and chooses the

man whom her father would have chosen especially given his extreme love of the land, a desire not held by his 'son,' Bab.

> Jubban was superior in one thing. He possessed a deep feeling for the land and he was a lucky-born cultivator. No one could do better than he in carrying on the work of the soil that had absorbed Jordan Plant's being and kept his heart's blood always warm. (291)

McKay creates a 'strong silent type' with the Jubban character who, almost like a stalker, or more flatteringly, guardian angel, shows up to defend or protect Bita at the most unexpected instances. "Jubban boxed Tack's mouth with his open palm" (69) for spouting vulgarities about Bita at her first tea-meeting. He is there to rescue her from the whip of the worshipers when she collapses at the revival. " A man rushed in and snatched her away." (250) Of course, we later find out that that man was Jubban. The most important rescue however, is when he snatched her away from Busha Gengley's son, Marse Arthur, when he accosted and tried to sexually assault her. "Right then Jubban appeared upon the bank above and jumped down upon Marse Arthur's neck. (263) Having defended her honor, Bita begins to see Jubban in a new light. Or rather, begins to see him for the first time. While Aunty Nommy is well aware of his "tuneful voice" and her father would trust him with his land and livestock, to Bita he had been nothing but a fixture on he grounds of her father's household.

Subsequent to the incident with Marse Arthur, Bita begins to examine her thoughts about what constituted the finest qualities in a person. Hew thoughts were that these qualities "could spring like flowers in the commonest as much as the most exclusive places" (266) so that no one, no class, race or nation could claim a

monopoly. This philosophy being the tenet by which she judges human character sets the stage for Jubban to be entertained by Bita as a possible match. Bita noticed Jubban for the first time when she returned to Banana Bottom on the event of Aunty Nommy's illness to care for her while her father tended to his fields.

> That evening when Jubban came to the house to check up on the goods for the market and take orders from Jordan, Bita became conscious of the existence of her father's drayman for the first time, remarked his frank, broad, blue-black and solid jaws, and thought that it was all right for her father to have confidence in him. (115)

Bita formerly appreciated Jubban for his competence as her father's employee, but, following the episodes of Jubban's intervention on her behalf, Bita starts to esteem him differently. This becomes apparent when Bita is made queen of Miss Delminto's tea-meeting and, custom calling for suitors to vie for the kiss of the unidentified queen, Jubban wins the honor and presents himself for his prize. Before he can receive reward however, Miss Delminto, knowing that the drayman is Jordan Plant's employee, and, cognizant that he is not on an equivalent social standing with Bita, offers to put someone else in Bita's place:

> But Bita replied that the person who had put down that amount to kiss the queen ought to have the real one…When Bita saw Jubban appear in the plaited palm arch of the boudoir she was all a trembling piece of excitement. Jubban marched determinedly towards his desire, the veil was lifted, Bita gave him her mouth, and he planted a sweet kiss on it. (277)

Although Bita had an initial attraction for Hopping Dick, that infatuation was largely based upon her desire to rebel against Mrs. Craig's authority. It is unlikely that she could have found lasting happiness with Hopping Dick since his primary motivation seemed to be having as much fun as he possibly could. Bita's fine

intellect required that she be with someone whom she could have respected, a man who was not overly concerned about the color of his skin, his outward appearance or what people thought of him. He was proud to say to Marse Arthur who referred to him as Jiggers and a "stinkin', dutty mule boy" that he, Jubban, "Ise a drayman but a man all de same." (264) Bita needed a man who, though black and a peasant was a man of strength, courage and character. She couldn't love a man for whom she had no respect. Jubban is a man whom she can count on to be there for her, to protect and fight for her, and he is also the man she trusts with her confidences. Jubban is a confident man. He doesn't apologize for who he is, just as Bita is confident in being a black woman from the peasantry.

Conversely, Banana Bottom, and by extension most people of color in the Caribbean, see and appreciate themselves only in context of relationship to others. A great contributor to this conundrum is the reality that little black children from a very young age see no images of themselves reflected in the stories of wild adventure and great accomplishment taught about in school. The average child is given little blonde haired, white skinned dolls with which to play and their best gifts at Christmas time. The books, "Grimm's and…Andersen's tales. The Leather Stocking Tales. Bible Tales…tales Dutch…Cornish drifts…of all children except Negro children." Yet they are told that through attaining great academic success they have a gateway to future success and happiness.

Indeed, a case can be made for humanity in general operating under this principle but the disorder is more severe for blacks than other groups. Against these odds, Bita Plant is able to transcend that which stymies others and prevents them

from attaining the heights to which they aspire as well as the true desires of their heart. According to David Nicholls, Bita is exercising authority over her sexual commitments.

> These people think she is "reverting to type," complaining that "while girls with less education and chances were aspiring to ladylike living and trying to get away from their peasant origin, Bita had deliberately chosen to vegetate in the backwoods with a common drayman" (p. 292).
> But Bita's choice is not a reversion to type. Instead, she is demonstrating in her choice of Jubban authority over her sexual commitments.[xlvi]

Rather than engaging in some sort of sexual agency, however, I believe that Bita is redefining the role of education on the acquisitor of scholarship. Not only is one free and able to move into another class category through scholarship, one is able to reinterpret the signification of the word class. The foundational tenets of class, namely color of skin and genealogical construction, cease to hold sway and a new barometer is inaugurated demarcated by the content of the character of a man or woman. In Jubban therefore, Bita found someone in whom "her admiration for him had slowly developed in to respect and love." (313) Jubban's scholarship encompassed "superintending the clearing of the land, planting, harvesting and marketing and the care and breeding of the live stock [sic]." (312) In no way is Jubban's particular inclination toward the land, in Bita's mind, less esteemed than her proclivity toward a life of the mind. Indeed, "she had no craving for Jubban to be other than what he was." (313) Hew on the other hand, although not book learned, was able to appreciate Bita's

intellect and "accepted with natural grace the fact that she should excel in the things to which she had been educated as he should in the things he had been trained." (313)

With self-confidence and self-respect, Bita Plant returns home, not just to Banana Bottom but also to the place where she most feels her natural self. Having embraced her true self, she is able to find what most individuals are searching for, true love, true acceptance and peace in the process. Her blackness becomes not a hindrance but help, all things considered. As for being of the peasantry, her father's love of the land and acquisitiveness in that regard set Bita in good stead to secure her future with Jubban who luxuriates in the land and its bounty. She is even able to purchase the 'State House' her father so coveted throughout his life "for less than one hundred pounds," (312) proving that she was not only book smart but a shrewd businesswoman who understood the political importance of land ownership to self-determination and the continued development and prosperity of the folk.

Only by overcoming the propaganda of otherness, the discourse of their own innate inferiority, can disenfranchised peoples start to address the issues that erect the barriers that hem them in to the prison of race and class.

VOCABULARY

The list below represents words that are commonly used in the Jamaican vernacular. While inexhaustive, the list gives a reasonable amount of words used in the text and will aid the reader attain a measure of understanding that would have been limited without it.

Ahm	I'm
An	and
Befoh	before
Bex	vex
Bra, Breda, Breddah	brother
Busha	Overseer or land owner
Cuss	curse
Dah-talk	are talking
Dah-have	are having
Dat	that
De	there
Dem	them
Dung	down
Dutty	dirty
Edication	education
Eena	in, into
Fe	for
Fraid	afraid
Genelman	gentleman
Hooda	would have
Kean	can't
Larned	learned
Nayga, naygurs	Negro
Noh	not
O'	of, or
Po'	poor
Red-kin	red skinned
Soh	so
Tell	tell or till (until) depending on context
Tink	think
Wid	with
Wi'te	white
Yah	here
Youse	you are, you is
Yu	you

Endnotes

[i] Collins, Patricia Hill, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 221–238

[ii] Cooper, Carolyn, "Only a Nigger Gal!": Race, Gender and the Politics of Education in Claude McKay's "Banana Bottom", Source: Caribbean Quarterly, Vol. 38, No. 1, Claude McKay (March 1992) pp. 40

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