

BLACK RHETORIC: THE ART OF THINKING BEING

by

APRIL LEIGH KINKEAD

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Abstract

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April Leigh Kinkead, PhD

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2013

Supervising Professor: Cedrick May

This dissertation examines the Black Hermeneutic Situation in order to uncover Black Rhetoric's possibilities for thinking Being. Martin Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics and his theories on thinking and Being provide the theoretical framework through which this dissertation unconceals Black Rhetoric's historical and philosophical origins in Ancient Egypt (i.e., Kemet). In order to examine the Black Hermeneutic Situation and its *saying* through Black Rhetoric, this examination establishes the benefits of Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics to an analysis of Black Rhetoric's lineage from Kemet to the United States via the Egyptian Diaspora and the Atlantic Slave Trade. Investigating the historical and philosophical origins of Black Rhetoric offers insight into the various modes of Black Rhetoric that evolved in order to confront and resist the dehumanizing effects of white supremacy (i.e., a socio-political effort as well as a more insidious undercurrent of American culture). These modes of confrontation and resistance seek to protect, maintain, and promote human dignity through rhetorical modes of *saying*. Historical investigations into as well as rhetorical analyses of Slave Narratives, Black Abolitionist speeches, Black Sermons, and Civil Rights and Black Power Movement speeches reveal the evolutionary process of Black Rhetoric and unconceal the Black Hermeneutic Situation. This dissertation centers its broad historical

narrative on close examinations of two of President Barack Obama's speeches (*A More Perfect Union* and *Second Inaugural Address*), which provide contemporary evidence for the evolution of Black Rhetoric from Western and Kemetic rhetorical traditions to its present state as a rhetorical mode of thinking Being that resists dehumanization by reclaiming human dignity.

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Chapter 1

Phenomenological Hermeneutics and the Study of Black Rhetoric

“Rhetoric is nothing less than the discipline in which the self-elaboration of Dasein is expressly executed. Rhetoric is no less than the elaboration of Dasein in its concreteness, the hermeneutic of Dasein itself” (Heidegger SS 1924). In 1924, Heidegger asserted that Book II of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* provides the first systematic hermeneutic of everyday Dasein, and he later expands this path of inquiry regarding the relationship of hermeneutics and everyday Dasein in *Being and Time*. There he examines Dasein’s fundamental way of Being as the only being we know of that is concerned with its Being, and Heidegger discloses Dasein as a linguistic, historical, and temporal Being that is primordially ontological and hermeneutical in its understanding of Being. Years after *Being and Time*, Heidegger focused on an examination of understanding thinking that reveals Dasein’s need to think Being (*What is Called Thinking?*). Such thinking requires not just access to language but also to memory and to poesy. For Heidegger, only poesy permits recollection, a thinking back that is necessary for Dasein to think Being properly, as temporal. As a scholar who reads Heidegger’s work holistically, as connected thoughts in a process rather than as disparate thoughts in time, I see particular themes emerge from the history and collection of Heidegger’s thoughts that lend themselves to a new way of understanding Black Rhetoric. Although Heidegger never speaks specifically about Black Experience, Black Rhetoric, or Black Hermeneutics, his theories on thinking and Being provide a model for inquiry and reveal the importance of thinking Being. Applying his phenomenological hermeneutics to my own inquiry into Black Rhetoric shall provide insight into the significant contribution Black Rhetoric makes to the history of rhetoric as a rhetoric that has the capacity to think Being. Therefore, examining Heidegger’s theories on thinking

as they relate to Being provides a methodological approach to examining Black Rhetoric that shall permit me to argue that Black Rhetoric thinks Being. Heidegger ends *What is Called Thinking?* with an assertion of what is to be learned from his text: "...the essential nature of thinking is determined by what there is to be thought about: the presence of what is present, the Being of beings" (244). As I read Heidegger, whether it is his examination of Being, discussion of everyday Dasein, exposition on thinking, or his application of phenomenological hermeneutics, I can't help but see Heidegger's work as offering revolutionary ways of understanding Black Rhetoric.

I am not the only scholar to see the potential contributions of Heidegger's work to critical examinations of race, as Penelope Ingram's notable *The Signifying Body: Toward an Ethics of Sexual and Racial Difference* explores this topic as well. I agree with her argument that Western metaphysics "robs the racialized Other of ontology because s/he is excessively embodied and [thrown] into the position of ground" (31). Understanding her reading of Fanon through a critical lens that seeks ethical encounters "with a wholly different Other" as a necessary point of departure for an ontological understanding of beings and Being permits the interpreter the opportunity to avoid understanding representations of physical bodies as being grounded in alterity. Avoiding interpretations grounded in alterity discloses the possibilities for authentic Being-in-the-world as a potentiality of Dasein, when the Dasein in question must navigate towards a way of understanding and speaking that overcomes Western Rhetoric's rejection of such ethical encounters (Ingram 30). To do so, I shall rely on Ingram's claim, which argues that imagining an "ontology that accounts for difference and realizes an ethical relation with the Other" must also take into account Fanon's understanding of the "problem of racial difference as an ontological question" while at the same time identifying that the "material body has an important role to play in the developing of an ontology for the racialized

subject” (30). The aim of such investigations in my dissertation shall be to reveal that Black Rhetoric emerged out of a history of understanding and speaking that placed the material body, particularly black bodies, at the center of all whites’ encounters with the Other in order to make permanent an understanding of racial difference that privileged the white perspective and refused to acknowledge that a Black perception was even possible, much less worth noting. My dissertation shall follow an uncharted path towards examining the intersection of phenomenological hermeneutics and Black Rhetoric and seeks to establish not only the history of Black Rhetoric as a blending of Western and Kemetic¹ traditions that over time resulted in a new and unique rhetorical tradition, but also argues that Black Rhetoric has the potential to fulfill Heidegger’s conditions for thinking Being. I shall argue this point by demonstrating that Black Rhetoric evolves as a consequence of Blacks’ need to respond to whites’ rejection of the possibility of ethical encounters with Others through the dehumanizing institutions of slavery and racism. As a consequence of such dehumanization, Blacks necessarily concerned themselves with their human condition and developed hermeneutical as well as rhetorical means by which to think Being as a means of reclaiming human dignity. I believe such an examination of Black Rhetoric is necessary in order to address the current global and political climate in which Western Rhetoric’s adherence to emphasizing alterity establishes institutions that privilege white Westerners and marginalize as well as disenfranchise nonwhites. It is my intent to offer Black Rhetoric as the global rhetoric of choice for productive and effective diplomacy because it has the potential to think Being, which is primordial to authentic Being-in-the-world.

¹ Ancient Egypt

As evidenced by Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, rhetoric is the hermeneutics of Dasein itself; therefore, one would encounter difficulty in discussing one without the other. Given this symbiotic relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics, this dissertation's establishment of Black Rhetoric as a bona fide rhetoric also serves to establish Black Hermeneutics.

This dissertation argues that Black Rhetoric fulfills Heidegger's conditions for thinking Being and points out the reason that such thinking is necessary to move ahead productively in an increasingly globalized socio-political world. Rhetoric is a productive way of Being for Dasein. When rhetoric fails or we fail to use rhetoric, we turn to other, less humane, means of persuasion: coercion and violence. In a world where more and more nations seek nuclear weapons and the gap between the haves and the have-nots widens, rhetoric is more important than ever. Rhetoric as an art has the potential to achieve diplomacy; however, Western Rhetoric has a history of being condescending, racist, sexist, and classist. That is not to say that Western Rhetoric never succeeds at diplomacy; clearly I can't truthfully make such a claim. In order to provide an alternative to traditional Western Rhetoric's efforts to address global issues, I shall demonstrate that Black Rhetoric can offer an advantageous route for diplomatic relations with non-western nations. In fact, Westernization tends to be associated directly with globalization and white-Eurocentricism, both of which are often identified as the cause for tensions amongst as well as within many nations. Many Muslim nations² such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, Palestine, and others reject Western influences on their countries and subsequently within their cultures. Much of Europe rejects the

² Arab cultures obviously have their own rhetorical traditions, but those traditions shall not be examined in my dissertation as they construct a line of inquiry I am not currently pursuing.

Americanization that enters their countries in the form of “fast food” and irresponsible consumerism. American Capitalism/Democracy is at the heart of our rhetorical traditions that evolved from Western European rhetorics. However, as other nations begin to etch significant roles for themselves in this rapidly growing global economy, American politics, bridled by Western Rhetoric, is impeding America’s ability to keep pace with the rest of the world. Fareed Zakaria underscores this phenomenon in *The Post-American World*, in which he argues that American politics in Washington must adapt in order to keep pace with America’s economic potentials throughout the world. If America wishes to remain relevant in this growing global economy, then Washington must reconsider its modes of persuasion. This dissertation shall argue that Black Rhetoric, because of its care and concern for human dignity, provides the appropriate and most productive means of finding available means of persuasion. At the heart of Black Rhetoric is a driving concern for the Being of beings that evolved out of a fundamental need to reclaim human dignity and a desire to address the dehumanizing consequences of institutionalized racism.

Western Rhetoric has come to support Americans’ rejection of community responsibility in favor of individual rights, as can be seen with the growing popularity of the Libertarian Party. Politicians and news media sources regularly snarl the word “socialism” as though it suggests the end of American democracy. We seem to have forgotten our Socratic origins, which understood that communities should be comprised of individuals who seek a greater, communal good rather than merely their own, individual good. Americans, particularly as a consequence of the expanding West, have replaced their sense of community with a privileging of the individual that much of the world rejects on the basis that individualism is antithetical to community. Unlike traditional Western Rhetoric, which has forgotten its Pre-Socratic origins, Black Rhetoric continues to embrace its Kemetic roots and in doing so speaks from a position of an

individual's responsibility to sustaining the rights of a community at large. There must be an ethical encounter between self and community that embraces Ingram's ethical encounter with Others.

In my examination of Black Rhetoric's emergence from both Western and Kemetic traditions, I shall build upon a few key scholars who have examined Kemetic Rhetoric in detail as well as examples of Kemetic texts. My examination shall include Ronald L. Jackson's and Elaine Richardson's *Understanding African American Rhetoric*; Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *Signifying Monkey*; *The Teachings of Ptah-hotep*; *The Book of the Dead*; Jan Assman's *The Mind of Egypt*; Will Coleman's *Tribal Talk*; and works by Molefi Kete Asante and Maulana Karenga. Franz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* investigates the role the material body plays within an ontological framework that suffers under the corruption of Black identity by white representations of blackness enforced linguistically as well as socially, culturally, and politically. These sources, examined alongside others, support my claim that a clear lineage from Kemetic Rhetoric to Black Rhetoric exists. I shall rely on the work of numerous scholars across varied disciplines in order to trace the passage of Kemetic understanding and speaking from Ancient Egypt to the Western Niger-Congo regions of Africa and show how these ways of understanding and speaking were maintained and perpetuated through a continued reliance on oral practices and traditions that maintained and transmitted Kemetic culture over time and place as well as examine the role of self to community and self to ontology.

The essays in Jackson's and Richardson's *Understanding African American Rhetoric* reveal a philosophical component of Kemetic Rhetoric that continues to inform Black Rhetoric until today. Ancient Egyptian culture spread orally throughout parts of Africa, carrying with it theories and practices for speaking. Scholars in Jackson and Richardson's text examine Ancient Egyptian texts for clues that unconceal the rhetorical

theories that informed the culture of that time. Their text also briefly traces those practices from Egypt to other parts of Africa, particularly to the Western Niger-Congo region of Africa, which was the ancestral home of the majority of African slaves.

Understanding African American Rhetoric primarily seeks to reinvigorate an awareness of Kemetic Rhetoric in order to examine Black Rhetoric's origins as well as to historicize the Afrocentric movement in America. Karenga's "Nommo, Kawaida, and Communicative Practice: Bringing Good into the World," as the first chapter of *Understanding African American Rhetoric*, presents Kemetic texts to readers as foundational to Black communicative practices that continue to focus on a sense of community and self as being equal parts of a world. Kemetic Rhetoric centers on a concern for community: "the communal character of communicative practice is reaffirmed and rhetoric is approached as, above all, a rhetoric of communal deliberation, discourse, and action, oriented toward that which is good for the community and world" (Karenga *Understanding* 3). Speaking as an act of communal concern is essential to the Kemetic tradition because it simultaneously expresses and constitutes the speaker's community in a tangible way. When examining this relationship between speaker and community, one gets a sense of the ethical role speaking plays in constructing and maintaining a balanced community. Rather than depending on logic for their legal system, as the Greeks did, Egyptians relied on restoring and balancing a cosmic energy flow, which they looked to as a means by which to maintain social order and justice. In order to examine the relationship of speaking to community solidarity as a means by which to balance cosmic energy, one must position oneself in a Kemetic hermeneutic situation rather than in a typically Western one. In order to accomplish this repositioning of understanding, we shall examine the concept and philosophy of Maat, which can be found later in this dissertation.

Kemetic Rhetoric, as established by Ptah-hotep's precepts in 2200 B.C.E., focuses primarily on the moral and ethical responsibilities of an individual speaker to his/her community at large, where the speaker is charged with speaking publicly in order to improve himself only insofar as improving himself has the ultimate goal of improving the community and the world at large. One can see evidence of this ethical position in Barack Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech, in which he states that as president he can work alongside his fellow Americans to perfect our union by overcoming racism. Kemetic Rhetoric reminds us that we are cogs in an immense wheel that requires communication, listening, respect, and a sense of responsibility to our fellow human beings. The second origin for Black Americans' sense of community comes from the terrible legacy of slavery. Since chattel slavery's origins in the United States, Black slaves cherished and clung to their sense of community, which was passed down from generation to generation as a means of survival. Black scholars, politicians, preachers, and activists continue to evoke this long-cherished sense of community as a means for establishing dignity, hope, and stability. The casual usage in which Blacks refer to one another as "brotha" and "sista" even among strangers has roots in an oral heritage that depended on memory as a recollecting and teaching, which sought to provide support, escape, and comfort for a marginalized group within America. Consequently, I shall also spend time examining the role oral culture played in the emergence of Black Rhetoric from its Western and Kemetic foundations within the context of racism and slavery.

In order to examine Black Rhetoric's evolution from these two different traditions, I shall liken the process to genetic mutation through natural selection. This scientific model exemplifies the process by which Black Rhetoric originated in Ancient Egypt, spread over time to Western Africa, traveled to the United States with the slaves, was maintained within an oral culture, and, with gradual exposure over time and through

necessity, began to merge certain Western Rhetorical practices with Blacks' own historically established traditions that we can now call Black Rhetoric. However, it is important to note that this dissertation stands apart from most Black Studies scholars' examinations of Black Rhetoric,³ because I do not, as they do, examine only the Kemetic roots of Black Rhetoric in order to establish an African heritage for Black Americans. While I appreciate the work these scholars have done to reveal the Kemetic tradition still at work in Black Rhetoric and shall rely on many of these scholars to make my own argument, I find it necessary to establish Black Rhetoric as a new species in a rhetorical evolution that is not merely a Kemetic tradition that adopts certain Western traditions or the other way around. Rather, Black Rhetoric goes through a mutation over time, which results in a new species of rhetoric, not the same species with a few adaptations. President Barack Obama's 2008 "A More Perfect Union" speech and his 2013 *Inaugural Address* embody the current state of Black Rhetoric in its evolutionary course and therefore shall serve as catalysts throughout my dissertation. More importantly, these two speeches demonstrate Black Rhetoric's capacity to think Being and establish Black Rhetoric's place in a global geopolitical economy.

In March 2008, during his presidential campaign, then Senator Barack Obama delivered a momentous speech in response to his critics' accusations that he held dangerous, anti-white (i.e., anti-American) views, which they feared would shape his policies if elected president. In order to respond to these criticisms then-Senator Obama, like Black leaders of the past, looked to the Constitution:

"We the people, in order to form a more perfect union." Two hundred and twenty one years ago, in a hall that still stands across the street, a group of men gathered and, with these simple words, launched America's improbable experiment in democracy. Farmers and scholars;

³ This is generally called African-American Rhetoric.

statesmen and patriots who had traveled across an ocean to escape tyranny and persecution finally made real their declaration of independence at a Philadelphia convention that lasted through the Spring of 1787.

The document [that] they produced was eventually signed but ultimately left unfinished. It was stained by this nation's original sin of slavery, a question that divided the colonies and brought the convention to a stalemate until the founders chose to allow the slave trade to continue for at least twenty more years, and to leave any final resolution to future generations. ("Text of Obama's Speech")

Following a tradition that precedes Frederick Douglass, Obama interprets his argument for racial equality as a patriotic endeavor that originated in the founding of the United States of America, as evidenced by both the Declaration of Independence as well as the Preamble to the Constitution. Both Douglass's "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" and Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" both frame their discussions of racism and racial equality in terms of America's democratic roots in the Constitution, which declares that our nation was formed in order to "establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity" ("Preamble"). Both Douglass and King emphasize in their speeches that, while America's founding documents note "all men are created equal" and that the government promises a promotion of "Justice" for "the general Welfare," Black Americans historically have been excluded from these promises. Unlike his predecessors, however, Obama identifies the historical division over slavery that existed in America at its founding and the consequential strife that lingered over this division for more than a century. The remainder of his speech, which shall be examined in more detail later in this dissertation, reveals that the social legacy of chattel slavery in the United States, which manifested over time as racism reinforced through institutionally sanctioned racial inequality, continues to plague our nation.

Scholars such as Ron Walters, David G. Winter, Brian D. McKenzie, and Charlton D. McIlwain have examined President Barack Obama's speeches and books, and the role his biracial identity plays in his presidency, and others have called into question his Black authenticity. In order to examine Black Rhetoric as a mutation of Western and Kemetite Rhetorics, as well as to demonstrate Black Rhetoric's capacity to think Being, this dissertation shall seek to answer the following questions: How, in the twenty-first century, did a biracial, Harvard-educated lawyer born into a lower-middle class white family find political success through a turnaround speech that embodied Black – as opposed to traditionally Western – Rhetoric, given that he was reared by his white mother and white grandparents? How is it that, despite not growing up in a Black home and not attending any predominantly Black institutions, Barack Obama obtained proficient skills in Black Rhetoric? Why is that his predominant exposure to traditional Western Rhetoric did not obscure his less predominant exposure to Black Rhetoric? In order to answer these questions, I offer my own application of Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics to the study of Black Rhetoric. I shall argue that Black Rhetoric has the capacity, as a discipline of study, to stand apart from its Western and Kemetite roots as an independent rhetoric in its own right worthy of being a standard course in any university curriculum. I shall do so by examining the origins of this non-standardized rhetoric as well as revealing its capacity to think Being according to Heidegger's theories on thinking Being. Although my application quite likely does not fulfill Heidegger's original intent for his own theories on phenomenological hermeneutics, this does not mean that his theories are not applicable to my own purposes.

I shall now begin my examination of Black Rhetoric not with *Being and Time* but with *What Is Called Thinking?* This text conveys a course Heidegger taught during the winter and summer semesters of 1951 and 1952 at the University of Freiburg. He

asserts early in his first lecture that what “is most thought-provoking is that we are still not thinking,” despite the fact that man is the thinking animal (*Lecture I*). For Heidegger, what is most thought-provoking is that which must be thought, that which draws us to think: “Thought-provoking is what gives us to think” (6). He then defends his assertion by claiming that human neglect has prevented man from thinking thus far: “...we human beings do not yet sufficiently reach out and turn toward what desires to be thought” (6). Delivered at a time when Heidegger was drawn towards Friedrich Nietzsche’s thoughts about man’s consuming will-to-power masked as a will-to-truth, he contends in his lectures that in the course of man’s obsession with objective scientific thought we have forgotten to think what must be thought: Being. Since *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s theories continued to focus on the metaphysical tradition that in its quest to be rational, reasonable, logical, and scientific forgot its ontological quest; it forgot about Being. He reveals Dasein as the Being that is concerned with its own Being; however, Dasein regularly falls prey to Others-in-the-world and forgets its own will to think Being as Dasein’s primordial, authentic way-of-Being-in-the-world. Because Dasein always is already in a mood and is driven by angst to flee in the face of death, Dasein, in the act of fleeing, often resorts to inauthentic ways-of-Being-in-the-world and forgets to think Being. Dasein’s inauthentic way-of-Being, as fleeing in the face of death, forgets to think Being and falsely assumes that Dasein can be objectively examined, analyzed, categorized, and understood as subjects for scientific study. However, Dasein does not have a Being that can be understood in such categorical and scientific ways. Metaphysics and science, which Heidegger critically rejects, often assume human beings are a Being that can be subject to objective understanding. Heidegger focused his theories of phenomenological hermeneutics and the need to understand Being in *Being and Time*

and applied them specifically to understanding thinking in *What is Called Thinking?* in which he concluded that thinking means thinking Being.

What Is Called Thinking? rejects at the outset scientific knowledge's claim to know anything about what it understands as thinking. Heidegger argues that science "does not think" (8). He makes this assertion in response to science's professing to know anything with certainty. He argues that what draws us to think is the withdrawal⁴ of that which is to be thought. Therefore, when science assumes that the process of the scientific method reaches completion and concludes that something can be known, it stops asking questions about that which it now assumes to understand and moves on to other inquiries, leaving the previous ones assumed to be resolved. Heidegger disputes the understanding of scientific method understanding, which presumes there must be a completion because, for Heidegger, in order to think one must be committed to the act and endless process of questioning. In other words, to think Being one must always be questioning Being; when one professes to have learned something about Being and consequently ceases questioning Being, then one has ultimately stopped thinking Being by presuming Being to be a Being that can be viewed objectively. *Being and Time* argues that Being is not a Being that can authentically ever be removed from Being and assume the place and role of an object. Being is not an object or an entity that can be objectively examined, categorized, compartmentalized, or completely understood. Dasein's Being is always-already in a world, in a time, and in a place. While language is the horizon for understanding⁵ Being, only death can be the horizon for Dasein's Being; therefore, phenomenological hermeneutics provides Dasein a way of understanding that

⁴ This line of reasoning appears in *The Symposium* when Socrates argues that we desire what we lack and therefore cannot desire what we do not lack. Heidegger's approach to understanding thinking follows this same rationale.

⁵ This is a hermeneutical sense of understanding, not the colloquial sense of the word.

permits one to think Being. However, the Occident historically, since Plato, has moved farther and farther away from thinking Being and has moved towards a scientific way of understanding human beings. Such scientific understanding of human beings, on the contrary, is in no way an understanding of Being because science does not and cannot in principle ever think Being, according to Heidegger.

Before I can demonstrate that Black Rhetoric has the potentiality for thinking Being, I must first make clear what Heidegger defines as thinking Being. It is wrong to assume that I could condense Heidegger's definition of either 'thinking' or 'Being' while at the same time completely preserving the complexity these definitions warrant. The best I can offer is an introduction and then allow the deeper and fuller meaning to unfold throughout the course of my argument.

According to Heidegger, that which is to be thought withdraws from Dasein. In this withdrawal, Dasein turns toward that which withdraws, and the turning "toward-which" is always that which is yet to be reached. If thinking Being is what withdraws from Dasein, as Heidegger argues it is, then Dasein's authentic way of thinking Being must always turn toward what is to be thought, which must be Being. Ultimately, when one examines the relationship between "toward-which" and "thinking Being," one realizes that Dasein's thinking Being is in itself a toward-which that cannot reach a conclusive end. Thinking Being is an authentic way-of-Being-in-the-world that compels Dasein towards its futurity. When one understands Dasein as a Being that is Being and Time, which is Heidegger's argument in *Being and Time*, then one also accepts that understanding Dasein's temporalities are necessary in order to think Being: Dasein's past, present, and

future.⁶ Dasein is temporal in so far as it is always already its past, present, and future. Dasein's Being is the horizon for understanding its own Being, world, and Time. Being, according to Heidegger, is the hermeneutic horizon for Dasein. Given this understanding of Dasein, we can better understand the relationship between "toward-which" and "thinking Being" as dependent on our understanding of Dasein as being temporal. Dasein's authentic Being-towards-death recalls its thrownness and summons it to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. Dasein's potential way-of-Being-in-the-world is to think the "toward-which" that must be thought: Being.

This seemingly circular argument may at first appear to go nowhere other than toward a tautology of Being; however, the circularity of this argument necessarily mimics the hermeneutic situation from which Dasein understands its Being, Time, and world. Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics posits that understanding begins not with an extant investigation of understanding, but with what is to be understood – Being. Thus, I shall begin my argument with Being and necessarily must also end my understanding of Being with Being, as Being is the horizon for understanding. However, this "end" of which I speak is not a logically conclusive end as science may claim, but rather is an end that Time, manifesting itself as death, necessitates. Keeping death as the "end" in mind, one must ask what it is that is to be thought in relation to this "end." That which is to be thought is that which withdraws from us and that which we must, in order to be thinking, direct our thinking toward, namely Being. If Being is temporal and the horizon for meaningfulness and understanding and since phenomenological hermeneutics is a way-of-understanding that permits Dasein to think about its own Being

⁶ Potentiality for Being is always already Dasein's primordial way of Being-in-the-world and fits neatly into this notion of unifying the temporal possibilities within the essence of Dasein.

and permits it to understand itself as temporal and not as an object to be examined, labeled, and categorized, then facticity provides the point of departure necessary for phenomenological hermeneutics, which intends to understand Dasein in the context of everyday life by allowing what will show up to show up *as it is*. This facticity also contends that experience is necessary for understanding historicity as it relates to the hermeneutic situation from which Dasein understands and thinks. Historicity, as it relates to actual lived experience,⁷ is not necessarily positive, according to Heidegger. Given the inevitable passing of time from present to future, a present experience becomes a past experience and in doing so becomes an event stripped of its temporal unity and is necessarily dehistoricized. This particular understanding of lived experience is further complicated later in my argument when I focus on Black experiences that help produce ways of understanding Blackness and the world from a Black perspective that fights against whites' oppressive labels and intrusive gaze. For now, however, it is important to note this relationship of lived experience to thinking, which leads me back to Heidegger's *What Is Called Thinking?*

In the first lecture, Heidegger accepts that man "has thought the profoundest thoughts and entrusted them to memory" (*What Is Called Thinking?* 7). Thinking is necessarily a relationship to Being and not merely a task to be performed. Heidegger suggests that the only path toward understanding what thinking Being means is to unlearn what we have traditionally understood as thinking. By turning toward that which withdraws, human beings become pointers toward what is withdrawing; man becomes a sign that should be interpreted. We point not at what is actually withdrawing but the withdrawal itself, and man – as a sign – is "the sign [that] stays without interpretation"

⁷ Lived experience generally leads Dasein into forgetfulness and away from authentic Being.

(*What Is Called Thinking?* 10). In this pointing toward the withdrawal and considering that Dasein is a temporal Being, memory becomes the “gathering of recollection” in which Dasein thinks back. Heidegger examines man as the un-interpreted sign in Hölderlin’s hymn *Mnemosyne* and launches his discussion of memory by examining the relationship between *mythos* and *logos*, whereby *logos* supposedly destroys *mythos*. In his argument, however, Heidegger asserts that *mythos* is not destroyed but concealed by our collective adherence to *logos* and by our forgetting *mythos*. Given the West’s desire for reason and logic that began in particular with Plato, the privileging of *logos* as a means by which to understand and explain the world through dialectical reasoning overwhelmed previous attention to *mythos*. The Greek emphasis on *logos* after Plato, especially given Aristotle’s influence, sought to privilege *logos* as the only reasonable, practical, and logical means by which to interpret, understand, and express the world. Logical assertions began to replace poetic expressions as worthy interpretations. While *logos*, according to Heidegger, did not actually destroy *mythos*, it did conceal it. For Heidegger, poetry supplies the language that can unconceal *mythos* for Dasein, which is “what has its essence in its telling” (*What Is Called Thinking?* 10). According to its Greek root *hermeneuein*, hermeneutics translates as “to say,” “to explain,” and “to translate,” which we translate in English as “to interpret” (Palmer 13). In its ability to interpret as saying, poetry fulfills Heidegger’s preferred mode of discourse because it engages Dasein in its hermeneutic situation. This engaging permits Dasein to recollect memory and allows Dasein, linguistically, to turn towards the gathering of recollection rather than merely retrieve past events as objects stripped of their temporal unity with Dasein: “This is why poesy is the water that at times flows backward toward the source, toward thinking as a thinking back, a recollection” (*What Is Called Thinking?* 11). Hölderlin’s poem claims that man is “a sign that is not read” (*What Is Called Thinking?* 11). Heidegger argues that the

poet, above others, “may have a part in showing us what is most thought-provoking: precisely what the assertion about our thought-provoking time attempts to think of” (*What Is Called Thinking?* 12). Dasein’s essential way of questioning engages it in understanding its own Being, because Dasein is the Being that has concern for its Being. Poetry is the language that in its pursuit of what is most thought-provoking reveals *mythos* as capable of allowing memory to be the gathering of recollection; therefore, through the language⁸ of poetry, Dasein can point toward that which withdraws. Even though man is a sign that is not read, the pointing toward allows man to think Being as a reading. Poetry, then, is the hermeneutic language in which Dasein has as its potentiality-for-Being a way⁹ for thinking Being.

To think Being, however, always must mean to think one’s own Being. How can we point toward that which withdraws from others? Heidegger defends his rejection of science’s claim to be able to understand others by asking: “Whence do the sciences – which necessarily are always in the dark about the origin of their own nature – derive the authority to pronounce such verdicts?” (*What Is Called Thinking?* 43). Much of Western thinking has adopted this scientific notion that somehow one can decide what another man’s place and function in the world is and consequently determine another’s role “objectively.” By doing so, one makes claims about who another man is. As a result of Aristotle’s encouragement of objective knowing, Western thinking until Nietzsche claimed the “existence and knowability of the external world” (*What Is Called Thinking?* 44). It is no accident that the more we engaged in so-called scientific thinking, the more we

⁸ Remember that Heidegger argues language is the horizon for understanding, horizon for hermeneutics.

⁹ “Way” for Heidegger connotes a more Asian sense than Western sense, such as tao in Taoism. It is not merely a method, but an essential manner of Being. He identifies his own texts as “ways not works.”

validated the practice of labeling and categorizing others as of means of distinguishing one group of people from another on the basis of certain perceived differences. Ingram notes this practice of so-called objective thinking through the practice of racial and sexual marking: "Heidegger argues that part of thinking Being before beings, that is Being before it is dispersed to particular beings, involves thinking Being that is unmarked. Sexual, racial, and cultural differences come after Being; they are ontic not ontological; they are characteristics of specific beings, not Being itself" (22). Ingram notes Heidegger's attempt to understand Dasein as sexually neutral and argues that neither sexual nor racial neutrality is necessary for ontologically ethical encounters with Others. Rather, she argues that Heidegger's "theory of *mitsein*, which imagines Being as a relation, as a revealing, between subjects provides a model for a theorizing of Being as both a sexed and raced relation" (30). This dissertation seeks to extend Ingram's understanding of Heidegger's *mitsein* as being evident in Black Rhetoric/Hermeneutics. While Heidegger focused many of his early studies and lectures on Aristotle, he also came to understand that metaphysics' will-to-know professed claims to objective knowing, which he rejected as not possible – with the exception of labels we constructed in order to mark specific beings. Scientists' drive for objective knowing manifests itself in metaphysics and Western Rhetoric as an observer's epistemological ability to make accurate assertions regarding his relative certainty of knowing and understanding things and beings. However, Heidegger clearly delineates the difference between knowing and understanding, just as he did the difference between Being and being, by clarifying that Dasein cannot make itself into an object to be understood. In order to make Dasein an object of epistemology, Dasein must lose its world, rendering it worldless. Dasein's understanding cannot take place outside its world, because Dasein is the Being that is essentially a Being-in-the-world. Heidegger relates this point about Dasein's need to

understand its Being-in-the-world to his greater purpose of discovering what is called thinking by explaining that our “own manner of thinking still feeds on the traditional nature of thinking, the forming of representational ideas” (*What Is Called Thinking?* 45). What Ingram makes clear is that we can accept Heidegger’s push to think Being as ontological by focusing on *mitsein*, which permits ethical encounters with Others on the basis of a relationship between the two that is not predicated on a subject/object basis but recognizes a beings-in-a-world (23). I extend Ingram’s perspective and assert that the traditional, metaphysical way of thinking denies us access to the proper nature of thinking and encourages unethical encounters with Others and agree with her claim that for “Fanon, the [B]lack man experiences his body only through the eyes of the colonizer, as this is the ground of his world” (24). Metaphysical thinking denies Dasein its world; therefore, it remains outside proper thinking, according to Heidegger. Since thinking Being is Dasein’s pointing toward that which withdraws and thinking takes place in the pointing, if we assume a subject-object structure in learning and thinking, Dasein cannot think Being because there is no pointing toward possibilities to be thought. The subject-object relationship assumes that nothing is withdrawing and that what we seek to know is before us as an object ready to be understood. Heidegger’s first few lectures during the 1951 course defend his argument that science, as traditionally understood in the West, does not and cannot think Being, because science privileges the notion of objective knowing as actual knowing and understanding.

During the 1952 course, his lectures unseat Schleiermacher’s definition of hermeneutics as understanding the author better than the author himself. Heidegger argues that the “wish to understand a thinker in his own terms is something else entirely than the attempt to take up a thinker’s quest and pursue it to the core of his thoughts” (*What Is Called Thinking?* 185). He asserts again that that which withdraws from Dasein

is what is to be thought and the pointing toward-which that withdraws is Dasein's thinking Being. While Heidegger accepts that we may take up another thinker's quest – because in the taking up of that quest what is to be thought then begins to withdraw from us – he does not accept that we can ever understand someone else as they understand themselves. Only our own Being can withdraw from us. What withdraws from one cannot withdraw from another in exactly the same way; the withdrawing itself changes. Heidegger claims: "The first is and remains impossible. The second is rare, and of all things the most difficult" (*What Is Called Thinking?* 185). To understand a thinker in his own terms, then, is impossible, and while taking up another's quest is possible, it is rare and the most difficult task to pursue. I am not suggesting, by arguing for Black Rhetoric's ability to think Being, everyone can or should be able to think as any individual Black person thinks. Black Rhetoric, unlike Western Rhetoric, is primarily acquired alongside language because it is not a well-studied or over-theorized system of persuasive speech. Like most people, the majority of Black Americans have not been exposed to studying any rhetorical tradition in extensive or exhaustive detail. With the exception of those trained specifically in the rhetorical arts, Blacks, like whites, Asians, and Latinos learn rhetoric along with learning to speak – as a necessary form of communication and understanding. What separates Black Rhetoric from other rhetorical traditions is the fact that it is a way-of-Being in the Black Community that is handed down from one generation to another in response to a specific historical context and from a particular hermeneutic situation that is shared by all Black people. This is not to say, however, that it never changes or has not evolved. The beauty and adaptability of Black Rhetoric lies in its ability to reflect changing times. However, while most of Black Rhetoric stems from oral and literary traditions passed down within Black families, churches, and communities, there are complexities to Black Rhetoric that, like Western Rhetoric, are

available only to those who are willing to study it in great detail. Therefore, by studying Black Rhetoric's origins and examining it as it shows up in practice, I shall reveal useful ways of teaching and understanding Black Rhetoric. If Heidegger's own argument for 'thinking' rejects the possibility of understanding another thinker as he understands himself, then what I am suggesting is that by understanding and accepting that Black Rhetoric thinks Being one can adopt its possibilities for thinking that can be conducive to resolving disputes diplomatically and with a concern for Being – particularly global disputes that seek to give a voice to those who desire liberation from oppression. Thinking Being prohibits one's proclivity for regarding human beings as objects to be observed and understood, which Western Rhetoric has been guilty of doing for most of its history. Black Rhetoric, then, can provide a field of study for those who seek its potential for thinking outside the preexisting subject-object binary and wish to preserve human dignity through what Ingram identifies as ethical encounters.

My task is not to understand Black people as they understand themselves individually or even to understand others as individual Black people understand them, but to take up the quest of Black Rhetoric in order to find an available means of communication that recognizes an audience of beings with a Being and not objects. Through a better understanding of my task at hand, I can focus on the first steps toward an understanding of Black Rhetoric by resuming my examination of Being, thinking, and the relationship of poetry to Black Rhetoric. Although Black Rhetoric evolved out of a particular group's response to institutionalized racism, Black Rhetoric is a mode of thinking and speaking that emerged out of common experiences of racism, marginalization, and disenfranchisement. Hence, Black Rhetoric is not the exclusive property of Black Americans but rather a mode of expression rooted in a hermeneutic situation that views the world and others through the lens of oppression in order to seek

out liberty and human dignity. This possibility for non-exclusivity distinguishes Black Rhetoric from African American Literature, which is generally understood as such because of an author's ethnicity. Black Rhetoric's origins lie in one "ethnic" group's history, but it is not a productive mode of saying limited in its use by the orator's skin color. In fact, Black Rhetoric's potential to cross ethnic barriers is one of its greatest strengths as a rhetorical art. More importantly, this potentiality is necessary to Black Rhetoric's capacity to think Being.

When engaged in the act of thinking, one must have thoughts. Thoughts necessitate recollection: "Thought is in need of memory, the gathering of thought" (*What Is Called Thinking?* 138). This use of recollection, however, does not evoke the general sense-meaning of 'memory.' Memory, for Heidegger, does not suggest a mere power to recall an event from the past; rather, memory is a temporal way of Being for Dasein: "What is past, present, and to come appears in the oneness of its own present Being" (*What Is Called Thinking?* 140). Heidegger identifies the closeness in sound and meaning of the Old English "*thencan*, to think, and *thencian*, to thank" by connecting them to *thanc*, a grateful thought (*What Is Called Thinking?* 139). Recollection doing the work of memory draws us toward the original thought, which is what is most thought-provoking. Thinking, then, dwells within memory, given this relationship between 'think' and 'thank,' which suggests that thinking is an offering (i.e., thanks) of what is to be thought; recollection reveals itself as a pointing toward that which is most thought-provoking (i.e., Being). Memory recalls what is to be thought and keeps it safe: "Keeping is the fundamental nature and essence of memory" (*What Is Called Thinking?* 151). Dasein inhabits this keeping but does not create it; therefore, forgetting consumes all that is not kept in memory. Heidegger claims that forgetting is not merely a failure to retain what is most thought-provoking and therefore a defective way of Being for Dasein; rather,

forgetting is Dasein's way of escaping thinking by fleeing the anxiety of facing one's own possibility for death. Man falls into forgetting as a way of fleeing, because when he thinks Being he must confront his own horizon for Being – death. Man's anxiety about his own death causes him to flee in the face of thinking Being, which must include accepting his own mortality as the horizon for Being. Metaphysics' desire to escape the inevitability of death has led philosophers¹⁰ to flee in the face of thinking Being in order to avoid thinking, understanding, and accepting Dasein's death. As a consequence of America's long history of racial violence, to be Black in America is to think about the possibility of one's death on a regular basis. This legacy of violence contributes to a Black Hermeneutic situation that must face the anxiety of death as a consequence of being denied the privilege of fleeing in the face of such anxiety. Therefore, Black Rhetoric, as an expression of the Black Hermeneutic situation, embraces the inevitability of death and recollects the history of racial violence in America in order to reclaim human dignity.

On the flipside of memory, forgetting conceals what is most thought-provoking: Being. Western Rhetoric forgets Being because at the outset it does not think Being: "Western thought thus begins with an omission, perhaps even a failure" (*What Is Called Thinking?* 152). This beginning, however, is not Western thought's origin: "The origin keeps itself concealed in the beginning" (*What Is Called Thinking?* 152). Beginnings derive from an origin but are not necessarily themselves the origin. Parmenides, according to Heidegger, marks the origin of Western thought but is not necessarily its beginning. Since Socrates's adherence to logic as an assertion of something about something (assuming subjectivity), Western thought has forgotten to think Being. It opts instead to turn human beings into objects to be observed and understood by subjects

¹⁰ Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* claims philosophers suffer from the same dogmatism as religious leaders.

capable of doing the observing and with the ability to understand on the basis of those observations. To identify Western thought's foundation as thinking Being rather than its beginning as making assertions through dialectical exchanges, Heidegger looks to Parmenides to reveal Western thought's origin as a desire to think Being. Since the writings of Plato, however, Western Rhetoric associates logic and dialectic with Socrates as one of the fathers of Western thought who privileged dialectic and philosophy as supplying one with the capacity to know Truth. Accordingly, *logos* necessitates dialectic in order to assert something as true or logically valid. Western thought became dialectical in its adherence to this understanding of logic as a product of a subject-object relationship where a subject observes an object's qualities and makes assertions based on those observations. In order to avoid this metaphysical pitfall of logic, Heidegger turns to the poetry of Parmenides and others as exhibiting the language that can think Being. Poetry is not dialectical and does not strictly adhere to an understanding of *logos* as logical assertions about things and people. Poetry, as a language, permits one to think Being through memory. In order to draw this particular examination of 'thinking Being' to a close and move on to understanding how poetry permits one to think Being, I must examine the role language plays in thinking, paying particular attention to assertions and propositions as opposed to poetic language. This takes me to Heidegger's examination of Parmenides as the first Greek thinker to think Being.

Heidegger translates Parmenides's poem to reveal the relationship of "saying" to thinking. Understanding takes place by encountering what is to be thought rather than asserting platitudes of what one assumes already is. Man reveals his world by asking questions of it and allowing the world to show up for him. In the asking, man comes to realize he is an integral part of the world: Being-in-the-world. From Parmenides's poem, Heidegger translates 'say' in "One should both say and think that Being is" as a

hermeneutic of Being (*What is Called Thinking?*). Saying is translating, and according to Heidegger, a translation is always an interpretation. So, to interpret one must ask questions of what is to be interpreted. Thus, saying is a way of thinking for Dasein if it is an interpretive saying and not a demonstrative, assertive saying; in other words, saying is a questioning. Saying as interpretation allows for possibility and potentiality, whereas saying as an assertion limits and fixes entities as objects. Only in so far as an object is finite and stagnant can we make claims about it and render it atemporal. Since Being is neither an object nor a subject, we cannot say (i.e., make assertions) anything about our or another's Being; we can, however, ask questions that seek understanding (i.e., a hermeneutic understanding). Language as a hermeneutic saying, then, becomes useful in order for Dasein to think Being.

Although language is a system of signs, or a columbarium of metaphors as Nietzsche¹¹ claims, it does contain within its scope the potentiality for originating moments. According to Heidegger: "To speak language is totally different from employing language. Common speech merely employs language" (*What Is Called Thinking?* 128). Poesy¹² is a way of speaking language that expresses Being. Poesy's potentiality for speaking Being, as a way of thinking Being, finds its origin in language. Parmenides uses¹³ poetry to say and think Being. In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Heidegger defends poetry's ability to think Being where other employments of language fail: "Poetry is the saying of the unconcealedness of what is" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 71). *The Origin of the Work of Art*, one of Heidegger's essays in his book *Poetry*,

¹¹ Nietzsche's *Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*

¹² I use 'poesy' to refer to the process of composing poetry, and 'poetry' to identify the work that results from the composing process.

¹³ Heidegger argues that "using" is different from employing. "Using" allows the thing to be what it is in its nature to be.

Language, Thought, examines the complexity of poetry as a use of language that unconceals. In its unconcealedness, poetry “is not an aimless imagining of whimsicalities and not a flight of mere notions and fancies into the realm of the unreal” (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 70). On the contrary, poetry, as the language that unconceals, also unfolds and projects ahead. Poetry is the language that reveals Dasein’s Being as temporalizing: past, present, and future. Western Rhetoric’s movement away from poetry and toward logic has left Being unthought since Parmenides. Parmenides is the origin of Heidegger’s thinking Being, as “Parmenides’ own language is the language of thinking” (*What Is Called Thinking?* 186). That is not to say, however, that Heidegger does not rely heavily upon Western thinkers since Parmenides. Aristotle’s writing, especially the *Nicomachean Ethics*, plays an important role in *Being and Time*.

Aristotle, more so in *On Rhetoric* than *Nicomachean Ethics*, sets out to define rhetoric as the counterpart to dialectic. Whereas dialectic aims to reveal truth as universal, rhetoric reveals temporary, contextual truths particular to a certain time and place. Awareness of audience perceptions, beliefs, and understanding is vital for any orator wishing to speak eloquently and persuasively. While Heidegger appreciates Aristotle’s sensitivity to non-fixed temporalities, which acknowledges that audiences live in particular places at specific times with individual perceptions of and truths about the world that do not necessarily remain stagnate. Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric* examines audiences as objects that can be observed and understood and whose reactions we can anticipate on the basis of our objectively knowing them. As the foundation for all of Western Rhetoric, Aristotle’s treatment of the audience as an object infiltrates subsequent Western treatises in science and metaphysics as well as rhetoric: “Calculative thinking, which Socrates defines and Plato and Aristotle perfect, makes modern scientific and technological development possible even as it precipitates the

atrophy of Dasein's meditative capacities" (McGrath 76). This atrophy conceals Dasein's ability and desire to confront its own Being in a way that allows it to embrace the burden of its own life and push forward into its futurity bearing its own load. Aristotle's adherence to logic handed down from Socrates and Plato brings his followers to view human beings not as temporalizing Beings with potentiality-for-Being but as entities fixed within a particular time and place that forget Dasein's Being as a projection toward a future and see Being as merely thrown into the present. Metaphysics and science (including technology) view human beings from a teleological perspective, whereas Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics views Dasein's hermeneutic situation as eschatological. Dasein's acceptance of death as anticipatory resoluteness allows Dasein to accept its own death and from that acceptance live its own life as authentically Being-in-the-world. While Heidegger's concept of thrownness accepts that human beings are born into a time and place in history and that certain conditions accompany this time and place (e.g., a Jewish woman born in Poland in 1919 to working-class parents or a German male born into an agriculture-based community in the Black Forest in 1889), it also identifies Dasein as always already its past, present, and future, which must always include Dasein's horizon for Being, which is death. Therefore, Dasein's way-of-Being-in-the-world is a temporalizing Being. Despite its thrownness, Dasein is always already projecting towards its futurity. Potentiality-for-Being, then, becomes far more significant to Heidegger's understanding (i.e., phenomenological hermeneutics) of Dasein than an understanding limited to viewing thrownness as a past that limits a present. Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* assumes a subject-object position of understanding (i.e., not phenomenological hermeneutics) an audience's thrownness as something that can be verifiably known such as the traits of a person. That is, one can anticipate how an audience will react to persuasive, motivational, or instructional speech by analyzing the

details the speaker knows about the audience's traits and from that knowledge rationally judge how the audience members will react to the speech in order to move that particular audience according to the speaker's wishes.

Anyone familiar with the history of Western Rhetoric can trace this particular element of Aristotle's influence from Cicero to Quintilian, Saint Augustine, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Robert of Basevorn, Desiderius Erasmus, Niccolò Machiavelli, Peter Ramus, Francis Bacon, John Locke, George Campbell, Hugh Blair, Richard Whately, and other influential theorists up to the present. These theorists and others share an approach to audiences (human beings) as objects that can be observed and subsequently understood, if only temporarily. By categorizing components of Western Rhetoric into appeals (*ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*), canons (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery), parts of speech (introduction, background, outline, proof, rebuttals, and conclusion), *topoi* (required knowledge of topics and audiences), and rhetoric's drive to speak to a particular audience, orators have treated audiences as objects for observation and analysis by subjects (i.e., the orators) that have studied the nature of human beings and amassed a knowledge of their topics. Therefore, knowing and understanding move well away from the questions of Being that Parmenides proposed in his poetry. Instead, rhetoric emerges as a test of man's¹⁴ worth in society. Under the umbrella of rhetoric, even poetry and homiletics¹⁵ during this long history do not escape Aristotle's pervasive

¹⁴ Given the misogyny prevalent in Europe over the centuries covered here, women were overlooked almost altogether as speakers capable of eloquent speech. Again, the subject/object binary concealed women's humanity and rendered them objects and not human beings.

¹⁵ Western Rhetoric is in no way monolithic. Significant figures such as Saint Augustine have challenged the Platonic/Aristotelean model and argued extensively for a hermeneutic understanding. While these moments in the history of rhetoric clearly exist and offer ruptures in the timeline, I shall focus my examination of Western Rhetoric on the dominant model as it relates to my argument here. I intend, in the future, to extend my

influence on rhetorical treatises. *Ars poetriae* and *ars praedicandi*, like classical rhetoric, categorize language according to assumptions made of an audience's ability to grasp complicated (highly figurative) texts in poetry and Scripture often as understood according to Aristotle's three categories of style: high, middle, and low. By judging an issue's complexity and an audience's interpretive capabilities, the speaker determines when to employ high (figurative and ornate), middle (moderate use of high and low styles), and low (plain and simple) styles¹⁶ of speech. *Ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, in particular, demonstrate Aristotle's assumption that human beings can be observed, analyzed, and understood in such a way that speakers can fashion eloquent speeches that will move a particular audience toward a particular course of action or belief. Book II of *Rhetoric* exemplifies this notion of categorizing human beings according to their emotions. Whereas Heidegger relies on the understanding that human beings have nonnoetic experiences (i.e. moods), Aristotle's treatise assumes a subjective position that attempts to elicit certain emotions from an audience given a prescribed understanding of those emotions. For example, Aristotle carefully distinguishes 'pity' from 'sympathy' and offers suggestions for recognizing when eliciting one emotion is more valuable than another. Understanding Dasein's emotions (not exactly the same as Heidegger's use of moods) permits the orator to evoke desired emotions from his audience as he sees fit. This use of pathos leads critics of rhetoric such as Plato to argue that rhetoric is merely manipulation through linguistic skill. Such a conscious use of audience manipulation confirms Heidegger's criticism of metaphysics obscuring Being by creating subject-object

examination of Western and Black Rhetoric to include figures such as Saint Augustine in order to examine further the complexity and nuance of Western Rhetoric.

¹⁶ The Catholic Church developed *sermo humilis*, a Latin used to speak and to preach to a congregation in ordinary language. Also concerning style, Saint Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* notes that style and decorum are to be implemented according to the subject matter.

relationships that profess the arrogance of certitude: Truth¹⁷ as verisimilitude. However, Heidegger's theories do leave room for those who prefer to live in a state of fallenness with others rather than to embrace their own call to conscience and accept the burden of their own life and eventual death. Nietzsche¹⁸ refers to these people as the "herd." While Aristotle and those who followed him suggested that audiences composed of such individuals are undesirable, they also argued for ways in which a speaker could identify a desirable audience. Regardless of the audience, the analysis for determining the desirability of an audience stemmed from a subject-object binary.

Aristotle (Classical Greek Rhetoric) focuses primarily on eloquence as a speaker's logical ability to find available means of persuasion and deliver an appropriate speech to a given audience, desirable or otherwise. This distinct notion of eloquence, however, emerged in Roman Rhetoric with a new mission that extended Aristotle's understanding of rhetorical eloquence. While Aristotle claims that rhetoric is amoral and a practical art for everyday living, Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* argues that eloquence is "a good man speaking well" and highlights the moral character of the speaker. This position rejects the view Aristotle entertained that an immoral person could still speak well. As a result of Quintilian's treatise, eloquent speech becomes a tool by which to judge a man's mind and character more than simply his ability to speak appropriately given a particular topic and audience. Again, Western notions of logic, whether taking a more obvious and dominant role (e.g. Cicero, Bacon, and Locke) or an obscure and minor role (e.g. Augustine and Vinsauf), remain a categorical feature of Western Rhetoric across the centuries. Whether theorists favored rhetoric over dialectic or dialectic over

¹⁷ Heidegger's understanding of a truth that opposes verisimilitude will be addressed later.

¹⁸ This terminology appears in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and is hinted at in many of his other works.

rhetoric, categorizing and judging rhetoric as well as speakers and audiences, both of which are human beings, remained prevalent throughout Western Rhetoric's history until Heidegger.¹⁹ Rhetoric developed into a tool of persuasive speech and subjective power rather than as a potential way-of-Being-in-the-world that thinks Being. The adherence in metaphysics to objective knowing concealed Dasein's ability to think Being, replacing this notion of thinking with Western Rhetoric's arrogance of certitude. Dasein, as a result of the West's privileging *logos* and concealing *mythos*, forgot to think Being.

Having provided an acquaintance with Heidegger's "thinking Being" and the manner in which Western Rhetoric fails to understand the need to think Being, I can now turn my argument toward a demonstration of Black Rhetoric's potentiality for thinking Being. Black Rhetoric can think Being because it ontologically fulfills Heidegger's definition of poesy despite its not being regularly identified as poetry. One must keep in mind the role memory plays in thinking Being and the way poetry is a place of recollection as memory by pointing toward that which is most thought-provoking: Being. More importantly, one must keep in mind that thinking Being allows Being to show up as it is (i.e., phenomenological hermeneutics), never establishes a subject-object relationship that claims to know others' Being, and does not place Dasein in a subject position. But before I can effectively make my argument for Black Rhetoric as a rhetoric that can think Being, I need to spend time sufficiently establishing Black Rhetoric as a unique rhetorical form that stands apart from its Western and Kemetic parentage. Therefore, I have a twofold objective: one, to trace Black Rhetoric's Kemetic lineage from Ancient Egypt to the slaves of the Niger-Congo regions of Africa; and two, to identify the role Western Rhetoric plays in Black Rhetoric. Ultimately, my examination of these two parent

¹⁹ Thanks in great part to Nietzsche's influence on philosophy.

rhetorics shall support my argument that Black Rhetoric developed over time as a separate rhetorical tradition that maintains traces of its parentage while keeping in mind Heidegger's understanding of thinking Being as manifesting itself in the language of poetry. Therefore, I shall also need to prove that despite Black Rhetoric's unapparent identification with poesy, it is indeed a uniquely poetic language. To do so, I shall begin not with Western Rhetoric's but with Kemetic Rhetoric's role by chronologically tracing both as having a significant influence on Black Rhetoric.

In order to fulfill this dissertation's aim, I shall structure the remaining five chapters as follows: Chapter Two shall ground my argument in President Obama's 2008 *A More Perfect Union* speech in order to reveal the significance of Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics as established in *Being and Time* to my examination of Black Rhetoric's capacity to think Being. I shall identify Black Rhetoric as a way of Being for Dasein that embraces temporality as a facticity of Being in so far as understanding and knowing must be distinguished with regard to Dasein as being-temporal. This chapter shall introduce Heidegger's theories on thinking Being, *pathos*, moods, and listening as well as his stance on rhetoric as the art of listening. Penelope Ingram's work on Heidegger shall play a significant role in this chapter by revealing the need for a revolution in ethics that embraces poetic thinking in order to create opportunities for ethical encounters with Others. This chapter shall also introduce W. E. B. Du Bois's double-consciousness and its relationship to Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *Signifying Monkey*.

Building upon the work of Gates in Chapter Two, Chapter Three shall reveal Kemet's concept of Maat and bring to light the important *tropes* found in Black Rhetoric that originate in Kemet. More importantly, Chapter Three shall fill in a significant gap in Black Studies by tracing the path Maat took from Ancient Egypt, to West Africa, and eventually to the United States through the Atlantic Slave Trade. A wide range of

scholars across varied disciplines shall contribute to this chapter's ability to reveal Black Rhetoric's oldest origins in Ancient Egypt. Through a detailed examination of the concept of Maat, Chapter Three shall develop my thesis that certain characteristics of Kemetic Rhetoric survived the Middle Passage and contributed to the foundation and evolution of Black Rhetoric. This chapter shall conclude with an investigation into the role of white Christianity as well as the development of institutional racism in order to expose their part in the development of a Black Hermeneutic Situation grounded in a desire to resist white supremacy²⁰ and reclaim human dignity.

Chapter Four shall apply the discoveries of the previous chapters to President Obama's *A More Perfect Union* speech in order to construct a chronological end to my inquiry into Black Rhetoric that shall permit me the opportunity to recall Black Rhetoric's origins through figures such as Phillis Wheatley, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Jacobs. This chapter shall focus primarily on the various *tropes* evident in the Slave Narrative genre that serve as the foundation of Black Rhetoric's evolutionary process. This chapter shall also point toward that which Heidegger identifies as most thought-provoking, which in the case of Black Hermeneutics is human dignity.

Chapter Five shall move my examination forward in time from the early and mid nineteenth-century to the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement of the 1950s and 1960s in order to reveal the continuing evolution of Black Rhetoric as well as its adaptability over time and context. This chapter shall reveal the three canons of Black

²⁰ White supremacy, as I use it throughout my argument, refers to two different but related understandings of this term. It represents a conscious political and social movement as evidenced by both laws (i.e., Dred Scott and Plessy vs. Ferguson) and organizations (i.e., the Klu Klux Klan). However, it also represents a less conscious but no less significant contributor to racial prejudice in general. In this latter sense, white supremacy not only impacts the ways in which whites view Blacks but also the ways in which Blacks view themselves (i.e., Du Bois's double-consciousness and veil).

Rhetoric (Collaborative Deliberation, Forensic Resistance, and Humanist Reciprocity) and their subsequent *tropes* in order to demonstrate Black Rhetoric's pedagogical possibilities. Examining Black Rhetoric's canons and *tropes* with a focus on the possibilities of Black Rhetoric, I shall rely on speeches from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and the Black Panther Party in order to reveal the potentiality of Black Rhetoric to think Being. As a move toward the conclusion of my argument that Black Rhetoric has the capacity to think Being, I shall examine President Obama's *Second Inaugural Address* as a means of demonstrating Black Rhetoric's potential to speak from a hermeneutic situation grounded in oppression, regardless of skin color, in order to resist oppression and claim human dignity by thinking Being.

The final chapter shall reexamine President Obama's *A More Perfect Union* speech in order to reveal the *tropes* identified in Chapter Four as playing a significant role in President Obama's speech. This examination shall look specifically at the rhetorical context of his speech as well as his need to establish common ground with white Americans. By using the President's speech as a demonstration of Black Rhetoric's capacity to think Being, I shall be able to argue that Black Rhetoric is not necessarily the exclusive property of Blacks but has the capacity to address oppression more broadly. This chapter shall develop my thesis by invoking Heidegger's theories on thinking Being and then applying his theories to my investigation of Black Sermonic Rhetoric's role in the evolution of Black Rhetoric. By tracing the path of Black Rhetoric chronologically, this chapter, as well as the other five chapters, shall permit my argument to unfold in such a way that it mimics the evolution of Black Rhetoric itself.

Chapter 2

Heideggarian Rhetoric and Black Studies

Scholarly examinations of Black Rhetoric outside discussions of linguistics and African American Literature are beginning to produce quite a fruitful area of research, particularly given President Obama's election and reelection. In 2008, when then Senator Obama first arrived on the national political stage as a presidential hopeful, his skill in oratory wowed the world. It had been at least eight years since the world had eagerly hung onto every word a politician spoke with interest, delight, and appreciation for the well-crafted word. As a consequence, journalists and scholars alike delighted in the opportunities afforded them to examine in rigorous detail the artful speeches of Barack Obama. However, it was his March 18, 2008 "A More Perfect Union" speech that sealed his presidential fate by offering the world his perspective on the continuing struggles of racism in the United States. On April 1, 2008, longtime writing professor Roy Peter Clark offered his rhetorical analysis of that speech and invoked the legacy of Abolitionist Rhetoric and W.E.B. Du Bois in order to do so. Clark claims that President Obama's speech sought to draw back the curtain of white privilege and offer white Americans an opportunity to understand racism from a Black Hermeneutic Situation, much as Du Bois and others had attempted to do in the past. Clark recognizes the praises given to the speech but argues that its greatest power lies in its crossing lines that are rarely ever crossed so eloquently and effectively: "The focus has been on the orator's willingness to say things in public about race that are rarely spoken at all, even in private" (par. 3). Clark is careful to note the speech's immediate exigence, which was to address whites' concerns about President Obama's connections to Rev. Jeremiah Wright, but he also identifies that President Obama used this opportunity to address a larger concern: racism in America. Clark identifies four rhetorical strategies from the

speech: “1. The power of allusion and its patriotic associations. 2. The oratorical resonance of parallel constructions. 3. The ‘two-ness’ of the texture, to use Du Bois’s useful term. 4. [President Obama’s] ability to include himself as a character in a narrative about race” (par. 7). Clark notes President Obama’s “framing of racial equality in familiar patriotic terms” as a rhetorical strategy in keeping with the legacy of race rhetoric (par. 8). President Obama had the delicate task of educating whites, particularly older whites, on race relations in such a way as to expose America’s failure to address the persistent legacy of racism and do so while not turning off white voters: “[President] Obama’s patriotic lexicon is meant to comfort white ears and soothe white fears. What keeps the speech from falling into a pandering sea of slogans is language that reveals, not the ideals, but the failures of the American experiment” (Clark par. 11). Clark identifies President Obama’s choice to cast the institution of slavery into a starkly religious light by labeling slavery as “this nation’s original sin” (“A More Perfect Union” par. 3). Despite his regular condemnation of racism in America, which mirrors that of Rev. Wright, President Obama carefully and strategically parallels his condemnations with “evocations of national history, ideals, and language” (Clark par. 12). In his brief analysis, Clark identifies rhetorical devices foundational to Black Rhetoric, despite his never mentioning ‘Black Rhetoric’ specifically. He correctly identifies that Obama spoke from a longstanding tradition of black orators who regularly equated Blacks’ desire for liberty to the colonists’ desire for liberty from British rule, the use of parallel constructions that reveal Du Bois’s double-consciousness, and, of course, the act of identifying one’s own autobiography as offering authority to speak on matters of race. I agree with Clark’s analysis, but feel that examination of Black Rhetoric can shed even more light on President Obama’s “A More Perfect Union” speech and its cultural, rhetorical, historical, and political significance.

Most discussions about rhetoric necessarily include additional discussions about hermeneutics. Consequently, any full treatment of rhetoric must also include a thorough examination of hermeneutics. While hermeneutics, as a field, is as large and complex as rhetoric, for the purposes of my examination of Black Rhetoric and Black Hermeneutics, I shall take Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics developed in *Being and Time* as my point of departure. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger examines the Greek meaning of phenomenology as "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" in order to distinguish his usage of phenomenology from Husserl's (58). This distinction is important since, for Heidegger, phenomenology cannot stand apart from history, but is constitutive of it. For this reason, I shall continue to spend a great deal of time looking at the history of Black Americans in order to examine Black Rhetoric through the lens of phenomenological hermeneutics. I have chosen Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics as my primary theoretical lens precisely because it does not force set perspectives or preconceived notions on the examined texts or make claims to absolute and objective knowing. Rather, it permits me the opportunity to identify my prior understanding of Western Rhetoric and its relationship to Black Rhetoric in order to help me recognize what shows up on *its* own through an examination of Black Rhetoric's relationship to Kemetic Rhetoric as well as Western Rhetoric. Accordingly, phenomenological hermeneutics, while doing violence to traditional philosophy, does not do violence to that which is being investigated – in this case Black Rhetoric.

By examining hermeneutics more broadly, I can identify the manner in which Heidegger inserts himself into a long tradition so that he may rupture that tradition. With regard to philosophy, he argues that despite the Occident's longstanding claims to be practicing ontology, the questioning of the ontology of Being itself has been lost in

metaphysics' claims "to know." To make this point clear, Heidegger creates a fissure in the longstanding metaphysical tradition by asserting that *only through phenomenology* "is ontology possible" (*Being and Time* 60). *Being and Time* points out that traditional philosophy has forgotten to inquire into Being as a consequence of metaphysics' investment in objective knowing, as in Kant's synthetic *a priori* judgments. Heidegger claims that genuine inquiries into Being have not been made since the Pre-Socratics. Therefore, Heidegger's *Being and Time* turns metaphysics on its head by arguing that it fails to inquire into the ontology of Being. Because metaphysics fails to do the job, Heidegger turns to phenomenological hermeneutics, which permits inquirers to do bonafide ontology, an ontology that can and does inquire into the ontology of Being. Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics in *Being and Time* embraces the potentiality for Dasein's being-human by focusing exclusively on Being through a rejection of subject-object knowing. Dasein, for Heidegger, is fully human and is the Being that is capable of being aware of Being and is fully human in entertaining this awareness. With regard to Heidegger's claim that phenomenological hermeneutics uncovers Being, I shall extend his understanding, articulated in brief below, in order to assist my argument's encounter with Black Rhetoric:

By uncovering the meaning of Being and the basic structures of Dasein in general we may exhibit the horizon for any further ontological study of those entities which do not have the character of Dasein, this hermeneutic also becomes a 'hermeneutic' in the sense of working out the conditions on which the possibility of any ontological investigation depends. (*Being and Time* 62)

Black Rhetoric does not have the character of Dasein, but as a language practice, it is a possible mode of expression for Dasein. My examination shall approach Black Americans' history, writing, and speeches through the lens of phenomenological hermeneutics and ground my examination of Black Rhetoric as an ethical encounter of other Daseins on the basis of care and concern for Black Americans, who have the

character of Dasein. Doing so shall reveal the horizon for understanding Black Rhetoric as a unique way of being for Black Americans, one that emerged, necessarily, in response to a particular hermeneutic situation – race-based slavery. Even though the Atlantic Slave Trade resulted in a forced African Diaspora throughout much of the Western world, Black Americans endured experiences particular to their time and place in the United States – chattel slavery and social as well as legal dehumanization. Even as institutional slavery was not a new enterprise in the world, chattel slavery, as it existed in the United States, was unprecedented in human history. Therefore, this unique experience led to a unique hermeneutic situation, which demanded a unique response – Black Rhetoric. Heidegger's *Being and Time* successfully establishes Dasein as a historical being that cannot be divorced from its past; in fact, Being, he argues, is Time. Despite lived experience often being a negative, according to Heidegger,²¹ experience as it relates to Dasein's history is constitutive of Dasein itself. As discussed in Chapter One of this argument, Dasein is always already its past, present, and future. By approaching this examination with temporality as a way of Being for Dasein in mind, I shall focus on establishing the relevance of Black Americans' historicity to my claims that Black Rhetoric emerged in response to particular experiences. In order to do so, this chapter holds that phenomenological hermeneutics supplies a more-than adequate mode of recognizing and comprehending Black Hermeneutics. It establishes a way in which one can understand and discuss Black Hermeneutics, identify the manner in which Black Rhetoric emerges, and at the same time examine Black Rhetoric.

Before such an examination can begin, one final distinction must be made between “understanding” and “knowing.” For Heidegger, understanding and knowing

²¹ For Heidegger, lived experience in general takes place in fallenness, in everyday idle chatter, and therefore is not a way of being that is authentic but rather is inauthentic.

exist separately and are not interchangeable terms. Throughout this investigation, I shall make claims to *understanding* but not to *knowing*, distinguishing them as Heidegger does. Understanding, according to Heidegger, coexists alongside Being and in fact describes Dasein. Dasein is its understanding of possibilities for Being, as it is fore-theoretical and contextual: “As understanding, [then,] Dasein projects its Being upon [its own] possibilities [for Being]” (*Being and Time* 188). Dasein’s primary way-of-Being as understanding is “Being-towards-possibilities” in which Dasein understands itself as a “potentiality-for-Being” (*Being and Time* 188). Dasein’s understanding, then, is fore-theoretical: “when the entity to be understood is brought close interpretatively by taking as our clue the ‘something as something’; and this Articulation lies *before* our making any thematic assertion about it,” because Dasein is always already its facticity, potentiality, and futurity of Being (*Being and Time* 190). Dasein comes into Being as a potentiality-for-Being that embraces understanding as embracing possibilities rather than limiting and fixing Being. In other words, we allow that which is to be understood to show up *as it is* in its context, in its world, as it is without pre-theorizing or forcing our or others’ values upon it. Dasein embraces possibilities by rejecting objective knowing, which constricts Dasein’s possibilities-for-Being. Understanding, then, results from phenomenological hermeneutics: “Anything understood which is held in our fore-having and towards which we set our sights ‘foresightedly,’ becomes conceptualizable through the interpretation” (*Being and Time* 191). Heidegger connects meaning to understanding by explaining that in the “project of the understanding, entities are disclosed in their possibility” (*Being and Time* 192). Therefore, “when entities within-the-world are discovered along with the Being of Dasein – that is, when they have come to be understood – we say that they have *meaning*” (*Being and Time* 192). Thus, “that which is understood, taken strictly, is not the meaning but the entity, or alternatively, Being” (*Being and Time* 192-3).

Contrary to understanding, knowing²² results from specialized applications that forget contexts – i.e., worlds. While understanding requires entities and Daseins to keep their worlds, knowing strips them of those worlds. Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* articulates Heidegger's use of understanding as "not a resigned ideal of human experience adopted in the old age of the spirit, as with Dilthey; nor is it, as with Husserl, a last methodological ideal of philosophy in contrast to the [naïveté] of unreflecting life; it is, on the contrary, the *original form of the realization of Dasein*, which is [B]eing-in-the-world" (259). Understanding, then, is a way of Being for Dasein; therefore, hermeneutics is also a way of understanding Being for Dasein.

Jonathan Salem-Wiseman's *Heidegger's Dasein and the Liberal Conception of Self* examines "Heidegger's claim that the essence of Dasein lies in existence" (537). While Salem-Wiseman's argument seeks to reveal a liberal understanding of the 'self' imbedded within Heidegger's framework for Dasein, his doing so intersects with my own application of Dasein to a phenomenological understanding of Black Rhetoric: "Dasein is a self-interpreting being, but there is no single way of taking hold of its existence that is mandatory or even privileged" (538). While I agree with his premise that Dasein does not have as a way of Being the character of a being (i.e., entity) that can be understood (i.e., taken hold of) as a thing (i.e., an object) with a nature that also can be understood (i.e., known) in order to assess what constitutes a Socratic notion of a good life understood from the perspective of one (i.e., any) particular Dasein's nature. I opt instead to extend his premise of self-interpreting for the purposes of my own conclusion – that Black

²² 'Knowing' here is not a Heideggarian sense of knowing; rather, it refers to what Heidegger criticizes as subject-object knowing, which presupposes an inner subject knowing an outward object. Such knowing seeks a corresponding relationship between a sign and that which is signified on the basis of a subject making claims about an object. Conversely, Heideggarian knowing is founded on Being-in-the-world and being-alongside.

Rhetoric embraces Heidegger's understanding of Dasein, mitsein, and Being and thus operates from the position that Dasein's existence is what takes place between birth and death and that the unfolding of experiences in that temporal existence present possibilities for Being that include ethical encounters with Others. There is no prescribed nature of Dasein. This is important for understanding my argument that the Black Hermeneutic Situation is a situation in both a time and place but is not offering a prescriptive 'nature' for Black Americans. On the contrary, it is the goal of this dissertation to argue that there is no 'Black Nature' but that there are ways of understanding, interpreting, and speaking that we can identify as Black Hermeneutics and Black Rhetoric because these ways seek understanding through thinking Being as a consequence of the dehumanizing effects of slavery and racism that compel one to think about humanity and human dignity in such a way that one thinks Being in order to do so. In order to understand how shared experiences and a shared hermeneutic situation can lead to shared understandings and ways of thinking, interpreting, and speaking, it is necessary to examine Heidegger's understanding of Dasein further.

Salem-Wiseman explains that Heidegger's Dasein is a being that is concerned with its own Being and that Being of my concern is always my own Being. This self-relation that results means "Dasein is characterized by mineness, [and] I must inevitably interpret not only my world but also my own being. This self-relation means that Dasein can make fundamentally different decisions with respect to the way in which it takes hold of its own existence" (538). By examining Dasein within the context of the Ancient Greeks's will to discover "the good," Heidegger argues that no singular good can exist for all Daseins. Consequently, there is no one good for any particular Dasein's Being. This revelation of Heidegger's work can appear as though it contradicts my use of the collective terms Black Rhetoric and Black Hermeneutics as somehow authentic (i.e.,

good) ways of being; however, upon closer inspection it becomes apparent that Heidegger's understanding of Dasein actually complements my claims quite neatly. Black Rhetoric and Black Hermeneutics provide terms for discussing and analyzing possible ways of being for Dasein and are not to be understood as revealing a so-called nature of Dasein. In other words, Dasein's potential way of Being-in-the-world as understanding is through phenomenological hermeneutics, which, when examined in the context of the Black Hermeneutic Situation, reveals Black Rhetoric as a way of thinking Being. Gadamer's recognition of Dasein's potential for understanding, then, is the reason I have chosen to rely on Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics so as not to obscure Black Americans' hermeneutic situations but to highlight them.

Gadamer's extension of Heidegger's understanding includes an examination of the complexities within the hermeneutic circle: "A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text" (267). Therefore, when approaching a text, he must "examine the legitimacy—i.e., the origin and validity—of the fore-meanings dwelling within him" (Gadamer 267). As an examiner of Black Rhetoric, I must examine my own methods and fore-meanings for understanding by questioning their legitimacy. For much the same reason that Heidegger rejects scientific knowing, I too must resist my Western propensity to categorize, compartmentalize, and treat Black Rhetoric as a thing I can "know" rather than as a way of understanding. I must allow it to be *as it is* and resist making claims about it that conceal it from my understanding. Therefore, I must recognize my own prejudices – formed through the Western tradition –before I can hope to understand Black Rhetoric: "The recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust" (Gadamer 270). Despite the Enlightenment's attempts to remove prejudice in order to understand, Gadamer

identifies that prejudice, in its original sense, means pre-understanding. Understanding, then, is dependent on pre-understanding: "That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being" (276-7).

Consequently, understanding, according to Gadamer, is "to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated. This is what must be validated by hermeneutic theory, which is far too dominated by the idea of a procedure, a method" (290). Therefore, to adopt Heidegger and Gadamer's definitions of understanding, I must join in their rejection of the longstanding tradition of understanding articulated by Friedrich Schleiermacher and extended by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Hermeneutics, according to Schleiermacher, provides the framework for creating a discipline of understanding. Such a framework requires the interpreter "to understand the text first as well as and then even better than its author" (Schleiermacher 167). Such an understanding would allow an interpreter to explain a text as its author would have.

Interestingly, Schleiermacher's definition of hermeneutics coincides with Heidegger's definition of "knowing." For this reason, I believe I must reject it – not only because I believe such an explanation to be impossible, as I cannot reexperience another's experiences nor understand another better than he has understood himself – but more importantly because Schleiermacher assumes a subject-object paradigm for understanding that conceals that which is to be understood. While Schleiermacher certainly deserves credit and respect for drawing significant attention to hermeneutics and providing an opportunity to extend the field of study beyond its religious applications, I shall align my way of interpreting Black Rhetoric with Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics rather than Schleiermacher's as it is more appropriate for my task at hand. Therefore, I begin with phenomenological hermeneutics as an origin for understanding

Black Hermeneutics, which in turn will allow me to understand Black Rhetoric.

Consequently, I shall not make claims “to know” Black Hermeneutics or Black Rhetoric, but through the act of interpretation as described in Heidegger’s phenomenological hermeneutics, I shall make claims to an interpretation of Black Hermeneutics and Black Rhetoric that I believe legitimately reveals these ways of being as they are – to the extent that I can allow them to show up for themselves as they already are in a time.

Kevin J. Porter’s *Meaning, Language, and Time: Toward a Consequential Philosophy of Discourse* takes up Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein’s temporality. Porter examines Heidegger’s argument that the temporality of Dasein is not bound to a single place in time or space, as Dasein can never be fixed in one particular temporal or spatial location: “Dasein’s involvements cannot be understood separately and at a single instant, but only have meaningfulness considered in a totality, the *world*, that includes their temporality” (188). Dasein is always already its past, present, and future; therefore, its involvements, which include encounters and understandings, are also fluid in space and time as part of Dasein’s world: “The future is ontologically primary in that the past and present are oriented toward it and emerge from it” (Porter 189). As a consequence of Dasein’s futurity occupying the present as anticipation, “Dasein comes toward itself, then, not in the sense that its future self is already fully determined but in the sense that Dasein’s ownmost potentiality-for-Being is something that Dasein can in fact ‘come towards’ through *anticipation* – i.e., a mode of Being in which Dasein is, in a sense, ‘constantly ahead of itself’” (Porter 189-190). Dasein’s future is never predetermined by its past nor by its present; rather, innumerable possibilities exist for Dasein’s future. Despite the future not being fixed according to past events or understandings of past events, these possibilities are often informed by Dasein’s present understanding of past events. S.J. McGrath’s *Heidegger* analyzes Heidegger’s Dasein as the being that is most

often engaged in interpreting its own Being. Because temporality is Dasein's primordial way-of-Being-in-the-world, Dasein regularly engages in both authentic as well as inauthentic modes of interpretation: "we can no longer presume to have access to things themselves unmediated by history and hidden prejudgment" (McGrath 4). As a result of these interferences (i.e.; what Heidegger labels "comportments") in our efforts to interpret things and Dasein, and particularly as a consequence of our anxiety in the face of death, Dasein most often falls into inauthentic ways of being: "Dasein is primarily motivated by self-deception, denial, and anxiety in the face of death, and that these 'comportments' shape not only the way we see things but also the very things we see" (McGrath 4). Metaphysics in particular, according to Heidegger, failed to pursue the ontological question of Being and instead focused on ontic questions of being. For Heidegger, this results in Metaphysics' failure to understand Being, or Dasein, for that matter. McGrath notes that in order to examine Dasein and think Being in terms of Dasein's own Being, we must be aware of Dasein's moods. Dasein's moods comport it toward the future as either an authentic or inauthentic way of being in the world. Dasein's moods do not exist in a vacuum and instead often are a reaction to an event. In order for beings to appear before Dasein in an authentic way, Dasein must embrace self-relating and acknowledge its own Being as the horizon of being in a world or risk seeing itself and others through the lens of the Other's gaze. McGrath explains that this event, (i.e., *Ereignis*) "simultaneously opens the clearing (the not) that is Dasein and makes possible the appearance of beings" (72). Despite Metaphysics' efforts to conceal Being and repress *Ereignis*, Heidegger unveils that the experience of *Ereignis* "pulsates with the [...] threefold relationship of Dasein, being[,] and temporality" (McGrath 73).

Daniel M. Gross and Ansgar Kemmann's *Heidegger and Rhetoric* reveals that while Heidegger is often paired with hermeneutics, he also spent a great deal of time with

Aristotelian Rhetoric, which represents the foundation of Western Rhetoric. Gross argues that even though Heidegger only nods as *elocutio*, he focuses on conceptuality: “Troping appears as poetic logos; it provides the nontheoretical distance necessary to see how we are in our everyday situations and how we are moved [(i.e., moods)]” (3). Rather than casting rhetoric as the art of speaking, as became the tradition following Roman Oratory’s emphasis on eloquence, Gross claims that Heidegger casts rhetoric “as the art of listening” (Gross 3). Gross claims that Heidegger “describes instead a being who, insofar as that being can hear, is constituted as some among others, someone in a particular situation that demands action” (3). He argues that Heidegger views language as a “medium, not [a] means” (Gross 3). Even more relevant to my project is Gross’s attention to *pathos*. As a consequence of Heidegger relocating “rhetoric [to] the heart of his fundamental ontology,” Gross claims, “We are human insofar as we can generate shared contexts, articulate our fears and desires, deliberate and judge in the appropriate terms of our day, and act meaningfully in a world of common concern” (4). It is important to note that we are beings in a world that is shared and projecting forward not isolated and fixed. While it is true that our understanding of this world depends on our hermeneutic situation and our self-relating, we are always in a world with Others and these Others contribute to our understanding in various ways, depending on how we interpret our relationship to these Others. Gross claims that Dasein’s moods create “the very condition for the possibility of rational discourse, or logos” (Gross 4). As Gross puts it, *pathos* is Dasein’s possibility for moods: “Without affect our disembodied minds would have no heart, and no legs to stand on. We would have no grounds for concern, no time and place for [interpreting], no motivation to discourse at all” (4). While only human beings can be moved to *logos*, “‘Being-moved’ is essential to all” (Gross 13). What, then, lies at the foundation of Heidegger’s Rhetoric is recognizing that Being-in-the-world is

Dasein's primordial way of Being; therefore, we are always necessarily Being-with-one-another. As a consequence of Dasein's self-relating that recognizes its being in a world with Others, Dasein also comes to understand itself as "having the same world with an Other" (Gross 15). Gross argues that language is not a tool of man, but I would assert that language can be a tool that Dasein, as being inauthentic, uses to distort and manipulate the world in order to limit the possibilities for Being of Others. This is obviously an inauthentic way of Being-in-the-world, but a way nonetheless. If, however, human beings are "in language and not the other way around," then they can hear others around them in addition to themselves and listen, which is an authentic way of being for Dasein (Gross 15). Unfortunately, not all encounters are authentic or ethical. When it comes to matters of race, encounters between whites and Blacks are all too often inauthentic, i.e., unethical.

As evidenced in Chapter One, I am not the first to see a connection between Heidegger and race studies. Ingram's *The Signifying Body* develops an understanding of Heidegger's Dasein that focuses on the role of language as having access to understanding experience in such a way that the possibilities of authentic Being include ethical encounters with the Other. Franz Fanon plays a significant role in her examination of Heidegger and racial difference. Ingram acknowledges Dasein's understanding its existence in terms of self-relation in her examination of Fanon's use of Lacan's mirror stage theory: "Although the black subject has its own idea of itself, that idea is profoundly altered through the failure of identification that takes place when it encounters the white metropole" (30). This failure is obviously a consequence of whites' refusal to encounter the Black Other ethically. Ingram, quoting Fanon, notes that it is "not just the idea of itself that is altered, but the actual physical self appears to undergo a change" (30). Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* speaks to this phenomenon perhaps better

than any other work of African American Fiction. Ellison's narrator remains a disembodied voice with the exception of his unethical encounters with whites whereby we gain a sense of the narrator's body through their eyes as opposed to his own. Kimberly Lamm's "Visuality and Black Masculinity in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Romare Bearden's Photomontages" tackles the "possibilities for and impediments to remaking the visual representations of the black male" (813). Lamm offers Bearden's work as a visual representation of the difficulties the narrator in *Invisible Man* encounters in his efforts to imagine Black Masculinity: "The work of Bearden and Ellison map and sketch screens of vision that the eyes of black men look within and across in order to forge perceptions and images of themselves distinct from their fixed role" as an inversion of positive white male identity (815-6). Like Ingram, Lamm relies on Lacan's mirror stage theory in order to understand the narrator's dilemma in *Invisible Man* and Bearden's ability to capture this dilemma visually: "Lacan defines the gaze as the field of vision outside of the individual subject, that which 'photo-graph(s)' him or her, confirms, sustains, but also splits the subject within the field of the visible, making full self-disclosure impossible" (817). The narrator is indeed invisible to himself as well as others because he fails to encounter Others through his own field of vision as opposed to being subject to the gaze of whites, who do not encounter him ethically but instead invert their image of the black narrator in order to capture a positive image of their own (white) selves. Consequently, the narrator fails to encounter Others ethically because he fails to concern himself with his own Being as a desire to understand his own Being from the perspective of his own Being; rather he allows the white gaze to influence his own visual field – until such a time that he comes to understand his invisibility, retreats underground, and decides to live in the light, visible. In order to better understand the intersections that exist between ethical-versus-unethical encounters with Others and understanding one's own Being as self-relating in the context

of Black Rhetoric and Black Hermeneutics as an authentic way-of-being, I shall direct my examination toward Du Bois and his theory of double-consciousness.

If we accept Heidegger's claim that language is the house of Being and the horizon for understanding, then we must also accept that early Black Americans necessarily adopted dualistic ways of being in a racially divided world. W.E.B. Du Bois identifies this dualism as double-consciousness. Racism (i.e., white supremacy), he says, denies Blacks a true self-consciousness, only letting them see themselves "through the revelation of the other world" (*Souls of Black Folk* 11). He explains the peculiarity of double-consciousness as a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (*Souls of Black Folk* 11). In what I posit as a struggle for identity, particularly for a rhetorical-minded sense of self (i.e., self-relating), Du Bois articulates Black Americans' duality: "One ever feels his two-ness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideas in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (*Souls of Black Folk* 11). His articulation of Black Americans' struggles between two ways of Being-in-the-world parallels my argument for Black Rhetoric's dual parentage as being grounded in both Western as well as Kemetic traditions. Double-consciousness, however, does not dissipate with Black Rhetoric's emergence and evolution; rather, it survives as a major tenet of Black Rhetoric.

Dana Carluccio's "The Evolutionary Invention of Race: W.E.B. Du Bois's 'Conservation of Race' and George Schuyler's *Black No More*" argues that Du Bois's "failed effort to conserve race and Schuyler's failed effort to dispense with it shapes scholarly debates about race in modernist and contemporary culture" (512). While I am less interested in Carluccio's focus on evolutionary psychology, her article offers exceptional insight into Du Bois's double-consciousness. Carluccio argues that Du Bois

“translates the question of what race is [...] into the more pragmatic question of what it does – or as Du Bois puts it, the question of what ‘the function of race differences [has been] up to the present time’” (515-6). According to Carluccio’s reading of Du Bois as participating in the evolutionary psychology of his time, he accepted the arguments for biological race but didn’t believe that biological differences produce inherently beneficial or detrimental traits. Rather, he focused on socio-environmental factors that could encourage or discourage progress. Carluccio explains that Du Bois’s understanding of race while complex clearly defends that the “evolutionary invention of race consists of the inclination to think in terms of the idea of race” (518). To understand his perspective on race in terms of his theories on double-consciousness, it is necessary to understand that Du Bois accepted certain biological factors as somewhat fixed but then emphasized race as an idea, one that is malleable and constructed socially. More importantly, Carluccio reveals that Du Bois’s argument in “The Conservation of Races” points “to a way of reading race that escapes the binary oppositions on which his logic may in some places seem to founder” (523-4). In order to read race outside its binary oppositions, the very oppositions that result in double-consciousness, Carluccio concludes that Du Bois, as well as Schuyler, offer the notion that race “could be real even though it might be a fiction and [in turn] made it into the idea that it could be real precisely because it was a fiction” (539). I believe it is beneficial in understanding my own argument about Black Hermeneutics and Black Rhetoric, both of which accept race entirely as a social rather than biological construction, to understand Carluccio’s analysis of Du Bois’s essay. She reveals that Du Bois, as well as Schuyler, understood and in fact emphasized race as an idea, a socially constructed idea that was malleable rather than fixed. This opens the possibilities for Du Bois’s double-consciousness as not only providing a way of self-relating but also signifying on the dominant social group’s misreading race as biologically

fixed. This understanding of double-consciousness, as a possible way of encountering others, is not too unlike Irigaray's "between two."

Margaret E. Toye's "Donna Haraway's Cyborg Touching (Up/On) Luce Irigaray's Ethics and the Interval Between: Poethics as Embodied Writing" focuses on the role of ethics that bridges Haraway's cyborg and Irigaray's embodied writing. Toye argues that the cyborg "has been used to discuss issues that intertwine ontology, epistemology, aesthetics, and politics, [and that] there is much to be gleaned from considering it instead via ethics" (185). As a result of Irigaray's ethics focusing on the "between two" that emphasizes becoming as a relation, I believe that a connection may be made here to Heidegger's *Ereignis*. Irigaray's "between two" can be understood as complementary to Heidegger's *Ereignis* in that the becoming that unfolds "between two" is also an event that takes place in a world. In this event, each of the two beings involved in the encounter is also part of a world that they share. Irigaray focuses on a phallogocentric world that devalues women and encourages women to encounter one another through the same "phallogocentric economy of sameness and substitution," which results in an unethical encounter, i.e., inauthentic way of Being for Dasein. Therefore, one cannot repeat through substitution the same sexist view of the world and expect to encounter either gender in an ethical way. Phallogocentrism, not unlike racism, attempts to fix the possibilities of Being from a perspective that favors the dominant social group and oppresses the non-dominant social group through various hegemonic mechanisms, including the language that guides our thinking and understanding. Consequently, Toye argues that a "revolution in ethics would also involve a revolution in aesthetics," which includes "art, poetry, and language" (Toye 190). Toye extends her examination of the intersections between Haraway's cyborg and Irigaray's embodied writing by arguing for "poethics," which emphasizes the ethical "aspect involved in approaches that combine

ethics and aesthetics" (190). "Poethics," according to Toye, permits cyborg writing to also be embodied writing: "By allowing Haraway's work merely to "touch up/on" Irigaray's ethics, specifically in terms of the concept of the "interval between," and not to engage in the reductions or colonization of one theorist's work to another's, it is my hope that creative readings and understandings of both theorists can begin to emerge, and that these small places of conjunction might prove to be productive ones" (195). Following Ingram's (2009) and Toye's (2012) lead, I believe that looking into the intersections that exist between Irigaray's approach to ethical encounters and Heidegger's authentic Dasein offers possibilities for productive examinations of both Black Rhetoric and Black Hermeneutics that seeks an ethical as well as an authentic way-of-Being-in-the-world-alongside-Others. In order to provide the proper foundation for my inquiry into Black Rhetoric, I shall situate my argument by claiming that Black Rhetoric is the counterpart to African American Literature and Black Hermeneutics is the core that binds these two ways of being. In order to situate Black Rhetoric as the counterpart to African American Literature, I shall turn to an examination of scholarship that identifies Black literary roots in West African narrative practices.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., opened the door to numerous paths of inquiry within Black Studies with his monumental text, *Signifying Monkey: a Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, in which Gates argues that Black Americans share cultural, linguistic, and literary practices with the Yoruba as a result of a high concentration of slave trading in the Niger-Congo (home to many Yoruba). Despite the Middle Passage and several centuries of living in the United States, Black Americans' dependence on and maintenance of their oral tradition, in addition to being denied access to mainstream (i.e., white) American education for so long, preserved much of their Yoruba cultural and linguistic heritage. Given their cultural and communal dependence on oral practices in

Yoruba (and Mali), the slaves maintained their myths through storytelling by passing them on to future generations. In time, of course, their English language adoption and conversion to Christianity diluted their African languages and myths. Nonetheless, the slaves did not completely assimilate into white European culture and forfeit their African identities; they acculturated instead. Doing so allowed them to hybridize the two fundamentally different systems of language and belief into one Black-identified system. Similar to French anthropologist Marcel Griaule, who looked at the Dogon's creation myth to link culturally and philosophically the Dogon to the Ancient Egyptians, Gates looks at the Yoruba creation myth as a basis for his argument that Black Americans have cultural and philosophical connections to the Yoruba.

The Yoruba rely on divination and interpretation to receive and understand divine messages from their gods. Gates argues that the origin of the Signifying Monkey (a trickster figure in Black American folklore) lies in Esu-Elegbara, a hermeneut in Yoruba mythology who translates, thus interprets, the will of the gods to the people and mediates between man and the divine. While this same figure exists in other places, albeit with alternate names, among African slaves' descendents in Brazil, Cuba, and Haiti, Gates focuses primarily on its presence in the United States among Black Americans as a direct lineage from Africa. Esu-Elegbara, also known as Esu, first appears in Yoruba creation myths as a mediator between men and the gods in that he acted chiefly as the interpreter of the gods: "For Esu is the Yoruba figure of the meta-level of formal language use, [the] ontological and epistemological status of figurative language and its interpretation" (Gates 6). Close examination of the Yoruba creation myth that first mentions Esu reveals his hermeneutic role:

Long, long ago, Olorun, the sky god, lowered a great chain from the heavens to the ancient waters. Down this chain climbed Oduduwa, Olorun's son. Oduduwa brought with him a handful of dirt, a special five-toed chicken, and a palm nut. He threw the dirt upon the ancient waters

and set the chicken on the dirt. The chicken busily scratched and scattered the dirt until it formed the first dry earth. In the center of this new world, Oduduwa created the magnificent Ifa kingdom. He planted the palm nut, which grew into a proud tree with 16 branches, symbolizing the 16 sons and grandsons of Oduduwa. (Ifa Bite)

The first Yoruba kings descended from these sixteen branches and were divine beings among their people. The Ifa kingdom in this myth established a common religion among the Yoruba along the Niger River in the Benin Republic and parts of Nigeria and Togo. The name Ifa represents the mythological scribe who “can only speak to human beings by inscribing the language of the gods onto the divining tray in visual signs that the *babalawo* [high priest] reads aloud in the language of the lyrical poetry called *ese*” (Gates 12). However, *ese* is not a language human beings can understand; therefore, an interpreter, Esu, is necessary for the *babalawo* to understand the sacred texts: “Esu clearly has priority in the art of interpretation. In other myths of the origins of Ifa, Esu both teaches and wills the system to his friend” (Gates 15). The Yoruba understand Esu as the “path to Ifa” (Gates 15).

While most of our knowledge regarding Yoruba myths results from oral narratives and practices handed down from generation to generation, other evidence of Esu’s interpretive role appears in Yoruba’s divination tools still in use today: “The *Opon Ifa*, the carved wooden divination tray used in the art of interpretation, represents a trace of this priority of Esu in the process of interpretation by containing at the center of its upper perimeter a carved image of Esu himself, meant to signify his relation to the act of interpretation” (Gates 11). In the process of divination, the *babalawo* uses the *Opon Ifa*, a divination trapper, and 16 palm nuts (*ikin*) to understand and share the gods’ messages with others. Thanks in great part to *babalawos* and their female counterparts, *Iyanifas* (Mothers of Ifa), who survived the Middle Passage and forced African Diaspora, many early slaves in America continued to practice Ifa before they converted to Christianity and

refigured Ifa into a Christian landscape. In doing so, they preserved the cultural and philosophical significance of interpretation in their literary and communicative practices – in large part via their maintenance of and holding to the Esu figure by preserving a significant role for Esu, who later becomes the Signifying Monkey. As a consequence of the Yoruba’s emphasis on interpretation through Esu in conjunction with our knowledge that a large number of African slaves originated in the Niger regions of Africa, which were home to the Yoruba and other Ifa practitioners, Gates can successfully argue that the Signifying Monkey’s origins lie in the Esu figure. Therefore, and despite Esu’s morphing into the Signifying Monkey, the function of interpretation made prominent by the Esu legends does indeed impact Black American communicative practices. An examination of the process by which Esu morphs into the Signifying Monkey reveals that such modes of interpretation seen among Black Americans began in Yoruba as an important religious and rhetorical *trope*, which it continues to be today in Black Liberation Theology and Black Rhetoric.

Examining the narratives that highlight Esu’s role sheds light on the origin of Black Hermeneutic practices. Gates identifies the *trope* of Esu as interpreter by examining an Ifa canonical narrative, “Esu Taught Orunmila [Grand Priest] How to Divine,” in Ayodele Ogundipe’s text *Esu Elegbara* (15). This narrative relates a scenario in which Esu teaches Ifa how to divine, which allows Ifa to become an important “communication link between men and the Orisas [spiritual manifestations of Olorun]” (Gates 15). Gates’s examination of this narrative suggests it is an origin for the eventual morphing of Esu into the Signifying Monkey by noting that in some of the Esu tales, he (Esu) is “portrayed as the first interpreter, responsible for teaching or uncovering the art of divination” for Ifa; however, Esu is not alone, as he is accompanied by Moedun, the Monkey “and the tree – a palm tree growing in the garden of Orungan [the midday sun] –

as well as being the messenger of Odu, the divination seeds” (Lydia Cabrera qtd. in Gates 15). The Yoruba tales frequently place Moedun in the company of Esu. Gates suggests that, through the African Diaspora and Transatlantic Slave Trade, Esu and his monkey companion eventually merge as one interpreter/trickster figure: “For reasons extremely difficult to reconstruct, the monkey became, through displacement in Africa[an] myths in the New World, a central character in this crucial scene of instruction” (15). This instructional role, which is at the same time an interpretive and signifying role, appears in Black Rhetoric as a necessary *trope* for the maintenance of Black Rhetoric as well as a tool for self-preservation and self-relating in a violently oppressive system (i.e., slavery).

Gates extends this examination of Esu and the Signifying Monkey to another Niger-Congo lineage for Black Americans, the Dahomey.²³ According to Dahomey Fon myths, Legba (their Esu figure) serves as a celestial trickster who affords man an opportunity to “mollify an angered deity and set aside his vengeance” by “winning the favor of Legba” (Melville Herskovits qtd. in Gates 15). As interpreter and trickster, Legba serves an important role as a mediator between gods and human beings. On the one hand, Legba is necessary for man to understand the gods’ messages through divination; on the other hand, Legba allows man an escape route from a “supernaturally willed dilemma” (Herskovits qtd. in Gates 15). Similarly to Ifa’s, the Fon’s gods speak a language inaccessible to human beings; therefore, Legba must interpret the gods’ words to human beings through divination: “Each god speaks a language of his or her own, and only Legba can interpret these because Legba ‘knows all languages’” (Gates 28). Legba, then, fulfills a dual role as both interpreter and trickster, which he demonstrates through

²³ The Dahomey, now the Republic of Benin, originally were subjects of the Yoruba, but liberated themselves from the Yoruba in the early seventeenth century. Ethnically, they are no different than the Yoruba and were located just northwest of Yorubaland. In fact, much of Benin today speaks Yoruba.

double-voiced tales. The role of interpretation through a mediator is foundational for understanding the Dahomey's relationship between human beings and gods: "Legba is the linguist-messenger who reads the text of Fa [the god of fate and destiny], a text that remains unread and unreadable without the agency of Legba" (Gates 25). Gates's argument examines the Legba figure as both an interpreter and trickster figure in more detail than I provide here, as it is not my intent to replicate what Gates has already accomplished. Consequently, I shall rely on Gates's work, which establishes a link among the Yoruba, Dahomey, and Black Americans both philosophically and culturally via the morphing of Esu/Legba into the Signifying Monkey, as a historical component of my claims about Black Rhetoric. This African lineage, which I shall trace in the next chapter, supports my claim that Black Rhetoric evolved from a Kemetic heritage as well as a West African one. Gates's contribution to Black Studies, particularly to the study of signifying within African American Literature, provides a foundation that is necessary for my own argument that Black Rhetoric can lay claim to Kemetic Rhetoric as an origin. While my next chapter shall do the work necessary to reveal the cultural, philosophical, and rhetorical intersections among the Dogon, Dahomey, Yoruba, and Ancient Egyptians, the present chapter shall focus instead on Gates's theories about signifying and the connection made in Black Studies between signifying and double-consciousness.

Roger D. Abrahams defines signifying as being multi-faceted as a consequence of being aware of one's circumstances in the world and making various rhetorical choices on the basis of that awareness:

Signifying seems to be a Negro term, in use of not in origin. It can mean any number of things: in the case of the toast about the signifying monkey, it certainly refers to the trickster's ability to talk with great innuendo, to carp, cajole, needle, and lie. It can mean in other instances the propensity to talk around a subject, never quite coming to the point. It can mean making fun of a person or situation. Also it can denote speaking with the hands and eyes, and in this respect encompasses a whole complex of expressions and gestures. Thus it is signifying to stir

up a fight between neighbors by telling stories; it is signifying to make fun of a policeman by parodying his motions behind his back; it is signifying to ask for a piece of cake by saying, "My brother needs a piece of cake."
(51-2)

Claudia-Mitchell Kernan's multi-faceted understanding of signifying offers even further insight: "What is unique in [the] Black English usage [of signifying] is the way in which signifying is extended to cover a range of meaning and events [that] are not covered in [the] Standard English usage. In the Black community, it is possible to say, 'He is signifying' and 'Stop signifying' – sentences [that] would be anomalous elsewhere" (313). Mitchell-Kernan clarifies that what is missing from the Standard English understanding of signifying is precisely what makes it so valuable in Black English: "A precondition for the application of the term *signifying* to some speech act is the assumption that the meaning decoded was consciously and purposely formulated at the encoding stage" (314). It is the purposeful encoding and the anticipation of its successful decoding by the intended decoder that makes signifying a valuable means of communication within Black Rhetoric. Thus, one cannot ignore Du Bois's role of double-consciousness at play within signifying, because it permits the encoding and decoding to be a reliable process within the act of signifying. Mitchell-Kernan explains this by identifying that a shared context (i.e., world) must precede the signifying utterance. In other words, a shared hermeneutic situation must house the exchange that intends to signify; otherwise, the decoding process is doomed to fail and signifying cannot occur.

Gates invokes Mitchell-Kernan's definition in order to establish his own understanding: "I cannot stress too much the importance of [Mitchell-Kernan's] definition, for it shows that Signifyin(g) is a pervasive mode of language use rather than merely one specific verbal game, an observation that somehow escaped the notice of every other scholar before Mitchell-Kernan" (*Signifying Monkey* 80). Gates concludes, "Signifyin(g) [...] is synonymous with figuration" (*Signifying Monkey* 80). Within this notion of

purposeful encoding and decoding, Gates argues that as a mode of figuration, signifying “is the figurative difference between the literal and the metaphorical, between surface and latent meaning” (*Signifying Monkey* 82). He extends Mitchell-Kernan’s definition by clarifying that signifying “presupposes an ‘encoded’ intention to say one thing but to mean quite another” (*Signifying Monkey* 82). For Gates, this definition supports his claim that the Signifying Monkey is primarily a trickster figure whose task in the world is to interpret, divine, and sometimes encode through linguistic trickery. As a trickster, the Signifying Monkey relies on his raw wits and linguistic skills in order to understand his world, which he shares with others. When looking at this figure in the context of Black Rhetoric and Black Hermeneutics as a *trope*, certain intersections throughout Black Studies become apparent.

Black Rhetoric engages in trickery (i.e., encoding) in order to navigate a world that exists within a veil and to do so from the perspective of double-consciousness. As a consequence of living “behind the veil of the color line,” trickery becomes a necessary linguistic skill/tool that develops alongside one’s developing double-consciousness (Brodwin 305). Howard Winant explains that Du Bois understands the veil dialectically.

The veil

operates both at the level of the personal or intrapsychic and at the institutional or structural level of social interaction. It evolves over historical time. And it expresses both the conflict, exclusion, and alienation inherent in the dynamics of race, racism, and the interdependence, knowledge of “the other,” and thwarted desires that characterize these phenomena. (1)

I agree with Winant’s reading of Du Bois’s veil through the lens of the Hegelian dialectic in the sense that Du Bois’s intent was not merely to identify the veil but to locate ways in which to transcend the veil and in turn the color line that it represents. Winant, of course, is not the only scholar to read the veil through the Hegelian Dialectic, as scholars since Stanley Brodwin in the 1970s have noted this in their critical readings of *Souls of Black*

Folk. Winant adds to his predecessors' reading in his 2004 *The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice* by extending Du Bois's neo-Hegelian dialectic of the veil in order to address global issues of the color line that persist in the twenty-first century by asking: "Why does racial identity remain significant in the face of its contemporary dismissal as a relic of a benighted past, an 'illusion' [that] we must now 'get beyond'?" His answer to this question exposes race as "not merely an instrument of rule [but also as] an arena and medium of social practice" (Winant 11). He clarifies that race "is an aspect of individual and collective selfhood" (Winant 11). Following this revelation, Winant makes the claim that I believe hints at the foundation for my own reading of the veil: "[race] shapes privileged status for some and undermines the social standing of others" (11). I read the veil as Du Bois's encoding of white privilege. For me, the veil represents what Winant identifies as its capacity to shape privileged status, and in order to do so, it must inversely shape the lack of privilege for Blacks. In order to operate within a world divided according to race-based privilege, those on the non-privileged side of the veil must construct modes of discourse that permit one to engage with the privileged folks while in such a way as to acknowledge both the white privilege and lack of privilege for Black folks. Signifying provides this discursive mode and frequently must take the form of linguistic trickery. More importantly, signifying as a mode of discourse behind the veil of the color line, affords one an opportunity to interpret the veil itself, oneself behind the veil, and the white privilege that protects and maintains the veil's existence.

My take on the Signifying Monkey as a mode of figuration understood from the perspective of Du Bois's veil and double-consciousness reveals Black Rhetoric and Black Hermeneutics as necessary counterparts. Du Bois argues that in order for racial progress to happen, the veil must be exposed, interpreted, and articulated, which

requires double-consciousness as well as an awareness of a potential way of being in the world. Winant concludes that despite progress with the problem of the color line, “the concept of the veil, the dialectics of the veil, still provide our most effective tool in the struggle to achieve racial justice and democracy” (14). The reason Du Bois’s veil remains effective is because it provides the bridge between Black Rhetoric and Black Hermeneutics. Joseph Evans’s “Double-Consciousness: The Du Boisian Hermeneutic” argues that Du Bois’s double-consciousness reveals a hermeneutic that remains useful for biblical exegesis. While I am not necessarily interested in Evans’s application of Du Bois for exegetical purposes, he does provide an articulation of Du Boisian hermeneutics, which he explains through his own reading of double-consciousness: “The Du Boisian interpreter, informed by double consciousness, understands how the text looks through the eyes of the Eurocentric majority interpreter *and* how it looks through the eyes of the community that has been marginalized and dominated by the majority group” (2). As a consequence of being a member of the non-privileged, marginalized group (i.e., Blacks) yet at the same time thrust into the world of the privileged, dominant group (i.e., whites), Black Americans necessarily develop modes of discourse that permit them to interpret, understand, and communicate their hermeneutic situation through an evolution of Black Rhetoric. As both Evans and Winant note, the veil prompts one to develop a double-consciousness. My contribution to this line of inquiry is that as counterparts to one another, Black Rhetoric and Black Hermeneutics emerge in order to interpret, understand, articulate, address, and ultimately challenge white privilege.

The ultimate argument of this dissertation is that, given the relationship of Black Rhetoric to Black Hermeneutics more must be done than has been done in Black Studies thus far in order to examine the Black Hermeneutic Situation. More importantly, much more work must be done to expose the relationship of Black Rhetoric to Black

Hermeneutics, which requires an inquiry into the Black Hermeneutic Situation. While a great deal of scholarship since Du Bois includes efforts to locate a Black American identity that originated outside the veil of Black disadvantage (e.g., efforts of the Afro-centric movement), much of this scholarship limits the origin of its scope to West Africa. If my claim that Black Rhetoric's origins reveal both Western and Kemetic rhetorical roots is to be supported, then I must do the work necessary to trace the steps of Black Rhetoric from Ancient Egypt, to West Africa, to the United States through the Atlantic Slave Trade and identify its presence today as preserving Western as well as Kemetic rhetorical traditions. In order to do so, in Chapter Three I temporarily step outside Black Studies and examine the work of archaeology and anthropology scholars who have unearthed the Egyptian Diaspora and found traces of Kemetic culture in West Africa. Rather than reviewing the work of other scholars that parallels Gates's examination of the Signifying Monkey within this chapter, I have opted instead to incorporate their contributions to Black Studies and the study of Black Rhetoric in the next chapter in order to provide an essential link between Kemetic Rhetoric and Black Rhetoric in the United States.

Chapter 3


The Evolution of Black Rhetoric from Ancient Egypt to the “New World”

In order to defend my claim that Black Rhetoric evolved from both Western and Kemetic rhetorical traditions, it is necessary that I take the additional step of tracing Black Rhetoric’s evolutionary path from Ancient Egypt to the United States via the Egyptian Diaspora and later the Atlantic Slave Trade. I shall also identify the various social, economic, and political mechanisms that supported the institution of slavery and created the rhetorical and hermeneutic conditions that fostered a need for Black Rhetoric to evolve as an act of resistance, liberation, and reclamation of human dignity. By providing the painstaking details that I feel are necessary to defending my claim that Black Rhetoric is indeed an offspring of Ancient Egypt Rhetoric (i.e., Kemetic Rhetoric), I shall also be extending the scholarship already done by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Geneva Smitherman, Will Coleman, Maulana Karenga, Molefi Asante, and Cedrick May, each of whom in their own way examines the legacy of African culture that survived slavery and remains evident within Black speech practices today. The uniqueness of my contribution lies in the fact that none of this previous scholarly work directly and specifically identifies the existing archaeological and anthropological evidence that proves Kemetic philosophies and speech practices made their way from Ancient Egypt to West Africa, survived Arab invasions as well as the Atlantic Slave Trade, and ultimately took root in the United States via the African slaves as Black Rhetoric. If my argument claims that Black Rhetoric evolved from both Western as well as Kemetic Rhetoric, then I must prove through archaeological and anthropological evidence – alongside the existing scholarship in Black Studies that links black literary and speech practices to West Africa – that Kemetic Rhetoric did in fact survive the Egyptian Diaspora and find its way to West

Africa. In order to do so, I must provide evidence that Kemetic Rhetoric influenced West African speech practices – despite some linguistic changes and cultural reimaginings of the fundamental principles of Kemetic Rhetoric (e.g., the concept of Maat). Many scholars have done the necessary work of demonstrating that West African traditions are in fact evident in both Black Rhetoric and African American Literature; therefore, my task shall not be to repeat the work of these scholars but shall be to fill in that which is missing within the existing scholarship – namely the evidence that Kemetic philosophies and speech practices survived the Egyptian Diaspora, took root in West Africa, survived the Middle Passage, and contributed to various modes of Black discourse. This chapter, then, seeks to provide the evidence necessary to defend conclusively that Black Rhetoric can indeed claim Kemetic Rhetoric as a cultural, philosophical, and rhetorical parent.

Numerous French, German, West African, and Egyptian scholars have spent years unearthing the etymology, meaning, and usage of ‘Maat’ in Ancient Egypt. Thanks to their work, which I radically condense here, I attempt an understanding of Maat not diluted by Western, metaphysical interpretations but focused instead on efforts to reveal a Kemetic understanding of Maat. For the Ancient Egyptians, Maat²⁴ was both a concept and a goddess. Rather than depend on systematized logic, Egyptians looked to the cosmos in order to structure their government and laws and expressed their understanding of these through *mythos*. Maat, referring both to order and to what constitutes it, embodied social solidarity by creating harmony, affluence, and good health. Ancient Egyptians perpetuated their sense of justice within their culture in order to create social solidarity through their concept of Maat. However, a Kemetic sense of justice and its conceptual understanding of justice differed greatly from that of the Greeks. Rather

²⁴ In what follows, the word will refer to the concept unless otherwise noted.

than defining justice as an exercise of self-restraint over one's corrupted, material desires (e.g., theft, lying, rape, gluttony, lust) or as avoiding contradicting the wishes of the gods, Ancient Egyptian justice begins with an understanding of Maat: "The etymology of  (Maat) suggests an evolution from a physical²⁵ concept of straightness, evenness, levelness, correctness, as the wedge-shaped glyph suggests to a general concept of rightness, including the ontological and ethical sense of truth, justice, righteousness, order – in a word, the *rightness* of things" (*Maat* 6). In addition to Maat as a philosophical and ethical ideal, it equally represented an ecological ideal concerned with "cosmic order [...] and commits itself to the future or destiny of humanity" (Mubabinge Bilolo qtd. in *Maat* 7). The *Teachings of Ptah-hotep*,²⁶ the oldest-known book in the world, offered advice on doing Maat in life and the role of truthful and effective speech in carrying out and teaching Maat to others. Ptah-hotep's teachings made the connection between speaking and Maat clear. Kemetic speech, as opposed to an art that seeks available means of persuasion, sought opportunities "to exchange [words] in pursuit of the good for the community and world"; in order to maintain rightness and balance, speech was a moral and ethical activity that directly and specifically supported the needs of the community (Jackson and Richardson 11). By speaking, one could transmit knowledge as culture, history, and understanding. One passage in particular from Ptah-hotep offers advice regarding the need to repeat speeches from the past: "Teach him then the speech from the past / that he may provide the example for the children of the great. May hearing enter into him, the measure of every heart. Speak to him. For no one can be born wise" (2.5 4-6). Understanding and practicing rightness was not understood as an

²⁵ Keep in mind that Ancient Egyptian writing functioned symbolically, where pictures (hieroglyphs) stood in for words, sounds, and/or ideas.

²⁶ A twenty-fifth century B.C.E. Egyptian Official

inherent ability but was taught. The public and private sharing of knowledge was vital to Kemetic culture and speaking was the instrument through which one did so. It is interesting to take note here that Heidegger's own argument for rhetoric as the art of listening intersects Ptah-hotep's definition as an act of hearing and speaking. Because sharing knowledge through speaking was so important, Ptah-hotep found it necessary to warn his audience not to be prideful in their own knowledge: "Do not be proud on account of your knowledge, but discuss with the ignorant as with the wise. The limits of art cannot be delivered; / there is no artist whose talent is fulfilled. Fine words are more sought than greenstone, but can be found with women at the grindstone" (4.5 8-10). From this short passage, one can identify Ptah-hotep's concern for the reciprocity that a sense of responsibility to one's community demands. If a man gains knowledge, he is to pass it along to others unselfishly. In doing so, he has not only improved the condition of one individual but has also improved the condition of his community. In addition to Ptah-hotep's concern for reciprocity, his comment about the woman at the grindstone demonstrates that Ptah-hotep did not discriminate with regard to where knowledge could be found or with whom it should be shared. This humble position evokes a sense of balance necessary for Maat as being supportive of the community in the sense that Maat is rightness in the world.

In order to grasp the role of reciprocity in Maat, one can examine *Coffin Texts*, a collection of inscribed funerary rites that reveals Maat as the female component of creation: "Maat is identified [in *Coffin Text 80*] as Tefnut (moisture), the female element of the first act of creation" (*Maat 8*). According to this funerary rite, the "Creator [said], 'Tefnut is my living daughter and she shall exist with her brother Shu. Life is his name, Maat is her name'" (*Maat 8*). Maat was the daughter of Nun, who was primeval water. *Coffin Texts* reveals that the Creator told Nun to kiss his daughter so that his "heart may

live" (*Maat* 8). In this act, Maat became simultaneously a "reality-constituting" and "life-giving" force (*Maat* 8). As constitutive of creation and responsible for giving life, Maat represents a natural order for the cosmos. In light of this part of the Kemetic creation story, Egyptologists agree that Maat (depicted as a goddess with a white feather standing erect from her headdress) functioned in the funerary rite as a measurer of men's souls. However, Maat did not measure with a desire to see the scales tipped to one side, which would indicate more or less good than bad (i.e., an imbalance in goodness or badness), as a Judeo-Christian understanding of sin would desire. Instead, Maat interprets balanced scales as a sign that a man's soul is right with the world. This balance reveals a Kemetic desire and aim for reciprocity. In other words, a man should not give more than he receives, nor should he take more than he gives; a balanced scale represents a balanced life and soul, which contributes to a harmonious universe. The Ancient Egyptians believed that upon death the soul went before Maat and Anubis in order to gain entrance into the eternal kingdom of Osiris. After reciting the forty-two negative confessions, the deceased's heart was placed on one side of the scale and Maat's feather on the other. If the deceased's heart was in balance with Maat's feather, Anubis granted the soul entrance into the kingdom of Osiris. But if the scale tipped because the deceased's heart was heavy with misdeeds, then Anubis denied the soul entrance into the kingdom of Osiris and the soul ceased to exist, with no chance of being resurrected (*Hall of Maat*).

Ancient Egypt evolved its sense of moral and ethical understanding not on the basis of an individual's sense of justice but as a cosmic understanding of self as always existing in a world with others – both human and divine. This cosmic sense of community guided Kemetic practices regarding law and society toward a solidarity that took into consideration the balance of the universe and not just the self: "Kemet evolve[d] as a

communitarian society, focused not on the individual but on relationships, reciprocal obligations and related rightful expectations” (*Maat* 8). The following image depicts a funerary painting that reveals Maat (the goddess in white flanking both ends of the scene) overseeing the measuring of a man’s heart (i.e., soul).



Figure 1-1 Maat

Ancient Egyptians regularly believed life was tenuous and subject to chaos at any moment; therefore, society charged each individual with maintaining order and balance in their own lives in order to ensure order and balance for their community and ultimately the world and the universe as a whole. They privileged rightness over might as a way to maintain harmony: “The central importance of the text [*Shabaka Text* (eighth century B.C.E.)] lie[s] in its role of legitimating kingship through the principle of right over might, and the positioning of right as that which is loved and brings life and wrong as that which brings hatred and death” (*Maat* 31). The *Shabaka Text* also provides a cosmology of Ancient Egypt and insight into the role of Maat as underlying theories of kingship and divine rites. Shabaka was a Black Nubian²⁷ King of the Ethiopian dynasty who reunited²⁸

²⁷ Middle Nile

²⁸ Up until this point, Ancient Egypt was divided into two kingdoms divided as Upper and Lower Egypt. (Upper is actually the southern half and Lower is the northern half).

Upper and Lower Egypt after Ramses III. Shabaka claims that he was divinely favored because he discovered a worm-eaten document from an earlier pharaoh, which told of a once-united and powerful Egypt. Reading this encouraged Shabaka to reunite Egypt in order to restore its original make-up. The document itself represents a real flow of energy from one creature (man) to another (the worm) over a course of time. Thanks to this document, the energy and harmony from a previously united Egypt could be revived by Shabaka via restoring balance and order through reunifying Upper and Lower Egypt. Despite his reign being fraught with foreign invasion, he specifically addresses his fellow Egyptians by invoking the law of Maat and warning against its opposite, isfet: "Maat is given to one who does what is loved (mrrt)" (*Maat* 31). If Maat is given to one who is loved, then isfet "is given to one who does what is hated (msddt)" (*Maat* 31). This is one textual example of Maat as goddess constitutive of creation, as "both a cosmic and social principle, which set the standard for both God and human" (*Maat* 32). Ultimately, Maat was not only cosmological order but united the divine with the human through divine kingship, which placed an ethical and moral obligation on the king to carry out the principles of Maat throughout his kingdom. Shabaka's own sense of Maat as rightness and balance led him to understand that he was charged with a divine responsibility to reunite Egypt as a balanced whole. He understood that a king's civil responsibility to his kingdom was "to do Maat, to uphold it and live it" (*Maat* 32). Maat reveals that a Kemetic understanding of community and justice, as a need for balance that is aware of a larger cosmological order, focuses on reciprocity in order to guarantee harmony. For Maat, speech plays a significant role in preserving balance and restoring order.

Established by the divine and transmitted to the king, Maat flowed from the divine through the king and on to the community. Bureaucracy and the king's own example, both of which establish civil service and social ethics, teach and maintain Maat. A Middle

Kingdom text, recovered from an ancient tomb, reaffirms the divine nature of the king and his political and moral role: “Ra²⁹ installed the king [...] to judge humans, satisfy the divine ones, realize Maat (rightness), and destroy isfet (wrongness)” (*Maat* 33). Through the king’s offerings (usually food, which was seen as a source of energy for the cosmos and its deities), he maintains his connection to the divine and serves as an intermediary between his citizens and Ra. This bureaucracy extends beyond the palace to the people by way of schools and as home instruction. It is important to note here that literacy was not exclusive to the social elite in Ancient Egypt. Of course not all citizens were literate, but it was not uncommon to find literacy among the Ancient Egyptians (Metzger 210-12). Therefore, many textual sources accompanied the emphasized oral-transmission of Maat. However, the oral transmission was prized above the textual because of the social nature of speaking and the belief that speech was a gift of the gods and must be shared with others.

The *Teachings of Ptah-hotep* and the *Sebit*³⁰ provided textual examples of the king doing Maat and how citizens should and could learn Maat from their king as well as one another. One such example was when Ptah-hotep sought the counsel of his king to ask advice for appointing his own successor: “May this servant be ordered to make a staff of old age so that he may instruct him in the words of those who have heard the counsels of ancestors who have listened to the divinities” (28-32). After seeking the king’s counsel, Ptah-hotep synthesized the advice he received and included it in his own *Teachings*: “Every man teaches as he acts / He will speak to his children / so that they will then speak to their children / [Therefore] set a good example; don’t give offence / For if Maat is made to flourish, your children will live” (593-97). If we examine this closely, we

²⁹ The sun god and universal creator

³⁰ Also called Instructions

can identify how members of Kemetic society were expected to transmit Maat from one to another via speaking as well as by their actions. Kemet charges its Kings with not only providing instructions on *how* to do Maat but also being the example for others to follow.

The *Sebait*, an eighteenth-century B.C.E. treatise on ethics, “call[s] for due process, seeing ‘that everything is done in accordance with what is specified by law’ [...] and for ‘letting a man plead his innocence’” (*Maat* 35-6). The judge is not permitted arrogance or feelings of superiority but is instructed to be just through Maat. Because Rekhmira was a prime minister (i.e., a judge), there were instructions provided within his tomb that explained how he should conduct the office of prime minister: “I exalted Maat to the heights of heaven / I caused its goodness to pervade the breadth of the earth” (*Maat* 36). His instructions claim that he evoked Maat in his position as prime minister: “I judged the humble and the rich alike / I rescued the weak from the strong / I restrained the rage of the [...] character. / I suppressed the greedy in his hour” (*Maat* 36). Rekhmira concludes his instruction by asserting that he was “justified before God” (*Maat* 36). Human dignity, balance, fairness, and reciprocity underlie all comments on and evocations of Maat. The *Sebait*, the *Teachings of Ptah-hotep*, *Coffin Texts*, and other literary productions of Kemet consistently present Maat as requiring “justice, personal and social, [in which] the departure point was respect for the human personality, both as an image of God [as] stated in the *Book of Kheti* and as [an equal fellow] human as posited in *Coffin Text 1130*”; whereby, Ra creates every person “like his or her fellow” (*Maat* 37). This particular concept of achieving human dignity through Maat extended to Ancient Egypt’s economic conditions as well as its political actions.

In order to understand the impact of Maat on Egyptian culture, it is necessary to look at how influential Maat was on the day-to-day business of Ancient Egypt. Current Egyptologists agree that Egypt was not a slave state, as the institution of slavery

contradicts the basic philosophy of Maat. According to current Egyptologists,³¹ slaves did not build the pyramids nor erect any known structure in Ancient Egypt, as temporary conscription and skilled laborers, who were compensated for their work, supplied all construction labor. In fact, we have textual evidence that Maat influences this workforce as well: “the Maatian ideal condemned coerced labor[,] as clearly and often attested to [...] in the autobiography of the Masterbuilder, Nekhebu” (*Maat* 39). In his own writing, Nekhebu proclaims: “Never did I beat a man so that he fell by my hand. Never did I enslave any people there” (*Maat* 39). Maulana Karenga collects a series of textual examples in which various labor supervisors articulate their revulsion against violence and coerced labor. They also emphasize their rejection of sexually exploiting women and base these rejections on the principles of Maat. Egyptian scribes regularly recorded autobiographical accounts, which serve as implicit instruction manuals, regularly entitled *Declarations of Virtues*. In these *Declarations*, governors, prime ministers, nomarchs,³² and the like record their edicts for virtue by directing their readers toward behavior sanctioned by Maat. The desire to do Maat in service of the king, as well as for the community, reveals Maat’s emphasis on reciprocity in its search to maintain social solidarity. After closely examining some of the Egyptian texts that provide instructions for doing Maat in life, Karenga concludes that there are seven cardinal virtues of Maat: “truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order” (Jackson and Richardson 11). Equipped with the understanding of Maat as provided thus far in this chapter, it shall be easier to identify Maat’s philosophical and cultural influence on African

³¹ Dr. Zahi Hawass, the chairman of the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Egypt, among numerous other Egyptologists provide substantial evidence that skilled laborers performed all construction in Ancient Egypt.

³² Governors

cultures outside Ancient Egypt, particularly those that became the primary sources of human capital during the Atlantic Slave Trade in West Africa.

While it may at first appear that a reliance on textual sources was the primary mode of transmitting Maat's influence on non-Egyptian cultures, this is not the case. As noted earlier, literacy was certainly not rare in Kemet, but neither was it the primary mode of transmitting ideas, knowledge, and culture. Judged on the basis of the texts that we do have, which provide instructions for speaking, Ancient Egypt was an oral-centered culture that relied primarily on the spoken word for transmitting knowledge. It is also vital at this point to comment on the fact that Kemetic culture did not directly migrate westward and implant its identical self in what we now know as the Niger-Congo region of West Africa. Much scholarly debate surrounds Egypt's influence on West Africa; however, it is unmistakable from the history of the evolution of Yoruba that Yoruba's³³ origins do indeed lie in Egypt. In fact, Nigerians and other West African coastal countries today, particularly Yorubaland,³⁴ look to Egypt as their ancestral home. The *Osun Defender*, a popular newspaper in modern Nigeria, not only advertises education opportunities for its readers to learn more about their origins in Ancient Egypt but also regularly provides articles by historians and professors on the subject. In October 2010, Dr. A.O. Adesoji, a professor of history in Nigeria, explains the brief account of how a group of people once left Ancient Egypt, traveled towards west Africa, and eventually settled in Yorubaland: "The origin of the Yoruba is shrouded in mystery. Perhaps no aspect of Yoruba history is more controversial or ambiguous than that of Yoruba's origin, as there are many versions of

³³ A language spoken by numerous West African coastal people as well as the term used to identify the countries in this region as a single grouping.

³⁴ Once a kingdom that made up the eastern portion of the Slave Coast, it is now a region in southwest Nigeria.

oral traditions dedicated to this”³⁵ (par. 3). Adesoji relates two of the most popular versions of this migration in his October 2010 article: “According to the [first] version, the Yoruba migrated from the north-eastern part of Africa, which has been variously interpreted as Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, and Meroe. This group of immigrants [was] said to have been led by Oduduwa who utilized his superior force to overwhelm the autochthonous people that [they] met in the area and consequently established a new dynasty” (par. 4). The second version derives from Yoruba mythology and establishes the Yoruba religion, which shall be examined later as it relates directly to my claim that Kemetic Rhetoric evolved through the slaves’ transmissions as Black Rhetoric as well as Black Hermeneutics. I include this important methodological work within this chapter in order to answer critics who may speculate that Egypt was comparatively isolated, at least culturally, from the rest of Africa and had no real influence on subsequent African cultures. I believe that even marginal knowledge of Central and South America’s origins are sufficient for proving that given a civilization as widespread, long-lasting, and successful as that of Ancient Egypt, it is not likely that it existed in any significant cultural isolation. The Mayans serve as a perfect analogy for this argument. Despite the Mayans not lasting as long or being as widespread as the Ancient Egyptians, we can still see the effects of this ancient culture today in Central and South America. Given Ancient Egypt’s emphasis on speech, Maat, and community, it is not likely that Arab invaders somehow absorbed Kemet and destroyed all traces of its once rich culture and philosophy, rendering it virtually lost to the rest of Africa. Edward Parrinder, a scholar located in Nigeria, straddles the fence on this issue in his book *West African Psychology*. While he is not convinced of a direct and obvious link between Egypt and Yorubaland, as many

³⁵ One can access the *Osun Defender* with the following link <http://www.osundefender.org/?p=279>.

regular practices in Ancient Egypt are not seen in Yorubaland, he is also not convinced that no link at all is possible: “it would seem that any migration must have taken place in pre-dynastic times, or from the Upper Nile, not directly from Egypt” (202). It is worth noting that Parrinder wrote this text in 1951, well before the late twentieth-century Afrocentricism movement, which helped to decipher historical texts without the Eurocentric slant that Parrinder inherited.

Since the 1980s and the boom of new research on the connection between Ancient Egypt and West Africa, few Black Studies scholars have concerned themselves with a disconnect between Egypt and the Niger-Congo regions of Africa, where the African slave trade was most prevalent. Therefore, I want to be fair to my examination and note that such doubts may still exist; however, I also want to make it clear to my potential critics that the overwhelming majority of Africana Studies and Black Studies do not make an issue of the exact manner of transference of Kemetic Rhetoric into the Niger-Congo regions of Africa. In fact, scholars who examine the role that oral traditions play in transmitting culture and knowledge in the Black community rarely problematize whether or not Kemetic culture actually seeped into other parts of Africa or how such a seepage may have occurred. A good number of Black Studies scholars, particularly Asante, Karanga, and Coleman, readily accept that Ancient Egypt had a clear and pervasive influence on the speech practices of slaves as a result of oral traditions spreading from Ancient Egypt into other parts of Africa. However, their research does not include the archaeological or the anthropological research necessary to defend their claims about Kemet’s influence in West Africa. This is the gap in scholarship that my dissertation, particularly this chapter, seeks to fill.

Certain philosophical, religious, and rhetorical components of Egyptian culture such as the philosophical significance of Maat eventually made their way to other parts of

Africa, then it is important to spend a moment to examine the manner in which Maat arrived in these other areas by paying particular attention to the manifestations of Maat in the Niger-Congo³⁶ region of West Africa. As mentioned earlier, this region, constituted by several African countries today, is the ancestral home of the majority of Blacks in America as a result of the Atlantic Slave Trade. While slave traders, on occasion, kidnapped slaves from other parts of Africa such as Mozambique and Angola, an overwhelming majority of slaves came from the western, coastal region of the Niger-Congo because of its easy access to coastal-Atlantic trading ports. In order to establish a linguistic route from Egypt to the Niger-Congo, I shall highlight a few languages, primarily from Niger and Nigeria, that represent the path that Maat followed from Ancient Egypt to West Africa and eventually to the United States via African slaves. As previously noted, Arab invasions in Ancient Egypt as well as Greek and eventually Roman invasions and occupations complicate the notion of a strict-African identity in Ancient Egypt. Commercial trade and military conflict generally result in a sharing of culture among the involved parties. Ancient Egypt was not cut off from the rest of Africa, as some White Eurocentric³⁷ scholars have suggested or implied; more importantly, however, it was not cut off from the Arab Peninsula either.

Climate change played a significant role in the cultural landscape of Africa. Africans migrated into the Arab Peninsula approximately 250,000 years ago, and many millennia later, unfavorable climatic conditions pushed them back into Egypt as well as into northwest and southeast Africa. By examining these migrations, numerous

³⁶ I will reference both ancient and modern names of African regions/counties as contextually appropriate in a given sentence.

³⁷ Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* covers this topic in great detail.

geneticists³⁸ agree that the cradle of human civilization began in central Africa some 100,000 years ago. Between 50,000 and 40,000 B.C.E., as a result of climate change that permitted or demanded by either extreme heat or cold, modern humans migrated northwards towards Ethiopia and Egypt, eastwards into the Arab Peninsula, westwards to the Congo, southeast into Asia, northeast towards Russia, and northwest into Europe. When vast ice sheets permitted, people migrated into the Americas and southern islands and continents in order to populate what are now isolated islands in the South Pacific and Australia. Climate change also contributed to the changes humans underwent in appearance, from black-skinned in sub-Saharan Africa, to olive-skinned in Asia and the Americas, and ruddy-skinned in Europe and northern Russia. By 10,000 B.C.E., human beings populated every corner of the planet. As the climate began to warm again, Africa enjoyed a period of lush vegetation (Wells). Given what we already know about the roles geography and climate play in the formation of societies and thanks to the arduous work of archaeologists, anthropologists, and climatologists, we have evidence of numerous societies springing up all over Africa. Ancient Africans as early as 16,000 B.C.E. established agriculture and trade and utilized donkeys and the Niger and Nile rivers to transport their goods: "For perhaps two or three thousand years [Africans] maintained a substantial sedentary agricultural economy between the forest and the desert. Much archaeological evidence exists to show that the area now known as the Sahara was much more fertile in this period" (Wiedner 17). By 5,000 B.C.E., the climate changed again turning much of this part of north-central Africa into the arid region we now know as the Sahara Desert. As a result of this climate-change event, the people in this part of Africa either migrated farther west along the Congo to settle along the coast or northward

³⁸ According to the Genographic Project headed by Dr. Spencer Wells and orchestrated by National Geographic

into Egypt. While we have archaeological evidence of these migrations, we do not have written accounts of their voyages to attest to the sharing of oral culture through a shared language. As a result of this absence, my argument begins with Kemet as the origin of much of African thought, because of the recorded evidence Egypt provides and its resemblance to much later writings in West Africa.

Because Egypt experienced so many centuries of progress and success beginning in 3150 B.C.E. with the first unification of Upper and Lower Egypt until its surrender to Rome in 30 B.C.E., further migrations took place out of Egypt into other parts of Africa, as Egypt's wealth and prominence expanded. Settlements around Egypt traded with and sometimes united in war with Egypt to expand their own economies and to defend themselves from frequent Assyrian invasions (Wiedner). In addition to uniting with some of the surrounding regions, many Egyptians fled to the northwest along the Mediterranean Sea and southeast along the Red Sea to escape the Assyrian invaders. In their flight and later in their new settlements within preexisting societies, Egyptian immigrants could not help but carry their culture and speech practices with them. Given the prominence and sophistication of Egypt, tribes in northwestern and southeastern Africa apparently accepted Egyptian immigrants quite willingly. Archaeological evidence of this culture sharing can be seen in both the pottery and art that survived these ancient societies' demise. In keeping with the archaeological evidence found thus far, I argue that this migration out of Egypt, in addition to Egypt's trading with other African regions, contributed to the spread of Kemetic philosophy and speech practices into other parts of Africa. Eventually, in 640 C.E., Arabs successfully conquered and occupied Egypt and implanted Islam, which eventually eroded the existing Egyptian theocracy and the prominence of the Kemetic Philosophy of Maat. Prior to the Arab conquest, Egypt underwent some cultural changes. But despite the earlier Greek and Roman invasions,

Egypt managed to maintain much of its cultural and philosophical identity by continuing to worship its gods, practice mummification, and maintain its own language and philosophy until the Arab victory in 640 C.E. (Wiedner).

The brief historical digression just presented helps explain the complexity of the relationship between Kemet and the rest of Africa, particularly with the Niger-Congo people. I do not find it necessary to my argument, however, to examine in exhaustive detail the varying languages throughout Africa or their paths of migration, as such linguistic studies³⁹ are readily available and not necessary to my particular claim that Kemetic Rhetoric is the oldest parent of Black Rhetoric. Given that the majority of slave traders kidnapped people from the Niger-Congo region of West Africa, I shall concentrate my efforts on the religious and linguistic connections of this particular region to Kemet in order to defend my claim that Kemetic Rhetoric is in fact an ancient parent-rhetoric of Black slaves in the United States.

Given the examinations of African migrations taking place over millennia that currently exist, one can focus on the particular path people took out of Egypt in order to arrive ultimately in the Niger-Congo. As stated earlier, some Egyptians fled northwest into what we now know as Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, as well as southeast into the Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, and Uganda. During the Trans-Saharan trade, which took place during Ancient Egypt's long-lasting prosperity and expansion, some Egyptians left Egypt for what is now Niger via the Sudan to trade goods or escape Assyrian invaders. The Niger River provided a means for transporting grains, pottery, and other goods throughout Niger, Nigeria, Mali, and Guinea. The Atlantic Coast also

³⁹ Adams B. Bodomo's *Africa-Asia Relations: Historical, Cultural, and Linguistic Connections* provides detailed linguistic analysis of ancient African languages. The *Langues et Civilisations à Tradition Orale* in Paris archives a great deal of linguistic research that examines the evolution and migrations of Ancient African Languages.

provided geographic means for trade among the coastal regions of the Niger-Congo (Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone) and with Northwest Africa (Senegal, Mauritania, Western Sahara, and Morocco). While no textual records exist to indicate an explicit sharing of culture, we do have archaeological and linguistic research suggesting that such cultural exchanges did indeed take place: “Overland trade routes spread out from the main towns on the Nile, so that commerce no longer focused so exclusively on the river” (Davis, Jr. 66). Ancient Egypt traded extensively with Meroë⁴⁰ from around 1000 B.C.E. until around 320 C.E. (Davis, Jr. 67). During this time, traders, migrants, and indigenous peoples began to develop other states in Africa such as Yoruba, which we know today as Nigeria. Africans across these vast regions traded ironworking, gold, cattle, grains, sheep, and other goods. The Bantu⁴¹ expansion throughout the sub-Saharan and Niger-Congo regions also benefited from this trade: “Ironworking was thus spread across the greater part of sub-Saharan Africa in the space of about 1200 years – between 300 [B.C.E.], among the Negroes in the Niger savanna, and 900 [C.E.] among the Batonga Bantu in Southern Rhodesia” (Wiedner 21). Wiender’s thorough examination of the linguistic migrations in Africa place Bantu adjacent to Yoruba:

Knowledge of precise developments along this [West] coast is lacking, but it is possible to suggest some general outlines. Negroes with considerable facility in ironworking apparently moved into the area west of the Niger Delta over 2,000 years ago—just about the time that Bantu-speaking Negroes, east of the Delta, began to expand—and established a number of small, independent societies. [...] East and northeast of the Niger Delta, among Bantu and other Negro people in and around the Cameroon Highlands, organization never developed extensively, although most of these people must have been in this area for several

⁴⁰ An Ancient African civilization located southwest of Egypt also known as the Kingdom of Kush.

⁴¹ Bantu was a language shared by a large population across the equatorial divide in Africa that spread throughout Africa. Zulu, Swahili, Tanzania, Pokomo (in Kenya), Banyankole (in Uganda), Tswana, Swazi, and Ndebele are among some of the languages identified as Bantu.

thousand years. [...] The very early inhabitants may have been the Yoruba and Dahomas. (40-2)

Wiender continues his inquiry into the languages of the ethnic peoples in these regions and concludes that there “probably were some Bantu in northern Nigeria” (42). If one examines this vast and extensive history holistically, one can identify long periods of time in which people of the Niger-Congo were in direct contact with Kemet. More importantly, they were in contact for an extended period of time with direct descendents of Kemet. African Studies and Religious Studies converge in their agreement that components of Kemet philosophy, particularly Maat, migrated to the Niger-Congo and were influential in Yoruba and Dogon religions (“Nommo, Kawaida, and Communicative Practice,” Coleman, and Wiender). Thanks to the rigorous work of linguists, anthropologists, and archaeologists, evidence does in fact exist that supports my claim that Kemet influenced people of the Niger-Congo in West Africa. Consequently, I can now further my examination of Maat in order to reveal its particular influences on the Dogon⁴² and Yoruba religions as well as their rhetorical practices.

French anthropologist Marcel Griaule studies the Dogon Tribe in Mali and traces its ancestry directly to Ancient Egypt. Much of the Dogons’s religious mythology coincides with Ancient Egypt’s. While the terms themselves may differ as a result of linguistic evolution, they remain conceptually the same. “The Dogon,” an article Griaule co-authored with Germaine Dieterlen, outlines the most basic foundations of Dogon beliefs and their impact on societal structures: “The Dogon hold that a ‘sign’ or symbol and that which it symbolizes are reversible[:] that signs, substitutes, and images constitute a vast system of correspondences, in which every term is interlocked within

⁴² The Dogon derive in the region of West Africa today known as Mali, which borders Niger, Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea, and Burkina Faso. Mali was also a country in the Niger-Congo that contributed to the Atlantic Slave Trade.

what seem to be specific categories” (83). The Dogon emphasis on signs and symbols within a context of multiple correspondences relates directly to Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, which worked in much the same way. The images of these two cultural groups, then, functioned on multiple levels to communicate different meanings depending on their context. Similar to the Ancient Egyptian creation myth, the Dogon articulate their understanding of creation as a cosmological balance between the heavens and Earth expressed in terms of nature. For Ancient Egypt, creation began with Ra (i.e., the sun god) emerging from an egg on water, and for the Dogon, it began with a primordial seed vibrating with energy (Griaule 84). The internal vibrations allowed the seed to burst forth from its sheath “to reach the uttermost confines of the universe”; this eruption allowed the seed to follow a “perpetual helical movement [that] signifies the conservation of matter” (Griaule 84). The pattern represents the “perpetual alternation of opposites [...] reflecting a principle of twin-ness (i.e., two-ness), which ideally should direct the proliferation of life” (Griaule 84). This process of creation results in twin-paired *Nommo*, “direct emanations and sons of God [...] and prefigurations of man” (Griaule 86). In being a twin-pair, *Nommo* contains both sexes to fulfill the obligation of oppositeness needed for the proliferation of life. The male *Nommo*, called *Yurugu*, does not wait for full germination but emerges prematurely and tears off a fragment of his placenta, which in time becomes the Earth. Given this imperfect and imbalanced origin of the Earth, as *Yurugu* leaves his female twin behind, *Yurugu* then attempts to retrieve the female half of his soul in order to restore balance and perfection but fails to do so (Griaule 86). The Dogon creation myth claims that *Amma*, the creator God that has ultimate control over all creations, was displeased with *Yurugu*’s incestuous reproductions and sent to *Nommo* the female half that was left behind along with four other *Nommo* entities in order to establish order in the universe. The *Nommo* collectively establish water, land, sky, sun, and moon along with

the different seasons (Griaule 87). While the myth is far more extensive and detailed than what I provide here, I supply enough to allow for a Dogon-based understanding of the relationship between man and the universe. Like the Ancient Egyptians, the Dogon see human beings as integral parts of a vast cosmos requiring all individuals to fulfill their responsibility for maintaining balance within their families, communities, states, and the universe at large. The Dogon, who were farmers and whose life and culture depended almost exclusively on grain and whose architectural constructions were primarily grain silos, understandably focus their creation myth on a plant's seed. They understood seeds as possessing an internal helix structure, which they drew on walls and pottery (e.g., each *Nommo* and subsequent creations by *Amma* emerge as seeds) in order to recreate visually man's descent from *Amma* through *Nommo*. More importantly, they maintained and reinforced their creation myth's lessons verbally through stories via specific oral-based communicative practices. Their myth establishes kinship roles and social hierarchy in order to secure balance for their community: "the regular and appointed series attributed to the seeds is the sign of the universal order established on Earth since the descent of *Nommo*" (Griaule 88). Disorder, in contrast but complementary to this harmonious order, requires certain rituals in order to reestablish and maintain order and balance: "Disorder among the seeds, which for an individual results especially from the breaking of the rules of life, prefigures the universal disorder [that] spreads by stages from the individual to his close kinsmen, his family, his clan, his people. But this disorder may be arrested and removed at any stage by appropriate rituals" (Griaule 88). *Nommo*, as explained in the Dogon creation myth, represents the ordered world from creation to the proliferation of human lives. *Nommo* represents truth for the Dogon people and their way of life:

A human being in his development manifests the development of *Nommo*, [the] symbol of the ordered world. Thus the new-born infant at

birth is the head of *Nommo*; when later he becomes a herd-boy, he is the chest, at betrothal the feet, at marriage the arms, and when fully adult he is the complete *Nommo*; as an elder and still more a supreme chief he is both *Nommo* and the totality of the world and mankind. (Griaule 89)

This creation myth served the Dogon as a symbol for truth as well as a structure for planning their lives. They patterned their villages on the notion of twins by having upper and lower twinned villages. The internal structure of the twinned villages reflects the internal helix of the creation seed. The myth of seed germination and gestation influenced the construction of their crop fields in relation to their villages: "Thus the settlement where men dwell close together is a representation both of man himself and of the layout of the fields outside the walls" (Griaule 96). In keeping with this emphasis on twinned pairs, the Dogon (i.e., cultivators) understood themselves geographically and culturally as being paired with the Bozo (i.e., fishermen), another tribe living in Mali (i.e., home of the Dogon) along the Niger River. Dogon tales such as the brief examples provided here demonstrate *mythos* as the Dogon's preferred mode of understanding *Nommo*, which created balance through the pairing of "twins" in order to discuss their social and economic relationship with the Bozo people:

If a cultivator finds in his field an ear of millet (*yu*) with two fruits, he immediately cuts it, takes it to the family shrine and, at the next sowing, the family head will distribute four grains to each member of the family in order to ensure them an abundant harvest. At the same time, one grain is thrown in the direction of Bozo territory, which amounts to giving them half the ear, that is, half the good fortune and the abundance, as one would do for a twin. (Griaule 108)

Griaule relates another tale in which the Bozo people are bound to the same rules of balance and sharing as the Dogon. If a Bozo catches a fish, he must immediately seek out a Dogon to eat it with him: "If he cannot find one [a Dogon], he simply puts a piece of the fish in with the catch he is taking to market" (Griaule 108). This notion of twin-ness goes so far as to prohibit sexual relations between the Dogon and the Bozo, which would have been seen as incestuous. While the relationship between the Dogon and the Bozo

was far more complicated than described here, the evidence that I provide supports my claim that an understanding of the Dogon's and Bozo's relationship – in terms of their desire to establish balance in order to see that their communal rules fulfilled their community responsibilities – reveals a direct link on the one hand to Kemet and on the other to their descendants (i.e., the Trans-Atlantic slaves). The more one examines the Dogon creation myth, the more connections can be made between the Dogon and Bozo to Kemet. What appears to be most pervasive throughout this time in Africa, from Ptah-hotep's Egypt to the Dogon and Bozo, is the need to share and express concern for one's community. In both Kemet as well as the societies of West Africa, language was the most prominent mode of transmitting culture and knowledge that sought to maintain balance within a community by sharing wisdom, correcting actions, and, above all, preserving human dignity.

The similarities between the Dogon and the Ancient Egyptians were not merely coincidental. According to Theophile Obenga's *A Lost Tradition: African Philosophy in World History*, and Cheikh Anta Diop's *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality and Precolonial Black Africa*, there is an obvious and distinct connection between West Africa and Kemet:

[Obenga and Diop] identify parallels that crisscross African societies of West, South, East, and North Africa, including Egypt, in such specific cultural subjects as cosmogonies, totemism, circumcision, kingship, social organizations, political organizations, matriarchy, economic organizations, and languages. Among them are parallel concepts and beliefs between [A]ncient Egypt and the Dogon of Mali, including the concept of an androgynous God. The [A]ncient Egyptian god of evil, Seth[,] and the Dogon counterpart, Yurugu[,] are symbolized by the same animal form. (Okafor 309)

The philosophical conceptions of Maat, as well as the numerous parallels between the Ancient Egyptians and the Dogon people, show up in various forms across Africa. Obenga's "linguistic examination of the relationship between Maat, or truth, and modern thought, finds that Maat plays a 'fundamental role' in a fairly long list of African languages that cross the continent" (Okafor 309). Given the evidence of this recent scholarship, one can safely conclude that Ancient Egypt was not cut off from the Niger-Congo (or other) regions of Africa, as earlier European and American scholars⁴³ long insisted.

Maulana Karenga's Kawaïda philosophy, informed in part by Asante's recovery of Dogon myths regarding *Nommo*, revives the *Nommo* myth to represent an Afrocentric move to reclaim, restore, maintain, and promote communal responsibility for Black Americans. Asante directly associates *Nommo* as a communicative practice employed by Blacks in America: "to understand contemporary Black [R]hetoric in America means one must understand that *Nommo* [my italics] continues to permeate Black activities" (Jackson and Richardson 9). Asante and Karenga, among other Black Studies scholars, agree that although most Black Americans are unconscious of this culturally African carry-over from slavery, it remains nonetheless distinguishably present in Black American communicative practices. While Maat is not named as such by the Dogon, the philosophical principles that underlie Maat appear as *Nommo* for the Dogon. That is, the concern for community, balance, and reciprocity evidenced in Kemet and articulated as Maat in Kemetic Philosophy and Rhetoric appear again many centuries later in the Dogon community as *Nommo*.

⁴³ Again, Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* reveals and identifies the most significant historical figures that established what Bernal labels the Aryan Revisionist Model in scholarship, which sought to conceal Ancient Egypt's influence in the world.

In addition to the brief examples of Dogon beliefs regarding *Nommo* presented here, one more stands out as a clear and irrefutable linguistic, philosophical, and cultural link between Black Americans and the Dogon. In his investigation of Dogon tales, Griaule notes that humorous “exchanges of insults and jests, often of an obscene nature” were means for establishing personal relationships among and between the Dogon and Bozo (109). This same communicative trait evidenced in Yoruba appears later among the Transatlantic slave’s descendents.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s *The Signifying Monkey*, various texts on Black Vernacular English (i.e., Ebonics) by Geneva Smitherman, and Will Coleman’s *Tribal Talk* each locate certain Black American rhetorical, linguistic, and literary roots in Yoruba. The Yoruba people originate in what is now the southwestern region of Nigeria⁴⁴ (near the Dogon in Mali) and have ethnic roots that date back to around the fourth-century B.C.E. That is, in approximately 1100 C.E., the Yoruba, who “had an early flowering of stone carving, iron culture, [and] bronze-working,” traded across the desert and along the Niger River (Wiedner 64). Obenga and Diop also make clear connections between Kemet and the Yoruba people. In reviewing their work, Victor Okafor, a Nigerian scholar, confirms that the principles of Maat “radiate prominently in our [Igbo]⁴⁵ saying: *eziokwu bu du* (literally translated as truth is life)” (309). Okafor continues his comparison of Maat to *eziokwu bu du* asserting that, like Maat, *eziokwu bu du* conveys a communal belief: “truth is like a seed to life” (309). As indicated in the early origins of Yoruba, Maat accompanied other myths, philosophies, and rhetorical concerns that migrated via oral practices into the Niger-Congo as well as into many other parts of Africa as a result of the

⁴⁴ Yoruba itself was identified as such long beforehand.

⁴⁵ Igbo is one of three prominent languages in Nigeria: Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo. They were once one language but over time split into the three distinct languages we recognize today.

Egyptian Diaspora. If these beliefs survived centuries of foreign and domestic invasions and migrations across Africa, then it is not unreasonable to expect that they also survived the Middle Passage and slavery, which provides basis for my claim that Kemetic Rhetoric is a parent-rhetoric to Black Rhetoric. Having established the Kemetic roots of the Dogon people, I can now examine Yoruba myths and their Kemetic origins in order to identify their specific influences on Black Rhetoric. This portion of my dissertation shall provide further evidence for my claim that Kemetic Rhetoric was in fact one half of Black Rhetoric's original parentage and that it can be traced from the slaves' beginnings in West Africa back to West Africa's relationship with Ancient Egypt.

The Signifying Monkey argues that Black Americans share cultural, linguistic, and literary practices with the Yoruba as a result of a high concentration of slave trading in the Niger-Congo (home to many Yoruba). Despite the Middle Passage and a few centuries of living in the United States, Black Americans' dependence on and maintenance of their oral traditions in conjunction with being denied access to mainstream (i.e., white) American education, permitted them to preserve much of their cultural and linguistic heritage from Yoruba. Given their cultural and communal dependence on oral practices in Yoruba (and Mali), the slaves maintained their myths through storytelling. In time, of course, their English language acquisition and conversion to Christianity diluted their African language and myths, but this dilution did not result in an erasure as much as it did a reimagining. The slaves did not completely acculturate into American (i.e., white European) culture and forfeit their African identities; they assimilated instead. This assimilation into American/Colonial society and reimagining of African culture and religion allowed them to combine their two fundamentally different systems of language and belief into one, Black-identified system – a point I shall return to at the end of this chapter as a means of linking Black Americans' cultural ties to the

Yoruba. Similar to Griaule, who looked at the Dogon's creation myth to link culturally and philosophically the Dogon to the Ancient Egyptians, Gates looks at the Yoruba creation myth as a basis for his argument that Black Americans have cultural and philosophical connections to the Yoruba.

The Yoruba rely on divination and interpretation to receive and understand messages from their gods. Gates argues that the Signifying Monkey's origins lie in Esu-Elegbara, a hermeneut in Yoruba mythology who translates, thus interprets, the will of the gods to the people and mediates between man and the divine. While this same figure exists in other places, albeit with alternate names, among African slaves' descendents such as Brazil, Cuba, and Haiti, Gates focuses primarily on its presence in the United States among Black Americans as a direct lineage from West Africa. Esu-Elegbara, also known as Esu, first appears in Yoruba creation myths as a mediator between men and the gods in that he acted chiefly as the interpreter of the gods: "For Esu is the Yoruba figure of the meta-level of formal language use, [the] ontological and epistemological status of figurative language and its interpretation" (Gates 6). Close examination of the Yoruba creation myth that first mentions Esu reveals his hermeneutic role:

Long, long ago, Olorun, the sky god, lowered a great chain from the heavens to the ancient waters. Down this chain climbed Oduduwa, Olorun's son. Oduduwa brought with him a handful of dirt, a special five-toed chicken, and a palm nut. He threw the dirt upon the ancient waters and set the chicken on the dirt. The chicken busily scratched and scattered the dirt until it formed the first dry earth. In the center of this new world, Oduduwa created the magnificent Ifa kingdom. He planted the palm nut, which grew into a proud tree with 16 branches, symbolizing the 16 sons and grandsons of Oduduwa. (Ifabité)

The first Yoruba kings descended from these sixteen branches and were divine beings that existed among their people. The Ifa kingdom in this myth establishes a common religion among the Yoruba along the Niger River in the Benin Republic and parts of Nigeria and Togo. The name Ifa represents the mythological scribe that "can only speak

to human beings by inscribing the language of the gods onto the divining tray in visual signs that the *babalawo* [(high priest)] reads aloud in the language of the lyrical poetry called *ese*” (Gates 12). However, *ese* is not a language human beings can understand; therefore, the interpreter Esu is necessary for the *babalawo* to understand the sacred texts: “Esu clearly has priority in the art of interpretation. In other myths of the origins of Ifa, Esu both teaches and wills the system to his friend” (Gates 15). The Yoruba understand Esu as the “path to Ifa” (Gates 15).

While most of our knowledge regarding Yoruba myths results from oral narratives and practices handed down from generation to generation, other evidence of Esu’s interpretive role appears in Yoruba’s divination tools still in use today: “The *Opon Ifa*, the carved wooden divination tray used in the art of interpretation, represents a trace of this priority of Esu in the process of interpretation by containing at the center of its upper perimeter a carved image of Esu himself, meant to signify his relation to the act of interpretation” (Gates 11). In the process of divination, the *babalawo* uses the *Opon Ifa*, a divination trapper, and 16 palm nuts (*ikin*) to understand and share the gods’ messages with others. Thanks in great part to *babalawos* and their female counterparts, *Iyanifas* (Mothers of Ifa), who survived the Middle Passage, many early slaves in America were able to continue their practice of Ifa for some time before they converted to Christianity. Even after conversion, however, the Africans in early America tended to blend their two beliefs by virtue of understanding Christianity through the lens of Ifa – as opposed to abandoning Ifa entirely and adopting a Eurocentric version of Christianity. In doing so, they preserved the cultural and philosophical significance of interpretation in their literary and communicative practices – in large part via their maintenance of and holding to the Esu figure by preserving a significant role for Esu, who later becomes the Signifying Monkey. As a consequence of the Yoruba’s emphasis on interpretation through Esu in

conjunction with our knowledge that a large number of African slaves originated in the Niger regions of Africa, Gates can successfully argue that the Signifying Monkey's origins lie in the Esu figure. Therefore, and despite Esu's morphing into the Signifying Monkey, the function of interpretation made prominent by the Esu legends does indeed impact Black-American communicative practices. An examination of the process by which Esu morphs into the Signifying Monkey reveals that such modes of interpretation seen among Black Americans began in Yoruba as an important religious and rhetorical *trope*, which it continues to be today in Black Liberation Theology⁴⁶ and Black Rhetoric.

Examining the narratives that highlight Esu's role sheds light on the origin of Black Hermeneutic practices. Gates identifies the *trope* of Esu as a hermeneut by examining an Ifa canonical narrative, "Esu Taught Orunmila [Grand Priest] How to Divine," in Ayodele Ogundipe's text *Esu Elegbara* (15). This narrative relates a scenario in which Esu teaches Ifa how to divine, which allows Ifa to become an important "communication link between men and the Orisas [spiritual manifestations of Olorun]" (Gates 15). Gates's examination of this narrative suggests it is an origin for the eventual morphing of Esu into the Signifying Monkey by noting that, in some of the Esu tales, he (i.e., Esu) is "portrayed as the first interpreter, responsible for teaching or uncovering the art of divination" for Ifa; however, Esu is not alone, as he is accompanied by Moedun, the Monkey, "and the tree – a palm tree growing in the garden of Orungan [the midday sun] – as well as being the messenger of Odu, the divination seeds" (Lydia Cabrera qtd. in Gates 15). The Yoruba tales frequently place Moedun in the company of Esu. Gates suggests that through the process of the African Diaspora and Transatlantic Slave Trade, Esu and his monkey companion eventually merge as one interpreter/trickster figure: "For

⁴⁶ Black Liberation Theology shall be explored in subsequent chapters.

reasons extremely difficult to reconstruct, the monkey became, through displacement in Africa[an] myths in the New World, a central character in this crucial scene of instruction” (15). This instructional role, which is at the same time an interpretive role, appears in Black Rhetoric as a necessary *trope* for the maintenance of Black Rhetoric as well as a tool for self-preservation in a violently oppressive system (i.e., slavery).

Gates extends his examination of Esu and the Signifying Monkey to another Niger-Congo lineage for Black Americans, the Dahomey.⁴⁷ According to Dahomey Fon myths, Legba (their Esu figure) serves as a celestial trickster who affords man an opportunity to “mollify an angered deity and set aside his vengeance” by “winning the favor of Legba” (Melville Herskovits qtd. in Gates 15). As interpreter and trickster, Legba serves an important role as a mediator between gods and human beings. On the one hand, Legba is necessary for man to understand the gods’ messages through divination; on the other hand, Legba allows man an escape route from a “supernaturally willed dilemma” (Herskovits qtd. in Gates 15). Similar to Ifa, the Fon’s gods speak a language inaccessible to human beings; therefore, Legba must interpret the gods’ words to human beings through the act of divination: “Each god speaks a language of his or her own, and only Legba can interpret these because Legba ‘knows all languages’” (Gates 28). Legba, then, fulfills a dual role as both interpreter and trickster, which he demonstrates through double-voiced tales. The role of interpretation through a mediator is foundational for understanding the Dahomey’s relationship between human beings and gods: “Legba is the linguist-messenger who reads the text of Fa [the god of fate and destiny], a text that remains unread and unreadable without the agency of Legba” (Gates 25). Gates’s

⁴⁷ The Dahomey, now the Republic of Benin, originally were subjects of the Yoruba, but liberated themselves from the Yoruba in the early seventeenth century. Ethnically, they are no different than the Yoruba and were located just northwest of Yorubaland. In fact, much of Benin today speaks Yoruba.

argument examines the Legba figure as both an interpreter and trickster figure in more detail than I provide here – it is not my intent to replicate what Gates has already accomplished – consequently, I shall rely on the specific parts of Gates’s work that establish the link between the Yoruba/Dahomey and Black Americans. This link is both philosophical and cultural via the morphing of Esu/Legba into the Signifying Monkey, which I shall reference as a historical component of Black Rhetoric throughout my argument. Gates’s argument that the *trope* of the Signifying Monkey is a direct descendent of the *trope* of the Esu/Legba figure pervasive throughout much of West Africa supports my tracing a direct philosophical, cultural, and rhetorical path from Ancient Egypt, to Western Africa, and finally to the United States via the Dogon, Dahomey, and Yoruba people. This lineage solidifies Black Americans’ ability to claim a Kemetic heritage as well as a West African one. My argument can now explore one more significant contribution from West Africa traceable to Black Americans today via Slave Narratives.

Will Coleman’s *Tribal Talk* identifies the Dahomey (i.e., modern Benin) creation myth as Voodoo’s primary origin. Similar to Black Rhetoric, Voodoo is a mutated, hybrid offspring of two disparate parents. It combines elements of Dahomey and Yoruba religions with Christianity acquired during slavery to form an ethnically and regionally specific denomination of Christianity found in parts of southern Louisiana, Cuba, Jamaica, and other ethnically African islands. Like the Yoruba and the Dogon, the Dahomey’s creation gods represent a twinness in addition to dual genders, which permit deities to be male and female at the same time. Not unlike the creation myths from Ancient Egypt, the Dogon, and the Yoruba, those of the Dahomey also have a primordial creator god that establishes a divine hierarchy by creating other gods and assigning to them particular dominions and spiritual roles. According to Dahomey narratives, Nana

Buluku, an androgynous god, creates the world and then, after bearing the dual-sexed twinned Mawu-Lisa, divides the world between him-her (Coleman 3). From this point forward, Nana Buluku resigns from any further acts of creation, leaving all future creations at the discretion of Mawu-Lisa. Dahomey creation myths identify Mawu-Lisa as a single-bodied entity containing not only two sexes but also two, opposing personae (Coleman 3). Nana Buluku bestowed on Mawu, the female persona, dominion over the night and the moon and Lisa, the male persona, the day and the sun: "Together, Mawu-Lisa is omnipresent and omniscient in relation to the activities of all creatures" (Coleman 5). His/her hermaphroditic state allows Mawu-Lisa to self-gestate and produce other dual-sexed and twinned offspring. Voodoo, also known as Hoodoo but more widely known as Vodun, claims as its own origin this Dahomey creation myth. While some variations inevitably exist, as is the case with almost all religions, Vodun as a principle religion in West Africa remains in practice and is known as Vodun in Benin and Voodoo in the southern United States. Similar to Kemet's understanding of energy and the need to maintain its balance within the community, Vodun understands that energy "flows from Mawu-Lisa into particular forms according to her-his divine will" (Coleman 4). Most Dahomey narratives speak of Vodun as "the ever-present life force itself" (Coleman 4). As was the case in Kemet's religious and cosmological understanding, Vodun, for the Dahomey, provides a way to maintain a balanced flow of cosmological energy between gods and human beings. This 'way' was as important to the Dahomey as it was to the Ancient Egyptians, the Dogon, and the Yoruba.

Vodun refers not only to a religion but also to that religion's spiritual deities and religious-rhetorical practices. Since Nana Buluku refrained from creation acts after bearing Mawu-Lisa, all future acts become the responsibility of the twins. As a result of Nana Buluku's decision and Mawu-Lisa's ability to self-procreate, Mawu-Lisa is able to

give birth to seven principal Voduns (i.e., spiritual deities). In keeping with the duality of Mawu-Lisa, the remaining seven Voduns are also twinned and dual-sexed. Of the seven, one in particular, Legba, stands out as the most important figure for the African slaves' descendents in America. According to most Vodun narratives, Legba, like the other Vodun, is an androgynous figure; however, most scholars generally refer to Legba with the masculine pronoun, so I shall do the same. As the youngest and most prominently known Vodun, "he alone is universally known, in one form or another, throughout West Africa and the African Americas" (Coleman 8). Legba's crossing the Atlantic as a common narrative *trope* for many of the slaves resulted in a preservation of this trickster figure in the Americas as part of an ancient and solidly African rhetorical tradition. If language is the house of Being and has the potential to preserve culture as well as think Being, then Legba provides an African foundation for Black Rhetoric's capacity to think Being. Through this linguist/trickster figure, Blacks maintained a part of their cultural heritage not only from West Africa but also from as far away and as far back as Ancient Egypt. As previously stated, Legba knows all the languages and is Mawu's linguist, as he is "situated as the [V]odun of communication" (Coleman 9). Like Esu and Maat, Legba is the intermediary link between human beings and the gods. For the Dahomey, the way to the divine must begin with Legba. Not unlike the Greeks who represented language (i.e., *logos*) as divine, via Hermes, Legba "is the bridge among the Vodun, so too he is the link between the heavens and the [E]arth" (Coleman 9). Thus, no message can pass from heaven to Earth or vice versa without first passing through Legba.

From the evidence provided thus far, it is reasonable to suggest, that despite a lack of avid recordkeeping or abundant textual preservation, language itself was vital, even divine, to West Africans. Oral traditions, in the form of narratives, preserved cultural knowledge for future generations. Thus, I argue that West Africans considered the act of

narration itself as a necessary component of their religious and cultural practices. More often than not, narrations can be viewed as modes of narrating that function socially and culturally as modes of transmitting knowledge. *Mythos* was a way to achieve understanding and transmit knowledge, both cultural and religious, among Africans. This emphasis on oral traditions made its way to the Americas and served as a source of unity, self-preservation, resistance, and liberation for many African slaves.

Thus far in my examination of Kemet, the Dogon, the Yoruba, and the Dahomey, I have traced cultural and religious practices that originated in Ancient Egypt and spread to West Africa and eventually to the Americas via the slaves. However, I have only begun to scratch the surface of these African religious and cultural practices; other scholars provide much more complete examinations than what I have provided. But for the purposes of this dissertation, I wish only to establish that evidence does indeed exist that supports my claim that Black Americans can look further than West Africa all the way to Ancient Egypt for their rhetorical and philosophical origins. My claim is that Black Rhetoric's origins can be traced all the way to Kemet, which introduces a new line of argument in Black Studies by exposing a gap in the current scholarship, which looks primarily to West Africa for Black Rhetoric's origins. While scholarly interest in Ancient Egyptian Rhetoric became popularized in the mid 1980s, thanks in great part to Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*,⁴⁸ few scholars made the connection between Black Rhetoric and Kemetic Rhetoric. Ronald L. Jackson's and Elaine B. Richardson's *Understanding African American Rhetoric* stands out as one of the few scholarly exceptions. Their text argues that Black Rhetoric's origins reside in Kemetic Rhetoric. In spite of the text's

⁴⁸ Bernal's theories are controversial; however, I find his work – particularly the parts I use here – quite useful and relevant to my argument. While I do not accept all of his theories, many of his points are valid and supported by other Black Studies scholars.

detailed examination of Kemetic Rhetoric, introduction to the concept of Maat, and critical application of Kemetic Rhetoric to black literary productions, it fails to explain *how* Kemetic Rhetoric survived for millennia and made its way to the United States.

The cultural and philosophical principles of Maat managed to survive centuries of migrations and invasions and remained important to the Dogon, Yoruba, and Dahomey. While the name “Maat” itself did not manage to survive the passages of time and the Egyptian Diaspora, its concepts of justice, energy, balance, dignity, speech, and community managed to survive. Adisa Alkebulan, a Nigerian scholar, identifies the manner in which an understanding of the cosmic power of *Nommo* made its way from West Africa to the Americas via the slaves. *Nommo*, for the Dogon, represents a clear link between Kemet’s Maat and West Africa’s understanding of truth, which can be found everywhere in Black Africa (Alkebulan 26). *Nommo*, as word and truth, establishes a vital link between language and Being. *Nommo*, then, provides a horizon for understanding Black ways of being/Being. *Nommo* represents life force, energy, which in turn is truth expressed in language (Alkebulan 28). Language permits Africans to access divine energy. By communicating with one another, they share this vital energy. Thus, community preservation through language lies at the heart of Black Rhetoric.

Karenga attempts to capture these socio-ethical concerns in his own Kawaida philosophy, which attempts to revive West African and Kemetic rhetorical and philosophical practices and understandings for Black Americans. He argues that African communicative practices focused on four socio-ethical concerns and used these “conceptual construct[s] to demonstrate coherence and continuity in the African communicative tradition” (*Nommo, Kawaida, and Communicative Practice* 4). He then identifies the four enduring socio-ethical concerns as “[one,] [the] dignity and rights of the human person; [two,] the well-being and flourishing of family and community; [three,] the

integrity and value of the environment; and [four,] the reciprocal solidarity and cooperation for mutual benefit of humanity” (*Nommo, Kawaida, and Communicative Practice* 4). Karenga explores Kemetic texts such as Ptah-hotep’s *Sebait* as well as Yoruba narratives to establish these socio-ethical concerns of Black Americans as originating in Africa. Having sufficiently established, historically, the connection between most Black Americans (not all Blacks are descendants of African slaves as some are descendents of Free Black Africans) and Kemet, I can now begin to construct an examination of Western contributions to Black Rhetoric in order to ground my argument that Black Rhetoric is indeed a hybrid offspring of two parents, Kemetic and Western Rhetoric. Once I establish Black Rhetoric’s parentage as Western as well as Kemetic, then I shall commence to prove how this rhetoric emerged from these two traditions as a unique rhetoric in its own right.

The Middle Passage brought West Africans to the Americas as slaves. We cannot know the actual number of Africans taken from Africa as slaves, but records solidly indicate the number to be firmly in the millions. Slavery, including export slavery, was not new to Africa at the time of the Middle Passage, as Portugal exported slaves to Europe for two centuries before the Transatlantic slave trade, but the chattel slavery that emerged in the United States was new. Portugal’s exploration of coastal Africa and Europe’s commercial expansion during the Renaissance created conditions conducive to a slave trade, particularly in areas already accustomed to slavery. Given the Arab invasions and their ensuing enslavement of Africans, slavery became a regular form of commercial trade in much of Africa. Exporting slaves to Europe and the New World was not too much of a stretch to fulfill Europeans’s desire for slaves: “[But] in the modern era, significant direct African-European contact began only with the Portuguese capture of the fortress of Ceuta from the Moroccans in 1415” (Bah 71). Within seven decades, the

Portuguese were the “sole European traders along the western, southern, and eastern coasts of Africa” (Bah 72). Gold and not slavery initially drew Europeans to Africa but the profits of slavery became more tempting as Portugal and the rest of Europe sought to expand their economic and religious prowess throughout the world.

Since it is commonly understood and accepted that slave masters actively converted their slaves to Christianity,⁴⁹ I shall not take up time here to prove this conversion did indeed occur; instead, I shall introduce this process as one of the Western foundations of Black Rhetoric. In the earliest days of American slavery, slaves endured the Middle Passage after being kidnapped from their homes, herded into slave auctions, and transported across the Atlantic bound and chained as cargo. Slave traders kidnapped the majority of slaves, but a small number of slaves were “debtors, criminals, starving destitutes, or war captives” sold at slave auctions (Bah 79). Despite the fact that much of coastal Africa participated in the slave trade, two major slave-trading regions supplied the majority of slaves in the U.S. The Dahomey area was the “busiest slave-trading frontier” (Bah 80). Records indicate that French traders in Dahomey sold as many as 12,000 and 20,000 slaves yearly (Bah 80). Not all of these slaves survived and arrived in the United States – but many did. Benin and the Niger Delta also provided major slave trading areas, which supplied slaves for transport across the Atlantic. In some cases, Western influences on the African slaves began immediately upon capture, as some Christian slavers insisted on baptizing their slaves before they boarded the

⁴⁹ Marcus W. Jernegan’s “Slavery and Conversion in the American Colonies” is an early twentieth-century resource on this topic. Philip D. Morgan’s *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* published in 1998 examines slave conversions within a particular region of early America. And, more recently, Cedrick May’s *Evangelism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835* published in 2008 looks at African-slave conversions to Christianity from the converts’ perspective via the published works of America’s earliest Black African authors (Jupiter Hammon, Phillis Wheatley, etc.).

ships in case they did not survive the journey – believing that *at least* their souls could be saved *even if* their lives were lost (Bah 78). Once in the United States, many slave masters agreed that converting their slaves to Christianity would make them more malleable and submissive and therefore easier to control. While this may have been true from the perspective of the slave masters, Christianity, for the most part, provided the slaves not only comfort but also a source of determination for liberation from slavery. To convert their slaves, slave masters took them to church with them or instructed them separately at home. For those who attended services outside the plantations, churches provided separate accommodations for Black slaves so that whites attending worship services would not have to see Blacks. For many generations, slaves did not have their own churches; instead, they received almost all of their religious instruction from whites: “Euro-American preachers were the primary interpreters-expositors of the biblical narrative” (Coleman 91). Since laws prohibited access to literacy and secular education for slaves, they only learned the “fundamentals of the Euro-American interpretation of Christianity,” which attempted to enforce a divinely directed state of subjugation on all Africans (Coleman 91). The white Christian church preached that slavery was a “divine decree” by interpreting the story of Ham’s curse by God as evidence for the genesis of Blacks as divinely preordained servants (Cone 74). Early American theologians wrote extensively defending slavery as God’s will. George D. Armstrong’s *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery* argues that slavery was God’s solution to white’s economic problems, which provided whites with free Black labor. Such theological justifications were not exclusive property of Southern ministers either. Fred A. Ross, a Presbyterian minister from Ohio, claimed, as the title of his work *Slavery Ordained of God* suggests, that God ordained slavery as benefit for righteous (i.e., white) men and as punishment for fallen (i.e., Black) men. Ross argues that Black slaves in America, as ordained by God,

benefitted from their condition more than their African brethren, who remained unsaved. Ross, like many white theologians, ministers, scientists, and legislators of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, argued that God intentionally made Africans as a separate race not equal to whites. More importantly, Ross relied on Scripture to defend slavery against accusations that it was a sin: "Let the Northern philanthropist learn from the Bible that the relation of master and slave is not a sin per se. Let him learn that God says nowhere it is sin. Let him learn that sin is the transgression of the law" (29). By relying on "Pauline ethical dualism," slaves and masters had no need for separate religions; in fact, the Apostle Paul provided American Christianity a fundamentalist interpretation of Scripture that permitted salvation for both slave and master by emphasizing the need to submit to authority and be obedient (Patterson 75). The Apostle Paul's understanding of Christ's duality, as both liberator and redeemer, extended to Christianity's ability for both "emperor and slave to worship the same god without threatening the system" (Patterson 76). Slavery in the South imitated Christianity's first European convert – Rome: "The religion that had begun in and was fashioned by the Roman slave order was to play the identical role eighteen-hundred years later in the slave system that was to be Rome's closest cultural counterpart in the modern world" (Patterson 76). The United States may have modeled slavery after the Roman Empire, but most of secular and religious life in the United States maintained its later Western European roots with regard to Christianity and social class.

Similar to James Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* and Will Coleman's *Tribal Talk*, both of which examine segregation within white American Christianity, Cornel West's *Race and Modernity* provides examples of white Christianity's justification for slavery and evidence of its institutional support from European models. West looks particularly at Europe's early influence on the United States with regard to slavery.

Colonialism in the United States looked to Europe as its model. The Enlightenment provided a “European stamp on the area of political thought” in the United States (West 57). While Enlightenment thinking provoked some⁵⁰ to oppose slavery as inhumane, others sought it out for opportunities to defend slavery not only as biblically justified but also as good science. West lists prominent figures who held racist beliefs as providing justification for slavery and segregation: “Montesquieu and Voltaire of the French Enlightenment, Hume and Jefferson of the Scotch and American Enlightenment, and Kant of the German Enlightenment not merely held racist views[,] they also uncritically during this age of criticism believed that the *authority* for these views rested in the domain of naturalists, anthropologists, physiognomists[,] and phrenologists” (West 82). These thinkers all wrote at some point on the matter of race and argued that Blacks (i.e., Africans) were *naturally* unequal to whites with regard to their intellectual and moral capacities. Kant, for example, in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, extended Hume’s racist commentaries: “So fundamental is the difference between the two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color” (West 84). At one point, Kant responds to a clergyman who received advice from a Black man. Kant rejected the Black man’s advice and defended his rejection claiming: “this fellow was quite [B]lack from head to toe, a clear proof that what he said was stupid” (West 84). Prominent thinkers such as those just listed dominated the secular and religious landscape in the early United States providing *natural* and *religious* justifications for slavery and racism. While much more textual evidence exists than is provided here, one can at this point accept that European (i.e.,

⁵⁰ Phillis Wheatley was one of the more influential authors who looked to Enlightenment thinking for abolitionist inspiration. A thorough examination of Wheatley appears in the next chapter of this dissertation.

Western) thinking obviously dominated the early United States's understanding of science, theology, politics, and philosophy. Even though the founding fathers, particularly Jefferson, rejected the Europeans's monarchical model for government and some rejected Christianity in favor of Deism, they could not entirely escape their European roots. Given that the United States was in its infancy, most of its institutions looked to Europe for inspiration as well as theoretical and philosophical support.

Early colonial institutions such as universities consciously preserved European thinking. Rev. John Harvard, an Englishman and a graduate of Cambridge University, founded Harvard University in 1636, which was the first university in the colonies. Nathaniel Eaton, its first schoolmaster, studied at Westminster, Cambridge, and Trinity College before moving to New England and accepting his Harvard post (Pierce 13). His successor, Rev. Henry Dunster, was also British. Seeing that no formal university education existed in the colonies prior to that of Harvard, such early institutions depended on men educated in Europe. These early founders carried Western European ways of thinking, speaking, and writing with them to the colonies and influenced early American institutions. While no defense for Western (i.e., Occidental) thinking in the United States is needed, as it is quite readily accepted, it is nonetheless useful to understand the manner in which Western thinking, writing, and speaking came to be one of Black Rhetoric's origins by way of the Occident's influence on cultural, economic, educational, and political institutions in early America – particularly regarding the influence of the Enlightenment. Early prominent black writers such as Phillis Wheatley provide textual examples of Western influences on Blacks in America, which came primarily in the form

of Christianity and identity⁵¹ discourse. The remaining three chapters of this dissertation shall examine texts authored by Blacks (both slave and free) and shall discuss these texts in order of chronology in order to provide insight into the process of rhetorical evolution in which Western and Kemetic rhetorical and hermeneutic traditions contributed to the formation of Black Rhetoric.

⁵¹ By identity here, I mean all that goes into identity: biology, gender, socio-politico-economic status, etc.

Chapter 4

Signifying, Revelating, and Testifying in Slave Narratives

Examining the various *tropes* within the Slave Narrative genre reveals the significance of the Black Hermeneutic Situation to Black Rhetoric. A detailed analysis of some of the most prevalent Slave Narrative authors' works permits me an opportunity to trace the origins of some of Black Rhetoric's most foundational *tropes* to the Black Hermeneutic Situation. Doing so shall illuminate the significance of President Obama's own rhetorical choices and help to explain the manner in which his speeches, particularly his *A More Perfect Union* speech, demonstrate Black Rhetoric's emergence as an independent rhetoric capable of thinking Being.

Barack Obama's 2008 campaign speech, *A More Perfect Union*, embodies Black Rhetoric's evolutionary process and, more importantly, demonstrates Black Rhetoric's ability to think Being. Western Rhetoric, as a consequence of its overemphasizing metaphysical ways of understanding and speaking, abandoned thinking Being since Plato. While the Humanist and Enlightenment⁵² movements challenged this abandonment and moved closer to thinking Being, they too fell short as a result of a Western commitment to *logos*.⁵³ Since Plato, Western *logos* supposes a hierarchy on the basis of dominance/superiority to submission/inferiority, which is dependent on the process of and emphasis on classifications constructed on the basis of subject-object

⁵² The influence of Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, Isaac Newton, David Hume, Voltaire, and, of course, Jean-Jacques Rousseau on Enlightenment thinking needs no defense here nor does the impact of Enlightenment thinking on the Founding Fathers (Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, James Madison, and John Adams), as an abundance of scholarship on each of these already exists. Therefore, I shall focus specifically on the Enlightenment's influence on Black Rhetoric via revisionist patriotism.

⁵³ I am using *logos* here as Heidegger's 1953 lecture, "Logos," understands *logos* as gathering in relation to ἀλήθεια as unconcealment.

binaries formed and supposedly defended through propositional statements constructed primarily by the dominant group and enforced culturally through various institutions of power such as churches, governments, and schools. Nonetheless, Enlightenment thinking gifted the architects of American Democracy with a new perspective on democracy, science, human rights, and even perhaps ontology, as a consequence of the Humanist ideas that lingered within Enlightenment philosophy and challenged traditional subject-object constructions pervasive in metaphysical thinking. Enlightenment ideas about the role of government coupled with a Black Hermeneutic Situation rooted in a theological perspective, which focuses on liberation from oppression, created conditions ripe for Black Rhetoric's emergence as a rhetoric capable of thinking Being. In fact, Black Rhetoric is rooted in ontology⁵⁴ as a consequence of the Black Hermeneutic Situation, which reflects Heidegger's belief that language (as well as rhetoric itself) is a medium of understanding and not a means of understanding (Gross 3). According to Heidegger, "language is understood discursively, that is to say rooted in shared moods, human institutions, and the nonchronological history these institutions compose" (Gross3). In order to encounter Heidegger's theories of Being-in-the-world absent the trappings of metaphysical thinking, one must accept his position that human beings "simultaneously compose discursive institutions and are composed by them" (Gross 4). What is remarkable, indeed revolutionary, about this understanding of Being is one's coming to the realization that for Heidegger "rhetoric [is] at the heart of his fundamental ontology" (Gross 4). In fact, Heidegger holds the view that we are human beings only "insofar as we can generate shared contexts, articulate our fears and desires, deliberate and judge in the appropriate terms of our day, and act meaningfully in a world of common

⁵⁴ This claim to ontology shall unfold gradually, in stages, throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

concern” (Gross 4). Evidence of this ontological-rhetorical concern coupled with Enlightenment thinking can be seen in President Obama’s speech on race, in which he articulates a need for unity on the basis of recognizing what we as human beings share (i.e., Being-in-the-world) as opposed to an emphasis on our differences (i.e., thrownness). He does not ignore the obvious differences between himself and the majority of his potential voters (i.e., thrown-projection); rather, he reveals his ability to understand them through a common ground rooted in humanity as well as patriotism (i.e., care and concern). Not unlike his rhetorical antecedents,⁵⁵ President Obama begins his speech with a call for human unity by reminding his audience of their own desires for human dignity. As a consequence of his engaging in Black Rhetoric as opposed to traditional Western Rhetoric, President Obama signifies through revisionist patriotism by reminding his audience of the moral, social, political, and legal implications of the Constitution (influenced directly from Enlightenment thinking): “the answer to the slavery question was already embedded within our Constitution – a Constitution that had at its very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law; a Constitution that promised its people liberty, and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfected over time” (par. 4). The Enlightenment thinking embedded within the language of our Constitution is unmistakable: “One of the defining characteristics of modernity is the belief that things can change and should change: the Enlightenment has traditionally been seen as the era when this belief first captured the minds of significant numbers of opinion-formers” (Kirk 1130). President Obama implies that the founding documents intentionally incorporated opportunities for change, progress, and expansion of rights as a consequence of the

⁵⁵ Phillis Wheatley, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X also engaged in revisionist patriotism.

authors' own Enlightenment thinking not being embraced by all of the colonies' representatives. As we now know, slavery was the most significant sticking point of Jefferson's battle to ratify the Declaration of Independence. Begrudgingly, he temporarily abandoned his efforts to abolish the institution of slavery in order to gain the signatures needed from all thirteen colonies' representatives. Scholars⁵⁶ overwhelmingly agree that Jefferson⁵⁷ purposefully included language that would permit the Union to address the question of slavery – yet again – in hope that it would be abolished within his own lifetime. The Constitution created this opportunity within the very language that President Obama quotes in his speech, but that effort was again abandoned as a result of the South's refusal to abolish slavery within the Constitution. This desire, of course, did not go the way of the Dodo. In fact, the continued desire to abolish slavery gained momentum and gave rise to the Abolitionist Movement, which embraced Jefferson's language and Enlightenment philosophy rooted in Humanism.⁵⁸ Black Americans adopted the Enlightenment principles that emphasize liberty and the role of government in a democratic society through their own revisionist patriotism, whereby Blacks envisioned themselves as citizens rooted in their belief that they were human beings.⁵⁹ Black Rhetoric evolved over time under the influence of Western Rhetoric's Enlightenment articulations of democracy's aim to protect the rights of citizens, promote

⁵⁶ Some of which are already footnoted in this chapter.

⁵⁷ Jefferson scholars as well as Black Studies scholars tend to agree that Jefferson's perspective on slavery and racial equality is complicated and this can be seen both in his owning slaves as well as his public response to Phillis Wheatley's abolitionist arguments.

⁵⁸ Karl Lehmann's *Thomas Jefferson American Humanist* specifically addresses Jefferson's Humanist ideas. Christopher Hitchens's biography, *Thomas Jefferson*, also looks at Humanist influences on Jefferson's Enlightenment thinking and writing.

⁵⁹ It shall be made quite clear throughout the remainder of this dissertation that whites justified slavery on the basis that Black Africans were not really human beings in the same sense that whites saw themselves as human beings. Slavery's dehumanization of Blacks became one of the fundamental catalysts for abolition.

the common welfare, and secure social justice – each of which are guaranteed under the promise that all people are born equally “endowed by their creator with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” It is within this socio-historical legacy that President⁶⁰ Obama purposefully places his own argument for human rights as a continuation of the Enlightenment’s trajectory for humanity understood in the landscape of Democracy:

And yet words on a parchment would not be enough to deliver slaves from bondage, or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States. What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part – through protests and struggle, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience and always at great risk – to narrow the gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time.

This was one of the tasks we set forth at the beginning of this campaign – to continue the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America. I chose to run for the presidency at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together – unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories [(i.e., thrownness)], but we hold common hopes [(i.e., shared care and concern as a result of sharing a world)]; that we may not look the same and we may not come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction – towards a better future for our children and grandchildren. (*More Perfect Union* par. 5-6)

Barack Obama’s speech opens by revealing that the quest for equality through rights is foundational to American identity. Despite some members of society denying other members equal protection under the law at various stages throughout U.S. history, we can look at American history in general as a history of struggle for equality, rights, and dignity. The origins of this quest lie in Jefferson’s own language: “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” President Obama, however, is not merely echoing the sentiments

⁶⁰ Barack Obama was a senator at the time this speech was delivered; nonetheless, I have chosen to refer to him as President.

of our founding fathers. On the contrary, as a Black hermeneut and rhetor, he cannot ignore the role double-consciousness plays within his oratory. In order to understand the roots of this particular *trope* within Black Rhetoric, I shall examine the historical context of its earliest published evidence after establishing the significance of *tropes* to rhetoric in general.

Heidegger's 1924 lecture series on Aristotle reveals that *troping* "appears as poetic *logos*" (Gross 3). Daniel Gross explains that Heidegger's understanding of the role *tropes* play in rhetoric is necessary to his claim that beings disclose themselves before other beings in the world as well as the world itself through language: "Without the ambiguous turn in language measured out in a *trope*, human expression would be one dimensional" (3). Without *tropes*, "We would lose the unique capacity we have as speaking beings to disclose ourselves against the world, to see always that 'things might be otherwise.'" So *tropes* are neither ornaments to a univocal core of language, nor are they 'originary'" (Gross 3). In other words, "a *trope*, acting in concert with its staid manifestation as a concept (*Begriff*) marks the contours of contingency" (Gross 3). Dasein is a being concerned with its Being-in-the-world with others. The contingencies Heidegger notes are human beings' possibilities for Being-in-the-world-alongside-Others. For Heidegger, Being is potentiality and therefore not fixed nor predetermined. Dasein always encounters others and the world from the perspective of its moods, which is always its own. Moods, like Being, are temporal and therefore are never fixed but rather are always projecting Dasein toward its future potentiality. Simply put, a mood is a fundamental existentials of Dasein and is how we have a world (*Befindlichkeit*). Without a mood Dasein could not have a world because it would have no way of Being-in-the-world. Heidegger's sense of mood should not be confused with a common understanding of mood that suggests a state of mind, emotive state of being, or a

subjective take on the world as an object. Rather, a mood, according to Heidegger, is fundamental to Dasein's Being-in-the-world. Mood, understanding, and discourse "comprise the structure of care" (Ratcliffe 5). The relationship of mood to understanding and discourse reveals the significance of *tropes* to rhetoric. A *trope* permits the articulation of *pathos*, which is grounded in the relationship of mood to understanding and discourse: "without others, *pathos* would remain unarticulated (as it does in nonhuman life) and rational discourse would never get off the ground" (Gross 4). Understanding these concepts through the lens of Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics, as they apply to my inquiry into Black Rhetoric and Black Hermeneutics, reveals the significant role *tropes* such as double-consciousness, signifying, testifying, revelating,⁶¹ and the Talking Book play. My task at this point in my argument shall be to reveal how these *tropes* emerged and contributed to the evolution of Black Rhetoric, which requires that I take a step back in time in order to look at some of the earliest examples of Black Rhetoric.

John Kelly Thornton's *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* traces the history of African people's arrival in the Atlantic World and the conditions within Africa as well as in the Atlantic World that made the Atlantic Slave Trade not only possible but also profitable, and then examines the various cultural, political, and economic effects that resulted from this arrival. I am less interested in the

⁶¹ I have chosen to coin this term in my dissertation in order to add it to the preexisting list of *tropes* associated with Black Rhetoric. Both its pronunciation and meaning are formulated on the basis of the Book of Revelation. "Revelating" in Black Rhetoric functions as a *trope* similar to a biblical understanding and use of "revelation" that conveys once-unknown information may be revealed. The process of revealing this once-unknown information grounds my definition of this term on the basis of its biblical relevance and Heidegger's understanding of poesy as a process of composing. Therefore, the process of unconcealing the once unknown in "revelating" makes it appropriate and necessary as a *trope* in Black Rhetoric.

historical situation within Africa and Europe and shall focus instead on Thornton's claims about the cultural impacts that the Atlantic Slave Trade had within the colonies and ultimately within the United States. I agree with Thornton's claim that the "impact of the African slaves was twofold" (129):

On the one hand [Africans] came into the Atlantic to work and serve, and by their efforts and numbers made a significant contribution to the economy. On the other hand, Africans brought with them a cultural heritage in language, aesthetics, and philosophy that helped to form the newly developing culture of the Atlantic world. (Thornton 129)

I shall focus primarily on Thornton's claims about the latter of these two effects and their relationship to my own claims about Black Rhetoric and Black Hermeneutics. More precisely, I shall work from Thornton's claim that the "African role as workers and servants shaped and conditioned their role as transmitters of African culture to the Americas and developers of a new Afro-Atlantic culture" (130). Within this development that Thornton examines lie my own claims about the interconnections of Black Hermeneutics and Black Rhetoric that could not have formed as we recognize them today outside the specific historical context of chattel slavery within an emerging democratic nation founded on Enlightenment ideals. The long history of European animosity and devaluation of dark-skinned non-Christians, particularly the close association of dark-skin as being representative of a non-Christian, contributed to the American colonists' willingness to prescribe the least desirable and most physically demanding work to the African slaves (Thornton 143). Slave labor as opposed to indentured servitude became increasingly appealing to the colonists as a result of its long-term payoff after an initial investment. While slave labor tended to be costlier at the outset, its overwhelming appeal was in the permanence it offered that indentured servitude did not: "Slaves had no way of automatically obtaining liberty, and the owner was not bound by a contract to give them anything" (Thornton 146). Because purchasing

a slave came only with a bill of sale as opposed to a contract, there was little to no legal precedence available to slaves, even freed slaves, to establish legal protection under the law by claiming or seeking to claim citizenship. Consequently, slavery became the preferred means of obtaining labor in the Atlantic colonies: “In the Atlantic colonies of the northern Europeans [...] freed slaves and their descendants could also form a permanently dependent group. Their owners could grant them freedom without necessarily losing control over them” (Thornton 150). The fact that slaves were property and therefore had no citizenship rights did not prevent many of them from contemplating their role in the New World as slaves, as Africans, and as human beings, nor did it suppress their desire for equal protection and obligation under the law as citizens. Some of the earliest textual evidence of such contemplation and desire can be found in Phillis Wheatley’s published works.

Phillis Wheatley, an eighteenth-century poet, was one of the first Black Americans to publish.⁶² Bostonian John Wheatley purchased the eight-year old child, who was kidnapped from Senegal in 1760, for his wife Susanna and named her Phillis Wheatley.⁶³ The girl quickly learned English and impressed her owners with her unmistakable intellect. The Wheatleys decided to educate the young Phillis in Latin and Greek and, as a means of focusing their protégé on these efforts, provided her with a neo-classical education.⁶⁴ They paraded her intellectual abilities before guests as entertainment, requesting the teenage Phillis to compose poems before astonished

⁶² Jupiter Hammon was the first Black American to publish individual works but Wheatley was the first to publish a book.

⁶³ It was a common practice during slavery to designate one’s ownership of a slave through the use of surnames. Some slave masters went so far as to brand their slaves as they did their cattle.

⁶⁴ This education included exposing Wheatley to Humanist and Enlightenment thinkers, which shall be discussed later in this chapter.

whites.⁶⁵ Since laws prohibited slaves from obtaining literacy legally, in 1772 she had to defend her literacy rights in court: “John Erving, Reverend Charles Chauncey, John Hancock, Thomas Hutchinson, the governor of Massachusetts, and his Lieutenant Governor Andrew Oliver, each took part in examining the young woman’s mind and works” (Graham par. 6). The trial resulted in legal support of her writing and permitted her to publish her first book, albeit with a publisher in England. Phillis Wheatley published *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* in 1773.

Examining her published works and knowing of Wheatley’s route to literacy allows one to see Western Rhetoric’s influence on the early stages of Black Rhetoric’s evolution. Being subject to direct instruction in English, Latin, and Greek, Wheatley could not escape Western, particularly Enlightenment, influences on her thinking. It is important to note, however, that she did not entirely adopt a Western philosophy or rhetoric: “Although temporally separated from her land of origin, family, and language, Wheatley quickly connected to a new language and constructed an identity that was both self-consciously African and African American” (May 49). Additionally, her writing reveals that she rejected white supremacy theologically, intellectually, as well as politically, and that she refused to internalize the racism imposed upon her personally, socially, and institutionally: “Wheatley identified strongly with both her identities by means of a theology that allowed her the intellectual, psychological, and literary liberations necessary to lead to her physical emancipation from human bondage” (May 49). James Sidbury’s *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* attempts to

⁶⁵ Of course, controversies arose as a result of Phillis Wheatley’s intellectual abilities, which directly challenged white supremacist justifications for slavery made on the basis that Africans lacked the capacity to do serious intellectual/ethical work and therefore were naturally suited for manual labor. John C. Shields’s *Phillis Wheatley’s Poetics of Liberation: Backgrounds and Contexts* published in 2008 addresses this issue in detail.

unravel Black Americans' complex identity construction and modes of identity expression in the Atlantic states from 1770 to 1820. He identifies two main discourse categories (i.e., filiative and affiliative) that dominate Black narratives within the context of their identity construction regarding their struggle to see themselves as African, American, Black, and non-white. Sidbury argues that Wheatley's "picture of an African identity based on affiliation" permitted her to see herself as "above all else, an evangelical Christian" in which she related to her African kinsmen's state of oppression more so than to her state of biology (31). The European propensity to conflate "Negro," "Black," and "African" reflected whites' disregard for others' self-identification as well as a white desire to degrade and polarize Blacks through the use of these white-constructed terms. Black Americans, however, "began to present themselves as 'Africans' despite the negative connotations that term carried in many whites' minds" (Sidbury 6). Through the efforts of early Black authors such as Wheatley, who began to identify themselves as African, Sidbury claims that an "alternative understanding of "Africanness" provided a source of pride and unity for the diverse victims of the Atlantic Slave Trade that began to emerge and enter into the conversation of identity construction for Black Americans (6). Sidbury claims that this newly formulating African identity was "not an ethnic identity" but was "instead a new diasporic identity that was founded" on the basis of a shared state of oppression and otherness (Sidbury 6). He claims that she was not the fact that she shared a filiative relationship with Africans that connected Wheatley to her African kinsmen that concerned her; rather, it was her affiliative relationship as a victim of oppression that united Wheatley to her African kinsmen. While some merit exists within Sidbury's argument that Wheatley identified with her African kinsmen on the basis of a shared state of oppression, clear evidence also exists in Wheatley's writing that she did in fact identify with her African kinsmen on an ethnic (i.e., filiative) basis. Wheatley was

all too aware that her skin color (i.e., her biology) was the single-most significant factor that led to her state of human bondage. Cedrick May discusses Wheatley's ethnic understanding of herself at length and reveals that one cannot ignore the role skin color (biology) plays in the controversies surrounding Wheatley's texts. Such controversies originated primarily out of whites' concerns for Wheatley's challenging whites' biological claims about the inferiority of Africans, which they created for the purpose of justifying slavery: "Wheatley's brilliance combined with her social/legal status as a slave forced the defender and beneficiaries of human bondage to rethink arguments supporting slavery based on innate inferiority of Africans or to resort to claiming that Wheatley and numerous other blacks like her were mere exceptions" (May 51). The challenge that Wheatley posed to the theologically, socially, politically, and philosophically constructed and hierarchized binary opposition between whites and Blacks represents one of the most common modes of resistance to white supremacy. Wheatley's articulation of this challenge also reveals an insight into the early formations of signifying and double-consciousness as foundational *tropes* in Black Rhetoric.

Given the underlying influence of Kemet's concept of Maat on the early African slaves, as evidenced within the previous chapter, combined with the socio-politico-economic state of race-based slavery and oppression defended by and justified through Christianity in the New World, one can begin to see the early formations of Black Rhetoric, which sought to address oppression in the land of milk and honey by signifying on the oppressor's own claims to and justifications for white freedom at the cost of Black slavery in a so-called democracy. Wheatley's textual works provide insight into these earliest stages of Black Rhetoric's evolution from its Kemetic and Western rhetorical

traditions and unconceals⁶⁶ the process of natural/rhetorical selection that favored certain rhetorical devices that engaged understanding of and speaking from a Black Hermeneutic situation that was also evolving in response to a changing social, political, economic, theological, and cultural world. Some of the devices that Black Rhetoric's evolution favored remain its most identifiable traits to date: double-consciousness, signifying, *trope* of the Talking Book, testifying, revelating, and especially revisionist patriotism/theology. In order to examine these origins of Black Rhetoric's evolution, I shall examine the two institutions that had equally profound effects on both the Black Hermeneutic situation as well as Black Rhetoric – slavery and Christianity – as first evidenced in Wheatley's texts and then in Frederick Douglass's. I shall also make regular reference to Western Rhetoric (i.e., Enlightenment thinking in politics and Christian theology in both political and private life) and Kemetic Rhetoric's influence (particularly the concept of Maat) on the evolutionary process of Black Rhetoric.

Both slavery and Christianity provided a world in which Black slaves coexisted alongside others (slaves, free Blacks, whites, Christians, and non-Christians) and from which early Black Americans understood themselves, others, and the world. Cedrick May's *Evangelism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835* addresses Wheatley's specific contributions to Resistance Rhetoric through her construction of a "self-consciously African and African American" identity (49). This double-consciousness, which is foundational to as well as formative of her hermeneutic situation and her rhetorical articulations, permits her to identify with her two conflicting identities (May 49). This philosophical and theological position plays a significant role in her hermeneutic situation. May identifies that the "two overriding philosophies that guided

⁶⁶ Heidegger interprets the Greek word for Truth (Aletheia) as unconcealment. Unconcealing, then, is the unfolding, revealing, laying-bare of truth, i.e., authenticity.

Wheatley's thought [were] Enlightenment philosophy and revolutionary theology" (51). Wheatley's being African and American makes her development of a double-consciousness necessary to her survival. At the same time, her being Christian generates an internal conflict that only double-consciousness can address ethically. Her double-consciousness emerges as a result of her understanding her hermeneutic situation as well as her desire to alter that situation in order to gain liberty and human dignity. May's examination of the Enlightenment's influence on Wheatley supports my own claim that Enlightenment thinking provided one side of Black Rhetoric's evolutionary origins in Western Rhetoric, which evolved over time through the *tropes* of signifying and double-consciousness: "Wheatley was thoroughly interested in Enlightenment philosophy and often found ways to integrate her interests and knowledge of scientific principles with Christian ideals" (52). May argues that evidence of this influence can be found throughout Wheatley's work and provides examples of "Wheatley's translation of scientific principles into Christian thought" in her *Thoughts on the Works of Providence* (52). He claims that Wheatley "uses Newtonian characterizations of the universe as a 'vast machine' to explain God as a creator and maintainer of its mechanisms" (May 52). May continues this examination with *To the University of Cambridge in New England* in order to identify that Wheatley "uses the language of science to express a relationship between humanity and God," and that the poem "acknowledges the seemingly secular duty of its audience" (53). He concludes this particular inquiry into the Enlightenment's influence on Wheatley by positing that at least "two of the four specifically evangelical poems that appear in *Poems on Various Subjects* use scientific and mathematical terminology to impart information or descriptions about divinity or humanity's relationship to God" (May 54). May then identifies the role Wheatley's hermeneutic situation plays in her writing as well as the reception of her texts: "Publishing the works of an African slave

who was clearly intelligent and creative and who articulated the principles of liberation and universal humanity posed too big a threat to the institution of slavery, since her skills debunked many of the rationales for [perpetuating] the practice of slavery” (55).

Wheatley, of course, was keenly aware of the threat she posed. Wheatley’s Resistance Rhetoric, which I argue is a primordial component of Black Rhetoric, reveals that her “principle concern was spreading a philosophy of universal equality and human rights through Christian evangelism, which she saw as the means to freedom for the oppressed” (May 50). In order for her theological position to support her secular philosophy, she had to develop a double-consciousness, whereby she saw the world through her own hermeneutic situation, which included the need to develop the skills necessary to see herself and the world through a white, patriarchal lens. These two necessary ways of understanding herself and her world provides the roots of DuBois’s understanding of the veil and double-consciousness.

Martha Cutter’s “Editor’s Introduction: Multicultural and Multilingual Aesthetics of Resistance” echoes this hermeneutic and rhetorical conundrum as evidenced some one-hundred and fifty years later in George Schuyler’s *Black No More*. Cutter identifies the legacy of the West’s anti-nonwhite stance in the United States in Schuyler’s work and argues that theorists such as Jacques Derrida provide insight as to why little has changed since the time of Wheatley with regard to the United States’ views on race: “meaning in the West is defined in terms of binary oppositions, a violent hierarchy in which ‘one of the two terms governs the other.’ Within the white/ethnic binary opposition in the United States, the ethnic subject often becomes defined as an inferior other” (5). Because the West continues to cling to meaning arrived at via hierarchies constructed within binary oppositions (i.e., Western *logos*), Wheatley’s struggle to overcome these hierarchies through her development of a double-consciousness resists being labeled

'the inferior Other.' Cutter turns to Schuyler's "either get out, get white or get along" in order to offer an ethical approach to the ethnic-based binary oppositions pervasive in the United States by providing "the creation of new aesthetic practices that work *alongside* those of the dominant culture to deconstruct its hegemonic structures" (9). Cutter recognizes that the traditional understanding of Schuyler's statement is one that echoes Booker T. Washington's "connotations of accommodation and assimilation" (9). However, an alternative understanding should be explored, one that embraces Du Bois's double-consciousness and resists arbitrary binaries that oppress nonwhites. If one looks again at Wheatley's texts through this lens, an alternative aesthetic practice emerges, one that has the power to "dismantle racist structures or script alternative meaning into the exact discourses of hegemonic society that have kept [Blacks] on one side of a violent hierarchy in the place of the devalued other" (Cutter 9). In other words, the "get along" option that Schuyler lists does not necessarily mean one must embrace a Washingtonian model of racial assimilation through work and economic participation. Rather, one may embrace the Du Boisian model first expressed by Wheatley that uses signifying and double-consciousness to redress the racial inequalities preserved via the West's propensity to construct and maintain race-based social stratification.

Published in 1773, Wheatley's *On Being Brought From Africa to America* reveals double-consciousness through subversive speech as one of the earliest black rhetorical *tropes*. While many white scholars interpret this poem as Wheatley's gratitude for being saved from her heathen home in Africa, a closer reading reveals her signifying and testifying as subversive, double-voiced speech, which also reveals her own understanding of her experience as a slave as well as her understanding of whites' view of her as an African and a slave:

'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land, / Taught my benighted
soul to understand / That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too; /

Once I redemption never sought nor knew. / Some view our sable race
with scornful eye, / "Their color is a diabolic dye." / Remember,
Christians, negroes, black as Cain, / May be refin'd, and join the angelic
train. (17)

Wheatley signifies on the word "mercy" revealing her double-consciousness by recognizing that, on the one hand, whites saw Black Africans as powerless and mindless objects; yet on the other hand, whites generally did not extend mercy's kindness to Blacks. Regardless of the facts that Wheatley served her slave masters as a house slave and was not subject to the grueling tortures of fieldwork, and that the Wheatleys provided her with a classical education, she was still a slave – she was someone else's property because she was considered inherently inferior to her white masters. Her use of the word 'mercy' reveals that she understands and acknowledges her dual predicament as a slave in a Christian land. White slave owners often justified slavery as an institution that saved heathen Africans from damnation by offering a conversion to Christianity and an opportunity to live in a Christian land – thus providing them with the ultimate gift of salvation. Wheatley signifies on the sense meaning of 'mercy' from the perspective of her own hermeneutic situation.

The italicized words ("Pagan," "Saviour," "Christians," and "Cain") also suggest that she thinks about her own being's Being-in-the-world as far more theologically complex and multifaceted than the surface meaning these words suggest (i.e., as a being concerned with Being). Her use and italicization of "Pagan" implies her awareness that white Christians view so-called pagan Africans as non-believers and therefore unworthy of grace. In Christianity, the word "Pagan" carries with it a special meaning that reveals a white Christian contempt for "backward" and "uncivilized" Africans (OED 2b). 'Pagan' means more than simply a non-Christian denied salvation; this label ascribes to its bearer the burden of sub-human status. History provides innumerable examples of Christians dehumanizing those they labeled as 'pagans' on the basis of the label itself. White

Christianity's use of 'pagan' discloses a belief that Africans, as non-Christians, bear their mark of non-belief physically, which explains their dark skin. Wheatley interprets this label of ungodliness from the context of slavery. In doing so, she cleverly masks her argument that white Christians seem to be the ones who are guilty, through the institution of slavery, of being unchristian rather than the so-called pagan Africans. For her, not skin color but one's love of the neighbor indicates whether or not one is indeed Christ-like. Wheatley's poem, when read from the African slave's hermeneutic situation, deconstructs the African/Christian hierarchy and exposes the hegemony of white Christianity's system of binary oppositions, which seeks to justify the enslavement and oppression of Africans on the basis of skin color. Wheatley's poem serves as one of the earliest examples of Black Liberation Theology's fundamental tenets that Christianity is in fact God's plan for liberation of all oppressed people. James Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* argues that Black Liberation Theology necessarily arose in response to the dire conditions of slavery: "There is, then, a desperate need for a *black theology*, a theology whose sole purpose is to apply the freeing power of the gospel to Black people under white oppression" (31). Wheatley's poem speaks to this desperation and gives hope to those whose "benighted soul[s] [need] to understand / That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too" (2-3). She signifies on Christianity's premise that God is the ultimate authority, the absolute truth, and the final word on mankind by deconstructing the white notion of salvation as empowering whites in this world with providence and offering Blacks liberty only in the afterlife.

If we look at Wheatley's poem as an early example of Black Liberation Theology, her understanding of salvation reveals that any self-professed Christian who enslaves another commits a sin by violating the commandment to love the neighbor. Wheatley suggests this in her final warning to readers: "Remember, *Christians*, negroes, black as

Cain, / May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train" (7-8). She warns white Christians who participate in the dehumanization of Africans that God's ultimate promise of salvation is liberty⁶⁷ from oppression. Wheatley's double-consciousness, which informs her hermeneutic situation, permits her to signify on white Christianity as her means of critiquing its failure to love the Black neighbor and consequently liberate all oppressed people.

Wheatley's works reveal the foundations of Black Rhetoric as being rooted in a hermeneutic situation that embraces double-consciousness and signifying as necessary *tropes* both in her critiques on Christianity as well as her political criticisms of slavery within a newly formed nation that claims to embrace democracy as its guiding principle. Even though Wheatley never wrote a Slave Narrative per se, the *tropes* in her poems and letters were foundational to this next stage in Black Rhetoric's evolution: embracing Enlightenment thinking's secular language and its concerns for liberty, democracy, and equality; reclaiming human dignity through the rhetorical acts of testifying and signifying; engaging double-consciousness in order to understand and articulate the Black Hermeneutic situation; and establishing a thematic and rhetorical model for Black Sermonic Rhetoric (rooted in Black Liberation Theology) that interprets Scripture as God's plan to liberate the oppressed.

Whether or not Wheatley was immediately familiar with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* and *Discourse on the Origin of Equality*, she was familiar with the Enlightenment ideas expressed within them: "Since no man has any natural authority over his fellow men, and since force is not the source of right,

⁶⁷ For many slaves, this liberation was understood only as the afterlife; however, in time there was an increased insistence that God intended liberation for the oppressed within their lifetimes and not merely as a deferred promise of the afterlife.

conventions remain as the basis of all lawful authority among men” (11). To give oneself over to the alienation of slavery is “incompatible with man’s nature, for to take away all freedom from his will is to take away all morality from his actions” (Rousseau 12-3). Consequently, slavery is “a convention [that] stipulates absolute authority on the one side and unlimited obedience on the other [both of which are] in vain and contradictory” (Rousseau 13). On the question of slavery, Rousseau concludes that in “whatever way we regard things, the right of slavery is invalid, not only because it is illegitimate, but because it is absurd and meaningless” (15). Wheatley’s Enlightenment philosophy promotes Rousseau’s view that slavery is a man-made institution that violates human beings’ nature. This philosophical perspective challenges the theological argument that God preordained Africans to be whites’ slaves. Enlightenment thinking, as evidenced by Rousseau, reveals that slavery is a violation of man’s nature. Wheatley recognizes this violation of nature in *Thoughts on the Works of Providence* at the end of the poem in which she claims that “Infinite Love” “nourish[es] all, to serve one gen’ral end, / The good of man” (122-7). Wheatley claims that God (i.e., Love) supplies all that mankind needs to nourish humanity, a belief rooted in her theological understanding of the commandment to love the neighbor (i.e., Christian charity). After acknowledging her theological understanding of love, she then reveals that human beings regularly fail to fulfill this tenet of Christianity: “yet man ungrateful pays / But little homage, and but little praise. / To him, whose works array’d with mercy shine, / What songs should rise, how constant, how divine!” (Wheatley 128-31). What is significant in this passage is Wheatley’s distinguishing between God’s love for mankind and humanity’s failure to reciprocate with Christian Charity. That man “ungrateful[ly] pays [...] little homage” and “little praise” to God reveals white men’s failure to love the neighbor as a consequence of their failure to recognize that Africans are in fact a neighbor (128). The institution of slavery violates not

only Wheatley's theological understanding of Christian charity and the commandment to love the neighbor but also her Enlightenment ideas on the nature of man. According to Rousseau and other Enlightenment thinkers, man's nature is to ensure the common good by promoting the humanity of the individual. From Wheatley's philosophical and theological perspective, slavery is a violation of man's nature. The institution of slavery is rooted in the evil temptation of greed; an evil that harms not only the slave but also infects the mind and soul of the slave master. In order to combat the dehumanizing effects of slavery on her own mind and soul, she develops a mode of articulation, particularly through her poetry, that permits her to resist the institution of slavery with her theological and philosophical understandings of human nature as desiring and requiring human dignity. Understood in this light, Wheatley's contribution to Black Rhetoric cannot be overlooked, as she embodies the earliest stages of Black Rhetoric's evolution from Western (i.e., Enlightenment thinking and Christian theology) and Kemetic (i.e., nonwhite African identity) Rhetoric.

While Wheatley provides some of the earliest published examples of Black Rhetoric, Slave Narratives offer a more diverse path of inquiry into its discursive possibilities. Therefore, no examination of Black Rhetoric's origins shall be complete without an inquiry into the Slave Narrative genre. Thomas Anderson's 1854 *Interesting Account* reveals signifying and testifying as *tropes* that reveal the reclamation of humanity (i.e., human dignity) as a necessary function of the Slave Narrative genre. Anderson incorporates the *trope* of testifying by revealing two separate but related acts of conversion – one to Christianity and the other to freedom – through which he gains agency, and in doing so enters into a system of power relations through literary/discursive acts. He opens his narrative by stating that he grew up as a wicked boy because no one took any interest in him, but at age nineteen he attended a Baptist

service and understood the minister's message to be one of freedom and righteousness achieved through the graciousness of a merciful God: "The wicked have no hope beyond the grave, while the righteous have a hope beyond Jordan's cold stream; and after they have crossed Jordan they have gone home to a God of pity, to a God of compassion, to a God of sovereign mercy" (2). Anderson's narrative commences with his conversion to Christianity, which he interprets as the actual beginning of his life narrative. He fulfills his Christian duty to witness, which is one mode of loving the neighbor, throughout his narrative by testifying to the manner in which Christianity saves his life and frees him from human bondage. In fact, his narrative is not unlike many others whose authors also determine that their faith in God has the power to deliver them from bondage (physical or mental); therefore, they feel compelled to offer praise by witnessing and testifying to others through the instrument of the Slave Narrative.

Narratives that both witness and testify often invoke a belief in the Christian after-life as a *topos*. Considering the slaves' shared hermeneutic situation in race-based bondage, it is not surprising that many of them convert to Christianity in the hope of attaining an eternal life in heaven that is free from bondage. Negro Spirituals invoke the 'promised land' as offering an escape from the horrors of slavery. *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*, one of the most famous Negro Spirituals, demonstrates this in its repeated line, "Coming for to carry me home" (Johnson and Johnson 62). Likewise, *Go Down Moses* adopts and analogizes the Exodus story, which reveals God's promise to liberate his enslaved children, and compares Blacks to the Israelites. Its final stanza, "No more shall they in bondage toil / Let my people go / Let them come out with Egypt's spoil / Let my people go," reveals the slaves' likening themselves with the biblical Israelites (Johnson and Johnson 51). Therefore, God's promise to the Israelites to free them from bondage reflects black slaves' common interpretation of heaven as their Promised Land. Despite

the fact that whites regularly attempted to utilize Christianity for the purpose of controlling Blacks, Slave Narratives and Negro Spirituals demonstrate the modes through which Blacks signify on Christian theology as a source of liberation and dignity, as evidenced in Wheatley's texts and Anderson's narrative.

Anderson represents an early example of the Slave Narrative's propensity to signify when, despite his master's attempt to beat his religion out of him, he continues to cling to his faith in God: "My master cursed me, and said: 'Will you preach to me?' But I now feel glad that I could suffer patiently for my new Master. And my manner at that time take master's strength away" (3). His "godless" master scourged him for over three hours; yet, Anderson claims that his faith in God gave him the strength to endure each successive torture. Anderson supplants his earthly "master" with his heavenly "Master" by proclaiming: "You have whipped out all fear, and I am not afraid of you no more. You can take a gun and shoot me or kill me, as you please, and all for nothing [...] And if He let you take this poor bruised body of flesh, I feel it ain't worth much" (3). While Nat Turner interpreted events around him as God's compelling him to revolt violently against whites, Anderson understood his Christian God as a source of passive hope and courage against the tyranny of his slave master. Despite the physical punishments he endured, Anderson believes that his soul is untouchable to man, which is the ultimate victory that Christianity offers slaves. He interprets the Christian distinction between flesh and spirit as applying to his physical life as a slave and his spiritual life as a child of God. Understanding his duality as existing in these two separate yet simultaneous planes offers insight into double-consciousness' evolution within the Black community as a response to and rejection of white supremacy. While Anderson did not physically revolt against his master, as Nat Turner and Frederick Douglass did, he mentally and spiritually resisted his master's efforts to repudiate his Christian faith: "My master who owned me at

that time[,] having no knowledge of God or godliness, supposed my religion was all a fancy, and said he could whip it out of me” (3). In response to his master’s repudiation and as a demonstration of Christianity as a pathway to liberation, Anderson evokes two common *topoi* in Black Rhetoric: lynching and salvation.

Black bodies function in Slave Narratives as battleground sites for struggle over identity. White supremacists utilize Black bodies in order to demonstrate their complete authority over black bodies through various acts of violence. Slave Narrative authors utilize black bodies within their narrative as sites for reclamation of human dignity through signifying and testifying. In response to such dehumanizing phenomena at the hands of whites, Franz Fanon observes that man “is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another in order to be recognized by him” (*Black Skins* 216). Slave Narratives signify on lynching scenes by testifying to the evils of lynching and revealing black bodies as sites of white cruelty in order to expose whites’ inhumanity. Testifying to the violence of lynching in Slave Narratives details not only the gruesome violence done to black bodies as a means by which to reclaim a human perspective but also affirms black humanity through the articulation of suffering. By testifying to the violence suffered in slavery, Slave Narrative authors supply a human voice and perspective to human suffering and expose lynching as a white hegemonic tool.

Slave Narratives testify to the fact that lynching functions as an assertion of authority in order to oppress rather than merely to punish. Douglass’s *Narrative* supplies evidence of Slave Narratives that testify to lynching as an act of oppression rather than correction when he recounts a lynching scene from his youth in which he witnessed his aunt’s public beating:

I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an aunt of mine, whom he [Mr. Plummer, the overseer] used to tie up to a joist, and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayers, from his

gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose. The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped longest. He would whip her to make her scream and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin. (7)

The beating of a slave was generally not a private activity; on the contrary, public whipping was a tool used for displaying white control over Blacks' bodies, a lesson clearly emblazoned upon Douglass's memory. Michel Foucault's theories on public torture offer fitting explanations of whites' public display of violence as a mechanism for preserving and solidifying white hegemony. According to Foucault, the body provides a site for a slave economy to expand its resources: "it is always the body that is at issue – the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission" (*Discipline and Punish* 25). Lynching's roots in plantation violence during slavery first employed the mechanism of public torture in order to assert authority and control over Black bodies. Douglass understands this association even as a very young child after witnessing his aunt's beating: "It was the first of a long series of such outrages, of which I was doomed to be a witness and a participant. It struck me with awful force. It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery through which I was about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle" (7). Douglass's *Narrative* testifies to the horrors of slavery while at the same time imposing the body of his aunt on his readers in order to reveal the human suffering he witnessed. Testifying to the violence he witnessed being done to Black bodies humanizes the victims while at the same time exposing the inhumanity of whites. Douglass confronts his readers with a human being rather than a piece of property, which reflects Fanon's argument that man must impose his humanity on others in order to be recognized as a human.

Slave Narratives focus on black bodies as both sites of torture as well as mediums of liberation, as doing so usurps the slave master's dominance and allows the

narrator to reclaim ownership of his/her body through a discursive claim of authority. While the institution of slavery established various mechanisms, one of which was lynching for maintaining white dominance both physically and mentally over Blacks, some Blacks gained a degree of freedom and agency by participating in what whites considered a traditionally white practice – writing. As a result of focusing on their appeal to *ethos* through their conversion to Christianity, Slave Narratives testified to the horrors of lynching and incorporated Black Rhetoric's standard *tropes*: testifying, signifying, and revealing. Ultimately, Blacks gained access to two identifiably white institutions in the United States – Christianity and authorship. By interpreting Scripture as a revelation of God's will to liberate the oppressed from oppression through the commandment to love God and love the neighbor, slaves interpreted Christianity as diametrically opposed to slavery. Liberated slaves, whether they purchased freedom, were decreed freedom, or escaped to freedom, planted seeds for their physical and mental freedom by signifying on the mechanisms of domination employed by whites – Christianity and authorship. Such significations resulted in their converting these mechanisms of white power into mechanisms of Black liberation – testifying and Slave Narratives. For Wheatley, Anderson, and Douglass, freeing their minds ultimately freed their bodies. Their faith in a Christian after-life, promised by a just and “merciful God,” supplies them with the hope and courage they need to endure their physical and mental torments of slavery until they can free their bodies. Anderson's example of the *trope* of testifying, which often focuses on lynching, usurps white authority over Blacks' bodies by establishing authorial power in the narrative itself. Slave Narratives, then, lay the foundation for one of the first entrances into a power relation between whites and Blacks – a power relation that depends on discourse. For the first time since the institutionalization of slavery in the United States, Blacks gained a sense of agency through an authoritative voice that could

be heard throughout the world via published Slave Narratives. By responding to a specific hermeneutic situation – a slave class within a democratic nation – the Slave Narrative genre emerges as the first uniquely Black literary genre in the United States. Therefore, the *trope* of the Talking Book, which distinguishes Slave Narratives from other autobiographical traditions, marks a significant step in Black Rhetoric's evolution.

Gates identifies that the *trope* of the Talking Book in *The Signifying Monkey* reveals a particular relation of power between Blacks and whites through discursive practices. As the Talking Book testifies throughout the narrative, the narrator assumes authority over the tale and its characters, as we have seen thus far with Wheatley, Anderson, and Douglass. Because of the power dynamics that exist in a white supremacist society, "white people can 'safely' imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over black people, accorded them the right to control the black gaze" (hooks *Killing Rage* 35). Slave Narratives permit black authors to commandeer a white medium of communication – published texts – in order to assert their own voice and reject white hegemony by relating their lives to others from their own, double-voiced perspective. Doing so fulfills two goals: one, the Slave Narrative responds to public violence with a public voice that, as a written text, has the authority to assume control over both master and slave within the text through the narrator's telling of events that reflects his or her own hermeneutic situation; and two, the Slave Narrative genre lays the foundation for Black Rhetoric as a rhetoric of liberation, revolution, struggle, resistance, community, and reclamation of identity/dignity through the Talking Book's testifying. While Gates focuses on the Talking Book as a Black literary *trope*, I am more concerned with its rhetorical implications as a point of departure for a Black Rhetoric that stands apart from yet clearly remains indebted to its parent traditions.

In order to understand the Talking Book as a rhetorical *trope*, it must also be understood as a mode of understanding in Black Hermeneutics, which requires looking through the lens of phenomenological hermeneutics beginning with Hegel. Hegel's examination of *Geist* in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* reveals humanity's universal desire for freedom through a development of consciousness and self-consciousness expressed as a struggle to understand 'self' in relation to 'others' – more specifically, the struggle between master and slave. While a desire for freedom is indeed traceable throughout human history, an understanding of Hegel's *Geist* applied to the history of the United States reveals a dominant theme that reverberates throughout its history – the theme of hermeneutical and rhetorical struggle for individual freedom that can only be asserted against the background of others and understood as a zero-sum game of power. Freedom depends on an individual's capacity and willingness to exercise it in a context with others and the others' willingness to acknowledge an individual's capacity and right to exercise it. In order to deny Blacks freedom, whites used slavery as a means by which to refuse Black individuals the legal and civil rights they need to exercise their freedoms and obligations as citizens in a democracy. This taught Blacks to understand themselves as *not-being* white, a distinction that constructed a social division along a color line, whereby white comes to mean 'master' and Black comes to mean 'slave.' Thus, 'white' signifies more than master; it signifies freedom, rights, privilege, and human dignity; whereas, 'Black' signifies the opposite of 'white' as bondage, disenfranchisement, disadvantage, and dehumanization. Sojourner Truth reveals her understanding of this color line when she asks, "Ain't I a Woman?" As a black woman, Truth discloses her understanding that whites have the capacity to refuse to see her as a woman or as a person at all. She acknowledges that the nineteenth-century's Cult of True Womanhood, which was a consequence of white supremacy as much as it was patriarchy, stripped her

of her identity as a woman as well as a human being. In order to protest their bondage and the color line's reinforcement of that bondage, Blacks must redefine 'Black' and 'white' outside the influential gaze of whites. Redefining 'Black' proves to be difficult because redefining 'white' proves to be almost impossible. The possibilities for 'whiteness' in a white supremacist society reveal that numerous possibilities for 'whiteness' exist through the byproducts of freedom and privilege; therefore, constructing a definition for 'white,' which suggests limits, proves to be a nearly insurmountable task. Negro⁶⁸ becomes necessary to define and identify both legally and socially as *not-being* white, free, or privileged. Blacks understand that 'Negro' signifies the absence of white privilege and communal freedoms. 'Negro' is the absence of autonomy, dignity, and individual, social, and political freedom. 'Black' is the absence of choice, whereas 'white' suggests the freedom of choice: "As fantastic as it may seem, racist white people find it easy to imagine that Black people cannot see them if within their desire they do not want to be seen by the dark Other" (hooks 35). 'White' means having the privilege to see or not see others as well as to be seen or not seen by others. Truth not only admits in her speech that she sees whites from the perspective of a Black gaze, but more importantly, she reveals the fact that she understands that whites do not see her because they have the privilege of *choosing* not to see her. Whites' not-seeing turns out not to be a failure to choose but the ability and privilege to exercise one's right to choose or not to choose. This particular understanding of the dynamics that exist between white privilege and the power to see or not see (to be seen or not seen) is vital to an understanding of Black Hermeneutics and Black Rhetoric. In order to fulfill Black Rhetoric's ultimate aim, which is to gain social and political equality through the reclamation of human dignity, it must

⁶⁸ In many cases, the pejorative 'nigger' was used to distinguish between white privilege and Black oppression.

address the social and political disparities that exist as consequences of a world dominated by white privilege. Nothing drives whites to recognize or acknowledge their privilege of whiteness; conversely, Blacks must recognize and acknowledge white privilege as a factual component of life under white supremacist institutions. Understanding this distinction is necessary because it reveals that Blacks' awareness of white privilege plays a part in forming their perception of the world knowing that they are denied the privilege whites effortlessly enjoy. Slave Narrative authors unconceal the fact that recognizing white privilege is a primordial way of understanding the Black Hermeneutic situation, as evidenced by Wheatley, Douglass, Truth, and others. Black Hermeneutics always takes up the task of understanding from a particular hermeneutic situation entangled with an awareness of white privilege and the knowledge that whites have the power to deny Blacks social, political, and cultural privilege. Black Rhetoric, then, must also speak from a position that acknowledges white privilege. Acknowledgment permits discourse, which is necessary to deconstruct a prevailing hierarchy with the ultimate intent of rendering that hierarchy illegitimate.

As a response to *being-Black* (i.e., skin color), understood in the context described above, the *trope* of the Talking Book in Slave Narratives assumes the authority of white discursive practices in order to assert Blacks' individuality, dignity, and freedom as a means of participating in America's *Geist*: the desire for individual freedom. Since colonial times, America's *Geist* has reflected a drive for individual expressions of freedom that come, not coincidentally, at the expense of others' freedoms. If we reread American history from Hegel's understanding of *Geist*, we see a recurring theme of one person's freedom being gained only at the expense of another's. Puritans provide one of the earliest examples of this particular component of America's *Geist*. The colonists seeking religious freedom did not embrace divergent doctrines, but instead punished, exiled, and

killed others in the name of their own religious freedom and contributed to America's history of engaging in a zero-sum struggle for power. Because the Puritans's spirit of freedom did not extend to non-Puritans, they violently persecuted Quakers, Catholics, Lutherans, and other non-Puritans as heretics. The religious freedom they sought came at the expense of those seeking religious freedom outside the Puritan faith.

Colonists seeking political and economic freedom from England did so at the expense of Native Americans' humanity, dignity, and individual, social, political, and economic freedom. To secure white freedoms and establish white communities, colonists forcibly and violently assumed ownership of land and livestock by destroying Native-American communities and lives. Again, one's freedom came at the expense of another's freedom, as white colonists justified their dehumanizing Native Americans in order to deny them their humanity, dignity, and individual, social, political, and economic freedoms. The colonists attempted to eliminate Native Americans in order to remove any threat they may have posed, be it a threat of violence or competition. The early colonists viewed Africans not as threats but as sources of income through cheap labor. Slavery provided whites the economic power they needed to develop their colonies in order to defend their declaration of independence from Britain and secure their "unalienable rights" to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Freedoms in America, once again, came at the expense of another's freedoms. The Civil War was a consequence of conflicting ideas between states' rights and freedoms to govern themselves and the Union's power to govern all of the states. In the end, one group had to lose its freedoms for another to gain its freedoms. While admittedly oversimplified here, this rereading of America's *Geist* from a revised (i.e., non-white) hermeneutic position reveals a persistent zero-sum struggle for freedom still evident today.

America's *Geist* continues to be understood as a zero-sum struggle for freedom and power that demands an intimate relationship between two competing forces. Such struggles for freedom are certainly not unique to America: they can be seen throughout the world. But Black Rhetoric's specific response to this struggle is unique as a result of the Black Hermeneutic Situation. One example of its uniqueness lies in the fact that Black Rhetoric,⁶⁹ on the whole, does not seek to play the zero-sum game that has been traditionally employed in America; instead, Black Rhetoric seeks a freedom that can only be realized at the expense of white supremacy – but not at the expense of white people themselves. Because Black Rhetoric thinks Being, it does so with care and concern for Being-in-the-world. As a result of the Black Hermeneutic Situation's grounding in the facticity of dehumanization, Black Rhetoric seeks reciprocity of human dignity as opposed to achieving, gaining, and realizing dignity at the sacrifice of another's. The evidence from Chapter Three exposes that Maatian ethics remained a dominant influence among the African cultures that occupied the regions where the majority of Africans were captured, sold into slavery, and transported across the Atlantic to America. Gates's examination of the Signifying Monkey reveals some of the lingering effects of West African cultural, philosophical, and linguistic influences among Black Americans. If one accepts the premise that Maatian ethics survived the Egyptian Diaspora as well as the Middle Passage, then one can begin to see its influence on Black Rhetoric. According to Maatian ethics, dignity only comes from mutual respect and a reciprocal acknowledgment of human dignity between the parties involved. More importantly, speaking is the way in which one respects and acknowledges the humanity and dignity of another. Heidegger's

⁶⁹ There are examples of individuals who adopt an inversion of white-supremacy's arguments and contradict my claims here. However, Black Rhetoric does not do this. I make a distinction between the color of a person's skin and their rhetorical productions. Black skin does not guarantee one to be a practitioner of Black Rhetoric.

own theories suggest this in *Being and Time* regarding Dasein's Being-in-the-world-alongside-others. The more we allow Others to come into Being, the more we ourselves come into our own authentic Being. I am not suggesting that Heidegger was aware of Maat; however, I do see that a clear parallel exists between Maatian ethics and Heidegger's understanding of thinking Being as saying because of the reciprocity implied in Heidegger's theories. I argue, then, that Blacks' freedom could only manifest itself through an acknowledgment of Blacks as human beings whose desire for freedom is no less important or deserving of recognition than that of whites' – but does not sacrifice whites' freedoms in order to obtain Blacks' freedoms. In other words, Black Rhetoric rejects the dehumanization of white supremacy and instead embraces humanist reciprocity in order to resist dehumanization and point toward Being in order to claim human dignity. Consequently, the reclamation of human dignity must be a reciprocal act.

Peter T. Coleman, director of the International Center of Cooperation and Conflict Resolution at Columbia University, addresses the problems of what he identifies as Western Rhetoric's proclivity for linear thinking, which contributes to an inability to solve some of humanity's most difficult and polarizing issues. In his book, *The Five Percent*, Coleman examines intractable conflicts in order to arrive at an understanding and method for solving such conflicts. Ultimately, he claims that we should stop looking at conflicts from a linear perspective that leads to what he calls "*conflict traps*: situations where people's reactions to conflicts make the very conditions that instigated them worse" (34-5). When a linear approach to a conflict fails to resolve that conflict, the reasonable solution seems to be to implement a non-linear approach instead. What, precisely, a non-linear approach entails depends, of course, on the conflict at hand. As a conceptual framework from which one can engage in non-linear thinking, Black Rhetoric's ability to think Being satisfies Coleman's non-linear approach to resolving polarizing conflicts in

order to avoid “conflict traps”; because Black Rhetoric rejects linear, zero-sum approaches in favor of balanced (demonstrates fairness) and reciprocal (demonstrates good will) ones – both of which are longstanding legacies of Maat’s influence on Kemetic-based rhetoric, which continues to influence and shape Black Rhetoric.

Slave Narratives exemplify this non-linearity by asserting a voice that demands recognition through reciprocity, which reflects Hegel’s understanding of *Geist* with regard to self-consciousness and exists “in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged” (111). Blacks demand acknowledgment from whites through the production and distribution of Slave Narratives as a specific response to slavery’s categorical refusal to acknowledge Blacks as human beings, much less citizens. Only with acknowledgment of human dignity can whites begin to sacrifice the privileges provided them by white supremacy and work towards securing black liberty. In other words, whites must view Blacks through Heidegger’s apophantic judgment in order to arrive at them as⁷⁰ human beings and engage with them in a mutual, reciprocal acknowledgment of human dignity. Heidegger identifies this as permitting beings to come into Being as Being rather than as objects to be understood through reductive, Western logic. Blacks’ struggle for human dignity in a Western culture establishes new rules for the zero-sum game that does violence to Western logic’s reductivism. Black Rhetoric does not seek a mere inversion of the existing hierarchy, but seeks to destroy the hierarchy altogether. In other words, Black Americans do not seek freedom and dignity at the cost of white freedom and dignity. On the contrary, Black Rhetoric seeks freedom and human dignity by establishing a reciprocal means through which Blacks and whites could be equal first in the eyes of the law and then in the eyes of

⁷⁰ Heidegger’s “apophantic as”

the people themselves. Black Rhetoric challenges whites to eradicate white supremacist ideology and white privilege by challenging the premise that Blacks are biologically, genetically, morally, and spiritually inferior – it challenges Western logic's indulgence in objective and *a priori* judgments. Under this new way-of-Being-reciprocal, whites and Blacks alike could share freedom and dignity equally with one another; they could acknowledge one another's Being; they could reciprocate acknowledgment of one another; they could reject the linear nature of the zero-sum approach to Western logic's notion of identity; they could allow beings to come into Being as Being and not objects or entities to be observed, examined, understood, classified, and known. The Abolitionist Movement and Slave Narratives provide the foundation for Black Rhetoric to confirm its role as the rhetoric of liberation, revolution, struggle, community, and reclamation of identity and dignity. This dissertation posits that Black Rhetoric holds the key to a genuinely equalizing rhetoric that thinks Being because it seeks actualized equality in the form of human dignity and community responsibility through reciprocity and balance – longtime legacies of Maat.

Maat serves as a precursor for Hegel's *Geist*, as a Kemetic way-of-Being and as a self-consciousness that comes into Being through the acknowledgment of all human beings as having Being-in-the-world as their primordial way-of-Being. Maat emphasizes a communal balance with individual responsibility to others that insists on beings allowing other beings to come into Being for themselves. Being-in-the-world, then, is foundational to Dasein's Being-alongside other Daseins. If we examine Hegel's *Geist* across Heidegger's Being through the philosophy of Maat, then we shall see that *Geist*, expressed as Maat through Blacks in America, reveals Dasein's *existentiale* as Being-alongside others as a means by which Dasein's Being expresses itself as care and concern. Understanding Black Rhetoric from the position of Heidegger's

phenomenological hermeneutics reveals that Slave Narratives lay the foundation for Black Rhetoric to be a rhetoric that has the potentiality to think Being as an expression of care and concern for Being. Because human dignity lies at the heart of Being, Black Rhetoric's response to white supremacy consequently thinks Being in order to reclaim the human dignity stripped by white supremacy. Since Dasein is always given to a mood, which is a facticity of Being for Dasein, understanding America's *Geist* as a zero-sum struggle for freedom reveals whites' desire for supremacy as a mood particular to whites that discloses white anxiety as a fear of inferiority and powerlessness. Thus, Blacks' desire for human dignity reveals a Black mood that responds directly to the white mood as a facticity of a Black way of Being-in-the-world. Accordingly, whites' anxiety, which creates a mood of superiority, masks whites' "Will to Power" as a "Will to Truth." Whites' claims to the truth about Blacks expose a white supremacist agenda that sought the suppression of Black humanity as a necessary consequence of expressing white power. Therefore, I posit that a Hegelian reading of America's *Geist* reveals a Nietzschean "Will to Power" repackaged as a Western "Will to Truth" that renders people objects for observation and categorization in order to label, marginalize, herd, and control them. White supremacy renders Blacks objects: "One mark of oppression was that Black folks were compelled to assume the mantle of invisibility, to erase all traces of their subjectivity during slavery and the long years of racial apartheid, so that they could be better, less threatening servants" (hooks 35). White supremacy's oppression objectifies Blacks by denying them agency, which ultimately denies them their humanity: "To be fully an object then was to lack the capacity to see or recognize reality. These looking relations were reinforced as whites cultivated the practice of denying the subjectivity of Blacks (the better to dehumanize and oppress), of relegating them to the realm of the invisible" (hooks 35). Acknowledgment of white supremacy's denying Blacks the ability to see

reality reoccurs throughout the Abolitionist Movement, Civil Rights Movement, and even in today's struggling Hip Hop Cultural Movement.⁷¹ Consequently, Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics provides the necessary critical framework for Black Rhetoric to flourish as a rhetoric that can think Being by rejecting reductivism and embracing reciprocity. Before one can have a voice, one must first have a perspective from which to speak. Black Hermeneutics insists that one must first acknowledge white supremacy's legacy and its continuing efforts to dehumanize before one attempts to undermine its pervasive presence through Black Rhetoric's reclamation of human dignity. James Cone addresses this need for seeing reality within Black Liberation Theology as understanding "the mood of Black Power" (8). According to Cone, when a Black man "first awakens to his place in America and feels sharply the absolute contradiction between *what is* and *what ought to be* or recognizes the inconsistency between his view of himself as a man and America's description of him as a thing, his immediate reaction is a feeling of absurdity" (9). Black Hermeneutics demands that white supremacy's dehumanization of the *Other* be recognized as an absurdity. Such recognition appears as Black Rhetoric in Slave Narratives, Abolitionist speeches, anti-slavery muckraking, Black Sermonic Rhetoric, Negro Spirituals, Gospel, and Hip Hop.

Western Rhetoric,⁷² which established a particular mode of subjectivity that promotes understanding as an act of observational cataloging, treats human beings as entities to be observed and understood comparatively. While Kant challenges sensory knowing with *a priori* judgment in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Western Rhetoric, well into

⁷¹ My own turn-of-phrase that signifies the current movement among Black Americans (and Hip Hop followers outside the U.S.) who see Hip Hop as a relevant venue for addressing human rights issues in the U.S. as well as globally.

⁷² I recognize that Western Rhetoric is not monolithic. I use it in this dissertation on the basis of its dominant features since Plato, which I note.

the twentieth century, continued to operate under the auspice of objective knowing through observation and comparison. Heidegger challenges this claim to knowing in *Being and Time* and in doing so rejects Kant's *a priori* judgment. Heidegger, like Marx and Hegel, accepts and understands that human beings exist in a world with a context and history. However, objective observation of one's world, context, and history such as that supported by the scientific method and Western Rhetoric cannot reveal Being because it does not think Being. Therefore, Western Rhetoric's adherence to a scientific-method styled approach to understanding, which misapplies Aristotle's focus on audiences as promoting objective observations of human beings, results in a rhetorical tradition that turns human beings into objects to be observed, compared, and understood, which in turn denies them their agency, individuality, and humanity. Aristotle's rhetoric did not set out to dehumanize audiences as a consequence of its desire to understand them. On the contrary, Aristotle's logic is grounded in everyday Being as evidenced in his *Rhetoric*,⁷³ which Heidegger understands as the first hermeneutic of everyday Dasein and inspires at least the beginning of Division I in *Being and Time*: "First, it has been maintained that 'Being' is the 'most universal' concept" (*Being and Time* 22). He clarifies that even though Being is the most universal concept, this does not suggest that it is easily understood: "So if it is said that 'Being' is the most universal concept, this cannot mean that it is the one [that] is clearest or that it needs no further discussion. It is rather the darkest of all" (*Being and Time* 23). By being the darkest of all, Being requires inquiry, investigation, examination, and discussion. Despite the fact that the concept of 'Being' is indefinable, Dasein looks for understanding through inquiry and discussion (i.e.,

⁷³ Book II of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, in particular, examines *pathos* and the manner in which everyday moods, described as emotions, influence an audience's receptivity of and response to a speaker on the basis of a particular mood.

rhetoric). Heidegger notes that Aristotle acknowledges the fact that individuals enter the ranks of audiences preloaded with their own historicity, facticity of Being, and moods, which inform their interpretation and understanding of what is said because Dasein understands from a particular hermeneutic situation that is always its own: "An understanding of Being is already included in conceiving anything [that] one apprehends" (*Being and Time* 22). Heidegger embraces Aristotle's perspective that what is perhaps most profound concerning the nature of human beings is our ability to be moved towards various ways-of-Being, which manifest themselves in rhetoric and requires inquiry as a mode of understanding: "Looking at something, understanding and conceiving it, choosing, access to it – all these ways of behaving are constitutive for our inquiry, and therefore are modes of Being for those particular entities [that] we, the inquirers, are ourselves" (*Being and Time* 26-7). Hans-Georg Gadamer extends Heidegger's take on Aristotle and argues that rhetoric "is a manifestation of [the] human being in its historicity" (Gross and Kemmann 8). In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer rejects Schleiermacher's argument that understanding originates from understanding the author as though one has lived the author's experiences himself and argues instead that rhetoric provides the means by which understanding through language occurs: "Language is the medium in which substantive understanding and agreement take place between two people" (284). He further adds that finding a common language, even a common rhetoric, is necessary for understanding to occur, as rhetoric "coincides with the very act of understanding and reaching agreement" (Gadamer 388). Historicity, for Gadamer, becomes key to understanding: "Historical consciousness fails to understand its own nature if, in order to understand, it seeks to exclude what alone makes understanding possible. *To think historically means, in fact, to perform the transposition that the concepts of the past undergo when we try to think them*" (397). A common language makes understanding

possible and a common language can only emerge when reciprocity is present. In other words, white supremacy denies understanding because it denies the humanity and thus the historicity of Blacks, and as a result, refuses to engage in a common language. Black Rhetoric provides a rhetorical position necessary for establishing a common language, because it shatters the hierarchical structure that white supremacy – via Western Rhetoric – constructs. Gadamer embraces Heidegger's view of Aristotelian rhetoric and argues that there "cannot, therefore, be any single interpretation that is correct" since each Dasein has its own unique historicity (397). Thus, each Dasein understands and interprets from its own unique position. However, a common language allows for understanding to take place across different hermeneutic positions because it does not conceal Being. Heidegger and Gadamer reveal Western Rhetoric's departure from Aristotle's hermeneutic of everyday Dasein, which embraces human beings' fundamental nature as an ability to be moved by rhetoric, when they point to the onset of objective, scientific knowing being applied to human beings.

Thus, phenomenological hermeneutics allows Being to show up without concealing it through objective knowing and does so without embracing Kant's synthetic *a priori* judgment or Descartes's insufficient judgments. Descartes argues for objective knowing by suggesting that we misunderstand only when we construct insufficient judgments: "When we perceive anything, we are in no danger of misapprehending it, if we do not judge it one way or the other; and even when we judge of it we should not fall into error, provided that we do not give our assent to what we do not know clearly and distinctly; but what usually misleads us is that we very frequently form a judgment although we have no very exact knowledge regarding that of which we judge" (289-9). Descartes grounds Western knowing and understanding as fully apprehending that which one wishes to judge. He assumes that full apprehension is not only possible but also

necessary to understanding. Heidegger and Gadamer's rejection of such Western ways of thinking replaces objective knowing with thinking Being. By embracing a fundamental desire to think Being as the primordial mode of understanding in Black Rhetoric, Slave Narratives reveal a black way-of-Being-in-the-world that expresses a need to respond to Western Rhetoric's efforts to conceal Black Being as an *Other*. In order for Slave Narratives to accomplish such a daunting task, Blacks had to embrace and confront their own anxiety as a mood that sought human dignity in the face of white supremacy's oppression and dehumanization. Black Rhetoric's two, equiprimordial *tropes* – signifying and testifying – demonstrate embracement and confrontation as Black moods expressed through *tropes*: "Without the ambiguous turn in language measured out in a *trope*, human expression would be one dimensional" (Gross and Kemmann 3). As a consequence of this multidimensionality in language, an understanding of the Slave Narrative as a black way-of-understanding-Being reveals Black Rhetoric as fulfilling the Hegelian dialectic (i.e., thesis-antithesis-synthesis) in part through the adoption of Western *tropes* as well as the preservation of Kemetic ones. Within this particular model, Kemetic Rhetoric fulfills the role of the "thesis," which emphasizes rhetoric as a communal and reciprocal act; and Western Rhetoric as the "anti-thesis," which emphasizes rhetoric primarily as an individual act; and Black Rhetoric as the "synthesis," which reconciles the individual alongside the community as Being-in-the-world-alongside-others through care and concern for human dignity as encouraging reciprocity and balance through the act of speaking a common language.

Slave Narratives reveal Black Rhetoric's origin as a necessary response to white supremacy and slavery, which sought to reclaim human dignity through rhetorical means by reconciling the role and responsibility of an individual to a community. *Tropes* perform a necessary task in Black Rhetoric that allows for understanding the Black Hermeneutic

situation, which is needed in order for Blacks to reclaim their human dignity. Black History, then, remains significant to Black Rhetoric. Understanding Black History from its Kemetetic roots until the end of the nineteenth century uncovers Blacks' complicated journey from one continent to another that resulted in a unique blending of languages, religions, and identities that mutated over time and place to emerge as a rhetorical practice separate from its parentage but certainly not entirely removed from it. The result is a rhetorical tradition that responds to and speaks from a particular hermeneutic situation: chattel slavery. Even though chattel slavery represents the worst of America, Black American identities would not be what they are today without this legacy. The legacy of slavery continues to affect Americans; therefore, Americans, regardless of ethnic identity, should not turn a blind eye to it and dismiss its impact as many whites have attempted to do. As evidenced by Slave Narratives, white constructions of 'blackness' always confront Blacks in America at some point in their life. For this reason, Slave Narratives remain relevant and significant works for examining Black ways-of-Being in America. While all nonwhite Americans share a similar hermeneutic situation, as a consequence of white supremacy (i.e., white privilege), male and female slaves in particular faced different challenges and different prejudices as a result of their different genders. The differences between male and female-authored Slave Narratives appear as expressions of the authors' individual experiences and understandings of those experiences, which were often influenced by the different ways whites treated male and female slaves.

While Douglass's narrative taught his readers that literacy was the key to freedom of both the mind and the body, he was also a man who felt confident in his physical ability to stand up to his masters and defend himself physically against their individual attacks. When he was sent to Mr. Covey, who had the reputation of being a

“nigger-breaker,” Douglass determined that he would not to be broken. After having been with Covey for only a week, Douglass received his first beating for losing control of the oxen and allowing them to destroy his cart: “Mr. Covey gave me a very severe whipping, cutting my back, causing the blood to run, and raising ridges on my flesh as large as my little finger” (38). In order to maintain his reputation as a “nigger-breaker,” Mr. Covey beat Douglass nearly every week: “During the first six months of that year, scarce a week passed without his whipping me. I was seldom free from a sore back” (39). Despite this regular abuse, Douglass resigns himself to stand up against Mr. Covey and protect himself from future beatings. In his narrative, Douglass addresses slavery from a masculine perspective and chronicles “how a man was made a slave” and conversely how “a slave was made a man” (42-3). Douglass relates the turning point in his life when Mr. Covey decides to whip him for claiming to be ill:

He came to the spot, and after looking at me awhile, asked me what was the matter. I told him as well as I could, for I scarce had the strength to speak. He then gave me a savage kick in the side, and told me to get up. I tried to do so, but fell back in the attempt. He gave me another kick, and again told me to rise. I again tried, and succeeded in gaining my feet: but, stooping to get the tub with which I was feeding the fan, I again staggered and fell. While down in this situation, Mr. Covey took up the hickory slat with which Hughes had been striking off the half-bushel measure, and with it gave me a heavy blow upon the head, making a large wound, and the blood ran freely; and with this, again told me to get up. I made no effort to comply, having now made up my mind to let him do his worst. (43)

After surviving this beating, Douglass decides to complain to his master Thomas, whom Mr. Covey works for, regarding his repeated whippings. Thomas rejects Douglass’s fears that Mr. Covey will kill him and instructs Douglass to return the next day.

Upon his return home, Douglass encounters Sandy, “an old adviser” who provides a root promised to protect him from any future harm at the hands of any white men. Despite being initially skeptical, Douglass begins to believe the root works after some time passes without his receiving a beating. However, it was not long before Mr. Covey decides to whip him again. Mr. Covey finds Douglass in the barn and catches his legs with a rope, intending to tie him up, but Douglass jumped:

I resolved to fight; and suiting my action to the resolution, I seized Covey hard by the throat; and as I did so, I rose. He held on to me, and I to him. My resistance was so entirely unexpected that Covey seemed taken all aback. He trembled like a leaf. This gave me assurance, and I held him uneasy causing the blood to run where I touched him with the ends of my fingers. Mr. Covey soon called out to Hughes for help. (46)

Douglass successfully defends himself against Mr. Covey and Hughes. For the remaining six months of his time with Mr. Covey, Douglass never receives another whipping. While Douglass initially believes the root helped protect him, he ultimately resolves to believe in his own ability to stand up for himself as a man. Douglass reclaims his human dignity and masculinity by defending himself rhetorically as well as through physical violence (i.e., self-defense). Douglass’s newly found masculine identity, as self-confidence in his physical ability to work, protected him from Mr. Covey’s violence. Anderson, Turner, Douglass, and numerous other men turned to physical confrontation as acts of self-defense on their path towards liberation. This decision, however, was not generally an option for most women who often, albeit not always, lacked the physical prowess necessary to challenge white men through physical acts of violence. While some women did resort to physical violence as a mode of self-defense, most women had to turn to more subversive means of resistance if they wished to survive the confrontation. Herein lies a significant divide along gender lines regarding male and

female authors. Even though Truth was as big⁷⁴ and strong as any man, the culture in which she lived encouraged women to fear men and to develop a sense of inferiority to them. Additionally, the patriarchal culture of Truth's time supported the notion that public speaking was not an acceptable activity for women and therefore required the supervision of men. As a consequence, men more often than not supervised and oversaw the women's suffrage rallies, including the ones Truth attended. Given the active control by men over women's public voices, Black women often embraced subversive measures for resistance.

These measures often took drastic forms. One form was rebellion. Black women sought creative and often desperate modes of rebellion against their oppressors. Black feminist scholars such as Angela Davis, June Jordan, Afua Cooper, Barbara Bush, Dorothy Roberts, and numerous others who have worked diligently over the last few decades uncover the female slave's means of resistance. According to Davis and Cooper, Black women fought desperately and courageously but often had to do so subversively. Following a precedent established by a 1669 Virginia law that "made the killing of slaves by [an] owner or overseer as a result of 'correction' a non-criminal act," slaves knew all too well the consequence of open rebellion (Aptheker 13). The mass killings of slaves following the Nat Turner revolt and other public displays of white power over Black bodies functioned as deterrents and reminders to Black women wishing to revolt that violence and death were likely consequences. The story of Celia, a young slave woman executed in Missouri in 1855 after she fought against her white rapist, provides but one example of the 1669 Virginia Law⁷⁵ in action two centuries after its

⁷⁴ Various biographers describe Truth as having been almost six feet tall.

⁷⁵ This law states that any slave found guilty of resisting his/her master should be sentenced to death and executed immediately.

establishment (McLaurin). As a consequence of the obvious physical differences between men and women, female slaves often resorted to acts of infanticide, suicide, poisoning, abortion, and running away as subversive modes of resistance. Sadly, most modes of female resistance and rebellion resulted in additional physical and emotional harm to the woman herself.

Cooper's *The Hanging of Angelique* argues that the "reproductive story of enslaved Black women shows that slavery was as much a system of sexual bondage as it was one of racial bondage" (168). Black women were bred like cattle for the economic gain of their masters and served as outlets for white men's sexual exploits. Douglass recounts this activity in his own narrative by the example of Mr. Covey's female slave, whom Covey forced to have sex with a slave she did not know so that he could increase his assets through their offspring: "The facts in the case are these: Mr. Covey was a poor man; he was just commencing in life; he was only able to buy one slave; and shocking as is the fact, he bought her, as he said, for a breeder" (41). Douglass⁷⁶ makes painfully clear the cruelty of this act and its effects on both male and female slaves: "To complete the wickedness of this transaction, Covey hired of Mr. Samuel Harrison a married slave, who was torn from his own wife, and compelled to live as the husband of this wretched woman" (41). While Covey's female slave endured her fate, it was not uncommon for Black women to attempt abortions or commit infanticide and even suicide to escape their state of sexual bondage. Since Covey had a particular reputation for cruelty, it is expected that his slave accepted her fate and did not physically or otherwise resist him out of fear of the harsh consequences she knew lay in store for her if she resisted by any

⁷⁶ Douglass's own sexist view of the world interferes with his ability to speak ethically about the sexual violence female slaves endured.

measure. Yet, some Black women did physically resist their masters despite the potential consequences.

Slavery subjected Black women to horrific sexual abuses not inflicted on the men. Harriet Jacobs employed her Slave Narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, to reveal the specific horrors that women endured as slaves. Many scholars such as those listed above argue that Jacobs was the first woman to write publicly about the sexual abuses inflicted on female slaves and the first to write a Slave Narrative, which secures Jacobs's place in history as one of the first Black Feminists. Like Sojourner Truth before her, Jacobs utilizes the *tropes* of testifying and the Talking Book to speak on behalf of Black women and their own unique hermeneutic situation within the context of slavery. She was a pioneer who sought to reclaim her dignity not only as a human being but also as a woman. She chose to speak out despite laws that silenced slaves from identifying white men as fathers of their slaves' children. Jacobs's brave rhetorical act shattered the unspoken rule that Black women were not to speak about the conditions of their sexual bondage.

As an early Black Feminist work, Jacobs's autobiography/narrative reveals that slave women's "sexual decisions represented a legitimate method of slave resistance" (Hine 665). Even though Jacobs did not resort to physical violence, her narrative serves as an example of rhetorical violence done to Western Rhetoric's supposed grip on literary productions. She broke women's imposed silence by publically writing about the sexual violence Black women endured as a particular addition to the general violence of slavery. Since Jacobs, Black Feminists have continued to examine the sexual politics of slavery and race. I argue that the rhetorical choices evidenced in her narrative contribute to an additional understanding of Black Rhetoric that offers a feminist perspective on human

dignity. Jacobs not only used her mind and her body to thwart her master's sexual advances but also her skills in rhetoric.

Jacobs, who gained literacy at the hands of her mistress, Margaret, remains one of the only female slaves who wrote her own autobiography rather than dictating it to someone else for transcription. Perhaps it was because she was able to write her own narrative without direct interference of a white gaze that she was able to reveal the candid truth about women in slavery. Douglass, for example, notes the whippings women endured but only mentions in passing their sexual abuse. Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* reveals slavery's active and widespread infliction of sexual bondage. Jacobs's autobiography notes that by the time she is fifteen years old, her master takes a keen sexual interest in her. Although Dr. Flint⁷⁷ feared repercussions from his community if he physically injured Jacobs, since her grandmother was a respected figure in their community, he nonetheless harassed her verbally on a regular basis. Jacobs's narrative testifies to the fact that Dr. Flint would make vulgar and sexually explicit statements and then remind her that she was his property: "When he told me that I was made for his use, made to obey his command in every thing; that I was nothing but a slave, whose will must and should surrender to his, never before had my puny arm felt half so strong" (21). The fury inside the young Jacobs could not be expressed through physical violence, as Douglass and Turner had expressed theirs. She did not dare strike him; instead, she expressed her rage rhetorically in her narrative. Through the *trope* of testifying, she exposes her master's licentiousness. Doing so

⁷⁷ Jacobs changed the names of all parties in her book. We now know that Dr. Flint was Dr. Norcom. Given that I am referring to her autobiography, I have chosen to leave the names as she used them in her publication.

reverses, at least rhetorically and albeit delayed, Dr. Flint's power over Jacobs. No longer is she compelled to endure his advances in silence.

In her testimony, Jacobs reveals an additional dilemma black women faced under slavery, white women's jealousy. Dr. Flint's wife, jealous of the attention her husband gives to Jacobs, inflicts upon the young Jacobs her own wrath and rage. Jacobs cannot escape the sexual bondage because of her status as a slave. She is therefore subject to the doctor's advances and licentious comments as well as his wife's jealousy-driven outbursts of violence and anger. Jacobs's predicament was not unique, however. Black Feminist scholars such as Angela Davis and Patricia Hill Collins report that female slaves often recount their difficult positions between the male and female slave masters. Collins argues in *Black Feminist Thought* that beauty attributed to a light-skinned Black woman proves to be a curse rather than a blessing, as evidenced by the very events Jacobs describes in her autobiography (92). The house-slave versus field-slave dynamic constructed on the basis of degrees of lightness and darkness created tensions between Black and white women that exceeded racial tensions already in existence during slavery. According to Collins: "This division of African-Americans into two categories – the 'Brights' and the 'Lesser Blacks' – affects dark-skinned and light-skinned women differently. Darker women [such as Truth] face[d] being judged inferior" and relegated to slave duties outside the home and away from constant view of the slave master (91). Light-skinned women (considered superior to dark-skinned women yet inferior to white women), were generally assigned duties within the home and kept close to the slave master, as evidenced by Jacobs's own narrative. Collins goes on to note that institutions "controlled by whites clearly show a preference for lighter-skinned Blacks, discriminating against darker ones or against any African-Americans who appear to reject white images of beauty" (91). While Collins's argument suggests extensive social and

political implications, there also exists a rhetorical relevance evident in Jacobs's autobiography. Given her fair skin and physical appeal to white men, Jacobs knew she had an advantage that would allow her to formulate a plan for freedom, which included her becoming pregnant by a white attorney in town, Mr. Sands. Her plan was to anger Dr. Flint with her pregnancy in hopes that he would sell her. Despite Jacobs's eventually having two children, Dr. Flint refused to sell her. Desperate to outwit the doctor and free herself from his and his wife's cruelties, Jacobs fled. With the assistance of a sympathetic white woman, Jacobs lived in a crawl space in her grandmother's house for years so that she could watch over her children until the time came that she could escape to the North and freedom – where she did eventually find freedom as well reunited with her children.

Jacobs did not commit suicide or infanticide nor did she attempt to abort her children. Instead, she recognizes her advantage and seeks affection from those with the power to help her escape to freedom. Unfortunately, Jacobs's so-called advantage as a light-skinned woman was categorically perverted through white representations of Black women such as Jacobs into stereotypical depictions of them as figures known as 'Jezebels' in order to oppress Black women sexually as well as economically and mentally through slavery. Collins's *Black Feminist Thought* addresses this very issue as it relates to relationships between Black women and white men since the time of slavery:

Given the history of sexual abuse of Black women by white men, individual Black women who choose white partners become reminders of a difficult history for Black women as a collectivity. Such individual liaisons aggravate a collective sore spot because they recall historical master/slave relationships. Any sexual encounters between two parties where one has so much control over the other could never be fully consensual, even if the slave appeared to agree. Structural power differences of this magnitude limit the subordinate's power to give free consent or refusal. Controlling images such as jezebel are created to mask just this power differential and provide the illusion of consent. At the same time, even under slavery, to characterize interracial sex purely in terms of the victimization of Black women would be a distortion,

because such depictions strip Black women of agency. Many Black women successfully resisted sexual assault while others cut bargains with their masters” (162).

Jacobs shrewdly analyzes her circumstances and considers how she could beat her white master at his own game. She recognizes the humanity and the dignity within herself and seeks to display them to the outside world. To do so, she knows that she must claim her own agency. She gains that agency via her Slave Narrative by signifying on white literary traditions and testifying to her own life as a slave, in particular as a female slave subject to white sexual violence.

While her story of resistance is indeed compelling and contributes greatly to a number of fields, namely Black Feminism, her representing a point in which we can see evidence of Black Rhetoric emerging and manifesting itself distinctly from its Western and Kemetic roots compels my examination of her narrative. The sections in it that speak of her resisting Dr. Flint’s sexual advances are perhaps the most telling of her place in Black Rhetoric’s history. Through the *trope* of testifying and non-linear conflict resolution, Jacobs gains the agency she desires. Her testimony witnesses to her unique understanding of the existence of a slave as well as to white sexual tyranny against Black women:

He told me I was his property: that I must be subject to his will in all things. My soul revolted against the mean tyranny. But where could I turn for protection? No matter whether the slave girl be as black as ebony or as fair as her mistress. In either case, there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death: all these are inflicted by fiends who bear the shape of men. (30)

Jacobs clearly identifies her hermeneutic situation as that of a female slave who understands her oppression within the complexities of patriarchy and white supremacy.

Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*, which examines the origins of morality through the polarization of good and evil, provides a lens through which to examine Black Rhetoric’s evolution from Western Rhetoric and Kemetic Rhetoric towards a distinctly

Black Rhetoric without actually abandoning or embracing either parent-rhetoric

completely. According to Nietzsche:

Here is the place for the origin of that famous opposition of 'good' and 'evil': into evil one's feelings project power and dangerousness, a certain terribleness, subtlety, and strength that does not permit contempt to develop. According to slave morality, those who are 'evil' thus inspire fear; according to master morality it is precisely those who are 'good' that inspire, and wish to inspire, fear, while the 'bad' are felt to be contemptible. (397)

In Jacobs's passage cited earlier, Dr. Flint clearly has contempt for Jacobs; however, she displays her contempt for him. Dr. Flint fulfills Nietzsche's master morality in that he perceives himself as "good" by virtue of his whiteness and therefore considers his actions to be equally "good" as long as they assist him in satisfying his role as a slave master. Because Jacobs is his property, Dr. Flint considers her rightful state to be subject to his will. As her master, Dr. Flint believes that if he does not secure her as being subject to his will, then he would be considered evil for failing to fulfill his role as her master, as such a failing would invert the established hierarchy and destabilize his position of authority. Thus, Jacobs satisfies Nietzsche's slave morality – temporarily. In doing so, she views herself as a victim of Dr. Flint's evil lust and power, both of which seek to destroy the young Jacobs. She believes that those who desire to exploit the so-called benefits of slavery, which she believes is evil, are themselves evil. She resists his evil authority through her good moral stance. While she could not exert any physical power over Dr. Flint, she could assert a moral power through the agency she gained as an author. Christians believe that the soul is the house of Being; therefore, Jacobs's power comes in the form of her soul's ability to revolt "against the mean tyranny" (30). For Jacobs, this suggests a willful act of resistance. While slave morality accepts a lack of power over one's physical self, it also embraces the notion that none can control or exercise power over another's soul. Therefore, Jacobs embraces the Christianity's

dualism of body and soul and signifies upon her understanding this dualism by staking a claim to her soul's power in which she links this power to her actual humanity, which is grounded in the condition of her soul and not her body.

In addition to signifying on Christianity, she also participates in Western Rhetoric's appeal to *pathos*. According to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, "The emotions are all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure. Such are anger, pity, fear, and the like, with their opposites" (Book II Chapter 1 par. 4). Privileged by her distance as an autobiographer, Jacobs can look back at this scene and frame it in such a way as to capture and carefully articulate her own fear in order to evoke pity from her white readers and anger from her Black readers. *Pathos* remains a significant rhetorical appeal in Black Rhetoric from its beginnings in slavery until the present day. However, Jacobs does not leave this scene as a straightforward appeal to pity and anger. Instead, she invokes her Kemetic heritage through *Nommo*. That is, Jacobs's narrative is not a tribute to herself but is a manner of speaking that seeks, specifically, to improve the lives of other slaves and to speak on behalf of Black men and women who are not able to exercise their own public voice. This Kemetic tradition, recognized as *Nommo*, solidifies Black Rhetoric's lineage to West Africa's rhetorical traditions that view certain kinds of speech such as Jacobs's "weaving, forging, cultivating, building family and community, and making the world good" that the Dogon, Dahomey, and Kemet people viewed as necessary components of good speech (Jackson and Richardson 8). While Western Rhetoric understands good speech as a good man speaking well, Kemetic Rhetoric understands good speech as a good man speaking well in order to improve his family, community, and ultimately the world. *Nommo* supports and perpetuates the notion that we are all interconnected – a notion that Dr. King shall express in his Civil Rights speeches.

Jacobs's narrative exemplifies the Slave Narrative genre. She carefully employs *pathos* to evoke certain emotions from her audiences in order to move them to a specific action: the abolition of slavery. While she appeals to a broader audience on the basis of shared concerns of slavery, Jacobs also points out the special difficulties female slaves suffered as a consequence of sexual violence: "The mistress, who ought to protect the helpless victim, has no other feelings towards her but those of jealousy and rage. The degradations, the wrongs, the vices that grow out of slavery are more than I can describe" (30). Here, Jacobs appeals specifically to white women. She feels that by virtue of being a woman who shares a gender-based oppression under men, Black and white women should align themselves to overthrow the tyranny of white men. Rather than embrace a sense of sisterhood, however, the doctor's wife assumes a master morality and in turn Jacobs assumes a position of slave morality. By examining her relationship with the doctor's wife, Jacobs responds to this by pointing out the "evil" of white women who punish Black women for being victims of white men's lust. Despite her status as a slave and having once understood herself and her situation from the position of slave morality, she does not remain within this slave-morality mindset. As a sign that she is in the process of removing herself from the master/slave dichotomy, she recalls a scene of two girls playing and invokes *Nommo* in order to reclaim humanity not only for herself but also for Blacks in America as a whole:

I once saw two beautiful children playing together. One was a fair white child; the other was her slave, and also her sister. When I saw them embracing each other, and heard their joyous laughter, I turned sadly away from the lovely sight. I foresaw the inevitable blight that would fall on the little slave's heart. I knew how soon her laughter would be changed to sighs. The fair child grew up to be a still fairer woman. From childhood to womanhood her pathway was blooming with flowers and overarched by a sunny sky. Scarcely one day of her life had been clouded when the sun rose on her happy bridal morning. How had those years dealt with her slave sister, the little playmate of her childhood? She was also very beautiful; but the flowers and sunshine of love were

not for her. She drank the cup of sin, and shame, and misery, whereof her persecuted race are compelled to drink. (32)

Jacobs paints a picture of the stark and bleak reality facing slave women as well as slaves in general. While her audience may have felt sympathy, pity, or even anger reading this scene, Jacobs hoped that they would recognize within her subtlety a desperate cry for human dignity. Jacobs speaks not for herself but on behalf of all Black Americans who suffer under white supremacy and desperately wish to reclaim their human dignity. She does so through an emerging Black Rhetoric that employs the *trope* of the Talking Book by signifying and testifying within her narrative.

As evidenced by Wheatley, Anderson, Douglass, Truth, and Jacobs, one can see the manner in which Slave Narratives unconceal Black Rhetoric's origin as a particular way of speaking that addresses a desire to reclaim human dignity from the grip of white supremacy. In other words, Black Rhetoric provides a response to white supremacy's attempts to destroy Blacks' human dignity by offering a mode of speech that reclaims humanity, and thus human dignity, through the *tropes* of signifying and testifying in the Talking Book that shall take on new life in Abolitionist speeches and later in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. Examining these movements shall reveal the significance of *tropes* to rhetoric that Heidegger argues is essential to thinking Being and therefore defend my own argument that the *tropes* in Black Rhetoric contribute to its capacity to think Being.

Chapter 5

Black Abolitionist Rhetoric and Black Sermonic Rhetoric

This chapter's examination of Black Abolitionist Rhetoric and Black Sermonic Rhetoric explores the evolutionary path of Black Rhetoric by inquiring into its philosophical, social, and theological influences after the formation of the United States as an independent nation. Abolitionist Rhetoric and Black Sermonic Rhetoric each adopted Enlightenment thinking's position that one cannot logically or ethically distinguish civil rights from human rights. Each also grounded its understanding of human rights in Black Liberation Theology. In other words, civil rights are human rights endowed by a God that promises liberty and dignity for His creation through his holy Word. Therefore, recognizing Blacks' civil rights necessarily recognizes their humanity, human dignity, and human rights. As a rhetoric of protest and resistance, Black Abolitionist Rhetoric speaks specifically to Black Americans' desire for human dignity and civil rights. Black Rhetoric's reclamation of human dignity as a means by which to claim human rights – and therefore civil rights – reveals human dignity and human rights as occupying two sides of the same coin, which unconceals the final cause of Black Rhetoric. The message of human rights as civil rights rooted in human dignity articulated in Black Sermonic Rhetoric and Black Abolitionist Rhetoric did not change for more than one hundred years after Abolition. Despite Emancipation, white supremacy's grip on Black American life remained as persistent as it was deadly. Jim Crow, peonage laws, segregation, poll taxes, literacy tests, and other forms of white supremacy's institutional power continued to strangle Blacks' efforts to obtain social, economic, and political equality well after President Lincoln's infamous proclamation. Incidents of lynching as well as other forms of white violence against black bodies increased. This is not to say that no Black progress took place; on the contrary, Black Americans regularly sought opportunities for education,

employment, politics, and wealth. Black culture thrived during the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz became a household word, and the Black Church expanded its presence within the Black Community. But for every step forward that Black Americans took, white supremacy kicked them back at least two paces. During these decades of struggle, new black leaders stepped forward in order to lead the Black Community closer to fulfilling its mission of full and equal recognition by and protection under the law. Black artists, poets, musicians, authors, actors, businessmen, lawyers, doctors, professors, pastors, students, and members of all aspects of the Black Community played a role in Blacks' continued confrontation with white supremacy and white violence. The brutal murder of fourteen-year old Emmett Till in 1955 sparked a firestorm. While Till's murder enraged Black Americans, the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* that led to the forced desegregation of public schools emboldened them. The role of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (henceforth NAACP) in the 1954 Supreme Court ruling demonstrated that Black Americans could and should challenge white supremacy in the courts. After the May 1954 Supreme Court's ruling in favor of desegregation and the August 1955 murder of Emmett Till, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., joined Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama in December of 1955 in order to organize the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Inspired by the successes of the NAACP and Dr. King, a group of southern pastors, including Dr. King, formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (henceforth SCLC) as an umbrella organization in order to coordinate nonviolent protests throughout the South.

While there were many influential people involved in and doing good work for the Civil Rights agenda, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., holds the honor of being the most iconic figure of the Civil Rights Movement. As a consequence of this honor, his speeches continue to influence and inform Black Rhetoric today, as evident in speeches by

President Obama as well as other prominent Black, white, Latino, Feminist, and Gay leaders. Dr. King's iconic status and argument did not go unanswered by the Black Community; Malcolm X too was a prominent and influential figure of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. For reasons that shall be explored later in this chapter, Malcolm X's influence on Black Rhetoric is more subtle than Dr. King's but no less significant. This chapter shall examine Dr. King's influence first and then analyze Malcolm X's.

Dr. King delivered many speeches in his brief tenure as a Civil Rights leader, but his "I Have a Dream" speech stands out as his most famous act of oratory. Despite the speech's relative brevity, Dr. King manages to encapsulate the most significant canons of Black Rhetoric: Collaborative Deliberation, Forensic Resistance, and Humanist Reciprocity. Placing the *tropes* examined thus far in my argument under the three canons of Black Rhetoric organizes them in such a way as to reveal their interrelatedness, expose the evolution of Black Rhetoric, and reveal the potentiality of Black Rhetoric to think Being and therefore offer a rhetoric that has the capacity to address oppression and bring liberty to fruition through care and concern for Being: Collaborative Deliberation engages communal interest and participation through call-and-response, revisionist patriotism, Enlightenment thinking, and Black Liberation Theology; Forensic Resistance relies on signifying, double-consciousness, testifying, revealing, and the *trope* of the Talking Book; and Humanist Reciprocity seeks to deconstruct white supremacist ideologies in order to affirm humanity and reclaim human dignity. A good deal can and has been said about Dr. King's particular gift of eloquence, but this dissertation is more interested in identifying Dr. King's role in the evolution of Black Rhetoric. Consequently, I shall focus on the evidence his speeches provide regarding the three canons of Black Rhetoric looking first at his "I Have a Dream" speech.

A close rhetorical examination of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech reveals his engaging the three canons of Black Rhetoric, particularly when one approaches his speech with the understanding that he constructed a speech that could speak to two different audiences with two different purposes in mind. The obvious audience was the hundreds of thousands in attendance, those listening on the radio, and the countless others watching on television. Those already in support of the Civil Rights Movement constituted this first audience and did not need convincing but instead sought inspiration, motivation, encouragement, unity, and hope. Those opposing the mission of the Civil Rights Movement as well as having the power to put the support of the Federal government behind Dr. King's dream constituted his second audience. Dr. King begins his speech with Collaborative Deliberation by highlighting the Emancipation Proclamation⁷⁸ and its promise to "end [Blacks'] long night of captivity" ("I Have a Dream" par. 2). Relying on *anaphora* to construct a catalog of Emancipation's failure to free Black Americans socially, politically, and economically, over the course of one hundred years, his speech includes the canon of Forensic Resistance by testifying to the nation's continued refusal to accept Black Americans as equals in spite of a presidential decree and the Thirteenth Amendment's abolishing slavery:

But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. ("I Have a Dream" par. 3)

⁷⁸ Abraham Lincoln's opposition to slavery was rooted in his political stance on democracy, which of course was influenced by Enlightenment thinking. Stewart Winger's 2002 article, "To the Latest Generations': Lincoln's Use of Time, History, and the End Time, in Historical Context," addresses this influence as well as numerous biographies that also attest to Lincoln's adopting Enlightenment views.

Dr. King's *trope* of testifying exposes the dire conditions of Black Americans but more importantly exposes the failure of the government to protect and promote the common welfare of its Black citizens. This segment of his speech not only catalogs and testifies but also reveals double-consciousness. That is, Dr. King points to the veil of white supremacy that compels Black Americans to see themselves as exiles in their own land. His choice of words points out that on one hand, Black Americans are legally defined as citizens of the United States; but on the other hand, white supremacy prevents Black Americans from accessing the privileges and obligations that citizenship promises. At this point, Dr. King articulates that he shall henceforth revelate⁷⁹ on the "appalling condition[s] of Black America" ("I Have a Dream" par. 3)

Dr. King's speech then constructs his infamous analogy of the "promissory note" through which he moves seamlessly between Collaborative Deliberation and Forensic Resistance via revisionist patriotism, signifying, testifying, and double-consciousness:

In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. ("I Have a Dream" par. 4)

Dr. King's appeal to revisionist patriotism and Enlightenment thinking are evident in his testifying to the promises of the founding documents, which guarantee inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. As a result of white supremacy's grip on the nation, Dr. King's interpretation of these inalienable rights as guaranteeing Black Americans full and equal coverage of the Constitution required that he signify on these promises. His signifying reveals his stance on humanity as being informed by Black Liberation Theology through the lens of double-consciousness in which he sees the veil

⁷⁹ This is a conjugated form of "to revelate."

of white supremacy but resists its oppressive effects in order to affirm his humanity and reclaim his human dignity. In order to deconstruct white supremacy with the intent to claim his rights to human dignity (i.e., civil rights) and expose white privilege's hypocrisy, Dr. King engages Humanist Reciprocity in his speech. His promissory note analogy in particular spoke to the legislators, justices, and the president, each of whom had the power to affect legislative, judicial, and executive changes in order to secure, protect, and promote the civil rights of Black Americans. Dr. King constructs his appeal to the government through an extension of his "promissory note" analogy, whereby he refuses "to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt" ("I Have a Dream" par. 5). He signifies through the *trope* of revisionist patriotism in order to expose the hypocrisy of white privilege and to reveal white Christianity's⁸⁰ violations of the commandment to love the neighbor: "We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check – [...] Now is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all of God's children" ("I Have a Dream" par. 5).

As a transition to the inspirational part of his speech (constructed for those already supportive of the Civil Rights Movement), Dr. King offers a warning to all desiring a return to "business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges" ("I Have a Dream" par. 6). He then clarifies that the revolt of which he speaks is not one manifested through violence but a "struggle on the high place of dignity and discipline" ("I Have a Dream" par. 7). Having adopted Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of civil disobedience through

⁸⁰ At this time in American history, most politicians (not unlike today) publicly professed their Christian faith in order to establish their *ethos* with voters, who overwhelmingly identified as Christian.

nonviolent protest, Dr. King assured his audience that he did not participate in other movements that accept retaliatory violence as a reasonable response to white violence: “Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force” (“I Have a Dream” par. 7). Dr. King’s appeal to moral superiority falls under the canon of Humanist Reciprocity in that it offers a reciprocal response that balances violence with nonviolence and immorality with moral superiority with the intent to secure justice. While his appeal to nonviolence reflects an obvious rhetorical purpose (i.e., appeal to *pathos* through sympathy and *ethos* through nonviolent behavior), a less obvious rhetorical purpose can also be extracted from this appeal to nonviolence that grounds Dr. King’s rhetoric in Kemetic as well as Western rhetorical traditions via reciprocity. He uses this as an opportunity to criticize the Black Nationalist Movement – and the Nation of Islam in particular – in order to argue that justice comes in the form of balance and reciprocity not by constructing an inverted version of an already established and unjust hierarchy⁸¹ and certainly not by begetting violence with violence or white segregation of Blacks with Black segregation of whites:

The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to distrust all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny and their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone. (“I Have a Dream” par. 7)

Dr. King proclaims his rejection of violence and secures his stance on reciprocity through the revisionist patriotism *trope* in which he argues that human beings’ destinies, whites’ and Blacks’ alike, are intertwined. The echoes of Black Abolitionist Rhetoric and Black Sermonic Rhetoric are clearly evident in this speech. Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream”

⁸¹ The Nation of Islam in particular advocated for black supremacy. An analysis of the organization’s arguments reveals that Elijah Muhammad advocated for black supremacy in much the same rhetorical fashion that white argued for white supremacy.

speech as well as others he delivered to promote the Civil Rights Movement's agenda provides a record of Black Rhetoric's evolution that serves a twofold purpose. One, Dr. King's speech reveals Black Rhetoric's capacity to think Being, as understood thus far in my argument, by thinking what is most thought-provoking (i.e., human dignity/rights) through a representational language (i.e., signifying) that seeks an ethical (i.e., Maatian ethics) encounter with Others. As a consequence of Dr. King's Black Hermeneutic Situation, he is able to acquire and develop his skills in oratory by engaging the three canons of Black Rhetoric in order to articulate the Civil Right Movement's agenda. His doing so constructs the aforementioned record of Black Rhetoric's evolution in which future orators looked to Dr. King as an exemplum for addressing oppression in any form it takes (i.e., race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.). "I Have a Dream" remains Dr. King's most famous speech and is therefore his most quoted, but the legacy he left points to Black Rhetoric's possibilities for addressing oppression's dehumanizing effects in order to signify on the oppressor's claims to superiority through a dual-voiced position that recognizes the dynamics of privilege and power in oppressor/oppressed systems with ultimate aim of deconstructing the oppressor/oppressed hierarchy by affirming humanity and reclaiming human dignity. Evidence for this possibility exists in Dr. King's speeches and sermons that address the needs of humanity more generally.

Dr. King's 1967 sermon "Why I am Opposed to the War in Vietnam" addresses the evils of not only of racism but also economic and militaristic oppression. He saw the Vietnam War as a war on America's poor (white and Black alike) that sought to secure the rights and wealth of a privileged few at the expense of the poor masses in America as well as Vietnam. Dr. King's speech addresses the corruption behind the United State's involvement in the Vietnam conflict and warns that its present course shall "lead to a national disaster" ("War in Vietnam" par. 16). He notes that America "has strayed to the

far country of racism and militarism” in order to expose the corrupt reasoning behind America’s interference in Vietnam. Dr. King’s sermon reveals his skills in oratory as well as Black Rhetoric’s potentiality for speaking against oppression on behalf of humanity, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.:

I am disappointed with our failure to deal positively and forthrightly with the triple evils of racism, economic exploitation, and militarism. The home that all too many Americans left was solidly structured idealistically; its pillars were solidly grounded in the insights of our Judeo-Christian heritage. All men are created equal. Every man is an heir to the legacy of dignity and worth. Every man has rights that are neither conferred by, nor derived from the State – they are God-given. Out of one blood, God made all men to dwell upon the face of the earth. (“War in Vietnam” par. 16)

Dr. King’s sermon demonstrates that Black Rhetoric has the capacity to think Being and in doing so resists dehumanization, deconstructs oppression, affirms humanity, and reclaims human dignity making Black Rhetoric a mode of human expression and not just a mode of expression for Black people. Dr. King was obviously not the sole representative of the Civil Rights Movement, but his speeches have proven over time to be the most referenced, discussed, and analyzed from that movement. But just as Dr. King was not the only spokesman for the Civil Rights Movement, the Civil Rights Movement was not the only movement in the 1950s and 1960s tackling racism and white supremacy.

The Black Power Movement formed in order to provide a more aggressive response to Black dehumanization and white supremacy than the Civil Rights Movement offered. James Cone defines Black Power as the “complete emancipation of black people from white oppression by whatever means black people deem necessary” (6). In other words, “Black power means black freedom, black self-determination, wherein black people no longer view themselves as without human dignity but as men, human beings, with the ability to carve out their own destiny” (Cone 6). Cone argues that whites “seem

to forget about the necessary interrelatedness of love, justice, and power when they encounter black people” (54). The Black Power Movement in general accepted that white supremacist ideology was endemic in the world and therefore integration was not genuinely possible, because whites would never see Blacks as their equals. The Nation of Islam, in particular, capitalized on this belief by repeatedly arguing for Black supremacy through Black Nationalism. As a hegemonic tool of oppression, racism established a power paradigm that America’s superstructure overwhelmingly reinforced and has as of yet refused to reject: white is the measure⁸² of things. The movement reacted and responded to white supremacy by embracing the anger many Blacks harbored for whites: “Black Power then is not black racism or black hatred. Simply stated, Black Power is an affirmation of the humanity of blacks in spite of white racism” (Cone 16). While the Civil Rights Movement under the leadership of Dr. King sought integration and appealed to whites’ pathos, the Black Power Movement believed that only Blacks could understand and sympathize with the Black hermeneutic situation; because, “only blacks really know the extent of white oppression, and thus only blacks are prepared to risk all to be free” (Cone 16).

While Dr. King noted the despair pervasive within the Black Community, Malcolm X noted the anger that accompanied that despair. In an effort to reclaim human dignity, the Black Power Movement and its various supporters such as the Nation of Islam and later the Black Panther Party chose to emphasize Black anger rather than appeal to white guilt; it chose to demand civil rights rather than plead for the constitutional legitimacy of those rights. At the same time, the Black Power Movement countered Dr. King’s nonviolent protest with self-defense. The Black Power Movement in general did not

⁸² A play upon Nietzsche’s “Man is the measure of things” in *Beyond Good and Evil*.

advocate violence but certainly did not support Dr. King's position on non-violence. Malcolm X explained that non-violent protest subjects Blacks to whites and leaves Blacks impotent physically, emotionally, and mentally. According to Malcolm X, self-defense is a divine right and an act that affirms human dignity. Malcolm X learned the lesson of racism's dehumanizing effects early in his life. As a boy, he witnessed his father's murder and his mother's institutionalization, which resulted in his being placed in the care of the Swerlins, who managed a detention home. Living in a home alongside whites provided him with a special insight into white supremacy: "it just never dawned upon them that I could understand, that I wasn't a pet, but a human being. They didn't give me credit for having the same sensitivity, intellect, and understanding that they would have been ready and willing to recognize in a white boy in my position" (*Autobiography* 28). As an adult in prison, Malcolm X's brother, Reginald, introduced him to the Nation of Islam during their visits. After his conversion, Malcolm X rejects his surname 'Little,' discards white aesthetics, and adopts Black self-love. Reading Malcolm X's autobiography reveals the events in his life that constructed his particular epistemological beliefs and served as the basis on which his lived experience led him to adopt the ideologies of the Nation of Islam.

Malcolm X stands out as one who understood the significance of language to a culture and the manner in which a language reflects as well as shapes culture. While Dr. King obviously was a master of metaphor and analogy, Malcolm X took up the other side of the rhetorical coin and relied less on figurative language and more on signifying on and testifying to white supremacy:

[P]eople are always speculating – why am I as I am? To understand that of any person, his whole life, from birth, must be reviewed. All of our experiences fuse into our personality. Everything that ever happened to us is an ingredient [...] the full story is the best way that I know to have it seen, and understood, that I had sunk into the very bottom of the American white man's society [...] in prison— I found Allah and the

religion of Islam and it completely transformed my life” (*Autobiography* 153).

Recognizing his lifelong struggles with white supremacy, Malcolm X devoted the last decade of his life to reclaiming his human dignity by reclaiming his Black identity (i.e., an Afrocentric identity devoid of white aesthetics and ideologies). He pursued this path beginning with his epiphany in prison, which revealed America’s superstructure as enforcing whiteness on Black Americans in order to maintain racial division and to control the destinies of Blacks: “I felt a challenge to plan, and build, an organization that could help to cure the black man in North America of the sickness [that] has kept him under the white man’s heel” (*Autobiography* 319). In 1964, less than a year from his assassination, Malcolm X looked back over his experiences and recognized that since his conversion to Islam, his mission had been to liberate Blacks from white thinking. It is for this reason that his epistemology of lived experience was so significant. He looked at how his efforts to participate in white culture landed him in prison. He also discovered that as long as a racist lens continued to filter whites’ perceptions of Blacks, then Blacks could never integrate into white society nor participate in white culture with Black dignity and respect: “The black man in North America was mentally sick in his cooperative, sheeplike acceptance of the white man’s culture. The black man in North America was spiritually sick because for centuries he had accepted the white man’s Christianity” (*Autobiography* 319). He notes the cultural, religious, political, and economic (i.e., the superstructure) institutions by which whites controlled and oppressed Black life through racism, discrimination, and segregation: “The black man in North America was economically sick and that was evident in one simple fact: as a consumer, he got less than his share, and as a producer gave *least*” (*Autobiography* 320). Malcolm X’s speeches reveal his epistemological lens of lived experience and expose the rhetorical modes by which he attempted to liberate Black America from this oppressive superstructure.

Malcolm X's *A Black Man's History* delivered in December of 1962, launched him into the global spotlight. Up to this point, his work for Nation of Islam focused on increasing membership, but this speech set him apart from other Black leaders, particularly Dr. King. The Afrocentric and Black Nationalist perspectives he embraces as a leader in Nation of Islam reflect the early influence of his father, Earl Little, who was a member of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and supported Marcus Garvey's Black Nationalist agenda. Therefore, the Black Nationalist position proposed by Nation of Islam was not too great a leap from his upbringing. Perhaps one of the most significant experiences in Malcolm X's life that contributed to the position he takes in *Black Man's History* was the KKK's murder of his father and the his mother's mental breakdown afterwards. The young and observant Malcolm X witnessed, experienced, and internalized the fatal sting of white supremacy. Recalling white supremacy's power to destroy his family resurrected a deeply buried animosity, resentment, and indeed hatred of whites that Elijah Muhammad exploited. Malcolm X indulged Black anger towards whites and appealed to *pathos* in his audiences – humiliation, dehumanization, fear, terror, and anger – in order to argue that Black Nationalism was the only realistic path to resisting white supremacy. He attributes Black self-love with the power to realize Black Nationalism's goal of liberation from white oppression. Malcolm X's speech reveals that through believing in Black self-love, Black Nationalism can successfully fulfill its mission through widespread rejection of the white superstructure that reinforces the notion that 'blackness' is inherently inferior to 'whiteness':

Today dark mankind is waking up and is undertaking a new type of thinking, and it is this new type of thinking that is creating new approaches and new reactions that make it almost impossible to figure out what the black man is going to do next, and by black man we mean, as we are taught by The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, we include all those who are non-white. He teaches us that black is the basic color, that black is the foundation or the basis of all colors. And all of our people who have not yet become white are still black, or at least part of

the Black Nation, and here at Muhammad's Mosque when you hear us using the term "black" we mean everybody who's here, regardless of your complexion. If you're here at the Mosque you're black, because the only ticket you need to get into Muhammad's Mosque is to be black. (*Black Man's History* par.1)

Malcolm X reveals his epistemological stance that depends on lived experience in order to construct knowledge. He identifies that it was a common practice among lighter-skinned Blacks to reject the label 'Black,' as they did not desire to affiliate themselves with 'inferior people': "They think of themselves as practically everything else on the color spectrum except black. And no matter how dark one of our people may be, you rarely hear him call himself black" (*Black Man's History* par.1). He then notes that thanks to the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, "so-called Negroes" now proudly embrace the term 'Black' with honor and dignity: "This shows you that a new teaching is taking place and there is a new thinking among the so-called Negroes" (*Black Man's History* par. 1). Malcolm X embraces the term 'Black' but rejects the term 'Negro' because it suggests a white gaze, a white constructed identity that connotes inferiority.

Malcolm X claims that if all one knows of himself and of his history is that of being or having been a slave and as a second-class citizen, he finds it difficult to resist his environment's efforts to reinforce his inferiority. He constructs compelling arguments about the history of Black people and emphasizes a past other than that of slavery in order to expose the dangers of being ignorant of one's own history. He sees education and knowledge as tools of power and recognizes that one of the greatest disparities between Blacks and whites is Blacks' lack of education. He also notes that any education that seeks to empower the educated must be one that includes knowledge of one's history as a prominent feature of that education. What separates whites from Blacks is not merely a Harvard education but more importantly knowledge of one's own history. The knowledge that Malcolm X sought was understanding that results from

Heidegger's *apophantic as*, in which one comes to understand oneself through unconcealment as opposed to comparison. Malcolm X's early speeches fail to embrace the full capacity of Black Rhetoric to think Being because he was trapped in a cycle of a representational, predicative language dependent upon constructing knowledge through comparisons rather than unconcealing his own Being and seeking ethical encounters with other beings' Being.

The Black Nationalist agenda clearly stands in opposition to the Civil Rights Movement and embraces the pitfalls of white supremacy and Western logic. Malcolm X's passion and willingness to expose Black anger attracted thousands to Nation of Islam: "We want no integration with this wicked race that enslaved us. We want complete separation from this race of devils. But we should not be expected to leave America and go back to our homeland empty-handed. After four hundred years of slave labor, we have some back pay coming, a bill owed to us that must be collected" (*God's Judgment* par. 95). The only hope he sees for white America is to repent of her sinful ways and atone "by giving us our true share" (*God's Judgment* par. 96). While many rejected the Black Nationalist argument Malcolm X articulated during his tenure in Nation of Islam, as he rejected them himself before his assassination, his eventual contributions to Black Rhetoric as care and concern for Being should be celebrated. Malcolm X's rhetoric speaks from a hermeneutic position that comes to think Being by recognizing that human beings are beings-in-a-world-alongside-others and that our situatedness towards one another elicits a particular mood that informs our own reactions and responses toward others. Those moods are formed according to our experiences and our understanding and interpretation of our experiences. In other words, Malcolm X reflects the stance that one must always be thinking Being in order to be thinking. When one sets aside thoughts of his own Being and attempts to understand the Being of another through the

construction of comparisons, he loses sight of his own Being and becomes unable to think.

Malcolm X's 1964 speech⁸³ *The Ballot or the Bullet* responds to Dr. King's 1957 speech *Give Us the Ballot*. He takes significant strides toward thinking Being by making clear that converting Blacks to Nation of Islam is no longer his intended purpose; rather, his new aim is to address the injustice and inequality that continues to plague Black Americans in order to secure human dignity for all Blacks:

Although I'm still a Muslim, I'm not here tonight to discuss my religion. I'm not here to try to change your religion. I'm not here to argue or discuss anything that we differ about, because it's time for us to submerge our differences and realize that it is best for us to first see that we have the same problem, a common problem, a problem that will make you catch hell whether you're a Baptist, or a Methodist, or a Muslim, or a nationalist. (*Ballot or the Bullet* par. 3)

Malcolm X deemphasizes his relationship with Islam and instead emphasizes his relationship with the Black Community as a whole: "We're all in the same boat and we all are going to catch the same hell from the same man. He just happens to be a white man. All of us have suffered here, in this country, political oppression at the hands of the white man, economic exploitation at the hands of the white man, and social degradation at the hands of the white man" (*Ballot or the Bullet* par. 3). By thinking Being, Malcolm X continues to concern himself with one mood in particular: resisting white supremacy. However, he directs that anger towards whites' actions rather than whites' Being in general: "Now in speaking like this, it doesn't mean that we're anti-white, but it does mean we're anti-exploitation, we're anti-degradation, we're anti-oppression. And if the white man doesn't want us to be anti-him, let him stop oppressing and exploiting and degrading us" (*Ballot or the Bullet* par. 4). This speech embraces a more global

⁸³ This speech appears after Malcolm X's break with Elijah Muhammad while he was still a member of Nation of Islam.

perspective and proclaims that it is not Black Americans' differences that matter but rather their shared experiences as an oppressed people that should be the focus of his oratory. His speech engages in testifying, signifying, revealing, and cataloging as evidence for his claims. His speech fulfills the four modes of Black Sermonic Rhetoric by calling for social activism, defending Black identity, unveiling cultural survival, and most important of all, speaking on behalf of black empowerment. In this particular instance, he sees Blacks' gaining voting rights as a means by which to obtain their dignity through full participation in the democratic process as citizens. Malcolm X provided the aggressive Black voice that so many Black Americans wanted to express but feared doing so. He exposes Black anger, animosity, and more importantly the knowledge that white America's immorality exploits and oppresses Blacks:

I'm not a politician, not even a student of politics; in fact, I'm not a student of much of anything. I'm not a Democrat. I'm not a Republican, and I don't even consider myself an American. If you and I were Americans, there'd be no problem. Those Honkies that just got off the boat, they're already Americans; Polacks are already Americans; the Italian refugees are already Americans. Everything that came out of Europe, every blue-eyed thing, is already an American. And as long as you and I have been over here, we aren't Americans yet. (Edchange.org par. 8)

White Americans' refusal to acknowledge Blacks' citizenship rights, which includes full and equal protection under the law reveals the greatest disparity between Black and white America: constitutionally protected citizenship. Despite the Emancipation Proclamation, the superstructure in America continued to disenfranchise Blacks through segregation as well as other forms of race-based discrimination:

I'm not going to sit at your table and watch you eat, with nothing on my plate, and call myself a diner. Sitting at the table doesn't make you a diner, unless you eat some of what's on that plate. Being here in America doesn't make you an American. Being born here in America doesn't make you an American. Why, if birth made you an American, you wouldn't need any legislation; you wouldn't need any amendments to the Constitution; you wouldn't be faced with civil-rights filibustering in

Washington D.C., right now. They don't have to pass civil-rights legislation to make a Polack an American. (Edchange.org par. 9)

The deductive reasoning within his analogy unveils the Black Hermeneutic Situation as one that constantly points towards the possibilities of citizenship. Unlike Dr. King, Malcolm X's metaphors and analogies never engage in a lyrical style; he remains strictly a prose-style speaker. While Dr. King was concerned with balancing his message of despair with hope, Malcolm X tended to balance his despair with anger as a call to resistance. As a mood, anger towards and resistance of white supremacy permitted Malcolm X the voice he needed to make emphatic statements about oppression, degradation, and exploitation in order to motivate his audience to take direct action. At this point in his thinking, Malcolm X remains convinced that whites in general are incapable of acting on behalf of non-whites without a benefit to themselves of some kind.

Shortly after this speech, Malcolm X's revelatory experience in Mecca encourages him to abandon his Black Nationalist beliefs while at the same time reinforcing his Afrocentric stance. He learns to support Dr. King's and the Civil Rights Movement's claim that the path towards equality rests within the power of the vote. In order to correct the corruption in Washington that perpetuates inequality, Malcolm X argues that the twenty-two million Blacks living in America must demand their right to vote so that they may elect representatives that will advocate for the needs of Black Americans. He returned from Mecca with a mission to connect Black Americans with Africans: "Malcolm saw and made the connection among Africans on a global level [that] indicated not only his Garveyite roots but also his role as a leader of Africans throughout the world. Not since Garvey himself did Africans throughout the world have a leader who stressed the importance of the global unity of Africans" (Conyers Jr. and Smallwood 152). While in Arabia, "he made his historic pilgrimage to Mecca, where he saw the true face of Islam. There he experienced brotherhood between races that he had never witnessed

while in America. The experience profoundly influenced his political advocacy of human rights throughout the world” (Conyers Jr. and Smallwood 153). Witnessing true Islam and Muslims of all races embracing one another as equals challenged all that he had learned from Elijah Muhammad.

After the Bombing reveals Malcolm X’s new ways of thinking about the Black Hermeneutic Situation and the solution needed to dissolve white supremacy. He speaks to his audience about the revolution in Africa and notes its international significance: “Tonight one of the things that has to be stressed is that which has not only the United States very much worried but which also has France, Great Britain, and most of the powers, who formerly were known as colonial powers worried also, and that primarily is the African revolution” (*After the Bombing* par. 6). Malcolm X explains that the African Diaspora as a consequence not only of slavery but more recently WWII, exposes the reason white colonial powers are concerned with the African revolution. He then notes that Africans who managed to escape their colonized countries to non-colonized African countries immediately began to organize for the oppressed people they left behind: “as soon as they got where they were going, they then began to organize into pressure groups to get governmental support at the international level against the injustices they were experiencing back home” (*After the Bombing* par. 9). He criticizes the Black Americans living in Africa for “just socializing” and turning “their back on the cause over here” (*After the Bombing* par. 10). His criticism is more than simply comparative for instructional purposes; he testifies to what he witnessed in Africa and reveals as to why his experiences in Africa are significant to the plight of Black Americans. As an activist and as a leader, Malcolm X speaks about his own efforts to unify Blacks seeks support for his efforts by converting his audience into social activists. His care and concern for

the Black Community as a global community reveals his acknowledging the need for all community members to unite in the struggle for dignity and equal rights.

White supremacy's institutional racism reinforced a comparative 'us' versus 'them' paradigm by regularly identifying non-white people, traditions, music, speech, and activities as 'Negro,' 'Colored,' or 'Black.' The fact that the oppressive powers were white and the oppressed people tended to be non-white reveals a socio-historical rather than a 'natural' or 'essential' difference. Malcolm X adopts a Marxist perspective inspired by Franz Fanon: "Malcolm's first major contribution to Africana critical theory was an Afrocentric *ideology* – but not an ideology in a negative sense, as in 'propaganda' (Schmitt 71) or a 'narrow' and purportedly 'normative...collection of beliefs and values held by an individual or group for other than purely epistemic reasons'" (Conyers Jr. and Smallwood 287). Rather, Malcolm X developed an ideology on the basis of human dignity and did so in order to critique white supremacy and Eurocentrism as negative ideologies: "Agreeing with Fanon's and Cabral's criticism of the absence and ignorance of ideology among Africana freedom fighters" (Conyers Jr. and Smallwood 287). In other words, Malcolm X developed an ideological system that looked not only at social class but the intersections of class and race as being supported by white supremacy and Eurocentrism, both of which construct value systems for the ruling race as well as the ruling class. Malcolm X understood the manner in which the dominant social class engaged racism in order to secure its dominance as being 'natural.' Therefore, Malcolm X had to construct a positive ideology that emphasized human dignity and offered a critique of racism and Eurocentrism as hegemonic tools of a dominant social class.

Without devoting an entire book to Malcolm X, as many have done, it is not possible to filter through all of the complexities of his arguments. I have attempted to sort out some of the more significant contributions of his speeches to Black Rhetoric, namely

his realization that the struggle for human dignity must underlie any resistance to white supremacy and oppression in general. One cannot ignore Malcolm X's contributions or the significance of following the progression of his thought to Black Rhetoric. Although he struggled along the way, Malcolm X discovered that thinking Being is essential to reclaiming as well as preserving human dignity.

Any examination of the Black Power Movement without a close analysis of the Black Panthers would be incomplete. Historically, the Black Church was the seed of Black Protest: "The appeals of most black spokesmen were based on strong religious, moral, and legal considerations. Since many black leaders were ministers, their arguments were molded by their own religious precepts and those of their followers," whether Christian or Muslim (Dick 242). However, the Black Power Movement generated black leaders outside the jurisdiction of the Church. Leaders such as Stokely Carmichael, Robert F. Williams, and Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) "combined their struggles around African American identity" by joining efforts with the Black Arts Movement, Black Feminists, student radicals, and other secular, grassroots movements (Joseph 11). The Black Power Movement adopted Malcolm X's Afrocentrism as a foundation of pride, dignity, and empowerment for the purposes of activism. Black pride meant Black self-love on the basis of resurrecting an African-inspired identity. Afro hairstyles came to signify Black Power by rejecting white aestheticism. Reaching out to and originating from secular areas of Black life allowed for more diversity within the Panthers's struggle for equality: "Drawing from social, political, cultural, and intellectual history," we can "examine wide-ranging implications of postwar black activism by shedding light on the deep connections between black activists and grassroots communities, black radicals and the Third World, the Black Arts and the international arena, and black urban politics and black nationalism" (Joseph 11). Malcolm X, Franz

Fanon, Stokely Carmichael, and others opened the door for an alternative to the Civil Rights Movement's non-violent protest by embracing Afrocentrism as foundational to Black Power. Despite the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Black Americans continued to languish in the despair of poverty and disenfranchisement as a consequence of institutionalized racism, segregation, police brutality, and white violence. The latter half of the 1960s and the early 1970s sparked a cultural revolution in Black America. Many scholars suggest that the assassination of Malcolm X triggered this movement as an alternative to what some considered the ineffectiveness of the Civil Rights Movement. Fueled by anger at the NOI for murdering Malcolm X and at the passiveness of King's non-violent protest, many Black Americans, particularly the younger generation, determined to take matters of race and inequality into their own hands. The notion of proclaiming dignity and respect through one's willingness to respond to violence with self-defense was one of Malcolm X's positions that the Black Power Movement adopted. The Black Panthers "rejected nonviolence and elevated armed resistance [as] an alternative protest strategy" (Joseph 146). The Black Panther Party's "concept of self-defense included revolutionary violence and appeared to serve primarily as a symbolic means to defy racist authorities and to nurture notions of militant black manhood" (Joseph 146). In other words, the Black Panther Party adopted a militant appearance as a means by which to reclaim human dignity in the face of white supremacy.

Jean-Paul Sartre's combining Marxism and Existentialism yields a philosophical position that examines humanity's dilemma of choice and critiques racism as a material example of Hegel's master/slave dialectic. According to Sartre, when one finds himself at the point of weariness in his despair, he chooses one of two paths: defeat or victory. In fact, one could argue that man is his most humane when he is violently defending his humanity: "We find our humanity this side of death and despair" (Sartre lvii). Sartre

expands on this by criticizing the colonizer's belief that dignity and humanity are zero-sum games: "we were men at his expense, he becomes a man at ours" (Ivii). In other words: "Colonial violence not only aims at keeping these enslaved men at a respectful distance, it also seeks to dehumanize them. No effort is spared to demolish their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs, and to destroy their culture without giving them ours. We exhaust them into a mindless state" (Sartre I). Newton and Seale approached the issue of race in America through this post-colonial lens. They viewed themselves as the colonized and whites as the colonizers. Sartre notes that colonial violence dehumanizes; therefore, it is possible "to change a man into an animal" but he qualifies this claim by warning that "they can't do it without weakening him considerably" (I). Sartre is referencing malnourishment, specifically, in addition to beating the colonized; however, these are not the only means by which to weaken a people. Newton and Seale acknowledge that segregation, discrimination, police brutality, disenfranchisement, and poverty are all effective mechanisms employed in the course of dehumanization. Consequently, Newton and Seale view linear reciprocity (i.e., violence begetting violence) as the only solution to their dilemma.

Inspired by Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Newton and Seale viewed the Black Panther Party as the colonized rebelling against their colonizer: "He is dominated but not domesticated. He is made to feel inferior, but by no means convinced of his inferiority. He patiently waits for the colonist to let his guard down and then jumps on him. The muscles of the colonized are always tensed" (Fanon 16). The Black Panther Party took Fanon's position on the colonized peasant class: "It has nothing to lose and everything to gain" (23). In response to accusations that the Black Panthers merely wanted to "kill up white people," *The Black Panther* published a statement claiming that Black Panthers "do not claim the right to indiscriminate violence. [They] seek no bloodbath" (Foner 19). On

the contrary, “it is the cops who claim the right to indiscriminate violence and practice it everyday” (Foner 19). The Black Panther Party held the position that the only way to claim human dignity was to defend humanity by any means necessary. The Black Panthers acknowledged that whites reserved the right to violent self-defense as exclusively their own. Newton published a brief essay in the May 18, 1968 issue of *The Black Panther* outlining his methodology and justification for encouraging his members to respond to violence with violent self-defense: “It is not necessary to organize thirty million Black people in primary groups of twos and threes but it is important for the party to show people how to go about revolution” (Foner 42). Newton outlines the three ways one learns how to engage in a revolution: “through study, through observation, and through actual experience” (Foner 42). Inspired by Fanon, Newton claims that igniting activism is essential to the revolution and that the Party’s responsibility is to teach the Black Community how to engage effectively as activists: “Without this knowledge of the black community one could not gain the fundamental knowledge of the black revolution in racist America” (Fanon 42).

In addition to Fanonist Marxism, the courage, respect, and dignity of which Malcolm X spoke bolstered Newton and Seale. Fueled with academic enthusiasm and youthful optimism, they believed that they had succeeded in structuring an organization that would end the oppressive conditions of Black Americans and even address the conditions of poverty for all Americans. Black Panther rhetoric echoed Malcolm X’s stance on Black Nationalism as empowering Blacks to address white supremacy and Fanonist Marxism by addressing social disparities. Much of what sparked the Black Power Movement and the Black Panther Party was the belief that the Civil Rights Movement failed to make significant and necessary social changes. The Black Power Movement acknowledged that certain legislative changes resulted from Dr. King’s and

others' efforts, but the changes had not brought about a radical change in Black life. Segregation, although illegal, was still an issue; police brutality remained a constant and pervasive threat; unequal education continued to plague Black children; discrimination in the workplace still hindered Blacks' efforts to gain economic progress; and, the judicial system relentlessly persisted in treating Blacks unfairly through false arrest, unfair sentencing, and insufficient representation.

In 1967, Newton, Seale, along with their first members Bobby Hutton and David Hilliard issued the first edition of their newspaper, *The Black Panther*, which "called on the black community to protest the police killing of Denzil Dowell" (Foner xi). Their early activism took shocking measures by policing the police. Newton and Seale carried shotguns and law books with them on patrol to ensure that Black people were not being harassed by the Oakland City Police. Their actions drew the attention of the California legislature and then-Governor Ronald Reagan, which resulted in California attempting to pass a bill that would ban the Black Panthers from carrying guns in public. At a speaking event where then-Governor Reagan addressed students on the state capital lawn, Seale took advantage of the reporters' presence and read their Executive Mandate #1: "The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense believes that the time has come for Black people to arm themselves against this terror before it is too late...We believe that the Blacks communities of America must rise up as one man to halt the progression of a trend that leads inevitable to their total destruction" (Foner xi). This incident led to the arrest of all members present and helped launch the Black Panthers onto the national scene. Eventually, J. Edgar Hoover's counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO), which aimed "to neutralize militant black nationalists," successfully weakened the Black Panthers with deadly attacks and regular arrests (Foner xiv-xv). Leadership disputes and arrests left the Black Panther Party in disarray until it eventually dissolved. Newton attempted to

revive the party in 1970 by “de-emphasizing police confrontations in favor of survival programs that would meet the everyday needs of black communities while also educating black people,” but Cleaver rejected Newton’s direction and split from the Black Panthers (Foner xv). But by 1977, the Black Panthers buckled under the pressure of COINTELPRO, police attacks, internal disputes, and dissolved for good.

Newton and Seale, like Malcolm X, recognized the anger Black Americans harbored and chose to direct that anger into activism and self-defense: “Unlike Malcolm, however, the philosophical underpinnings of the new black militancy were static. They remained encased within the ideas of revolution and black nationhood, ideas Malcolm had outgrown by the time of his death” (Grier and Cobbs 201-2). What Newton and Seale failed to realize was the maturity in thought that Malcolm X achieved before his death, which led to his rejection of Black Nationalism. Malcolm X’s “stature has made even his earlier statements gospel and men now find themselves willing to die for words [that] in retrospect [were] only milestones in the growth of a fantastic man” (Grier and Cobbs 202). As young men, energized by the boldness of Fanon and Malcolm X, Newton and Seale felt emboldened, encouraged, and energized to take on the problems facing Black America. They had a plan that addressed directly the needs of Black Americans and all who suffered under the suffocating effects of poverty. What they did not have a plan for was Hoover’s COINTELPRO. This was a power that the Black Panthers were ill prepared for and ill equipped to manage. Newton and Seale relied on their knowledge that Black Americans are survivors and that their survival instincts coupled with rage would bring them the victory they desired: “Black people have shown a genius for surviving under the most deadly circumstances. They have survived because of their close attention to reality” (Grier and Cobbs 208). Like Malcolm X, The Black Panthers acknowledged that Black Americans cannot escape the reality of their

oppressed state: "They are of necessity bound to reality, chained to the facts of the times; historically the penalty for misjudging a situation involving white men has been death" (Grier and Cobbs 208). Their plan to address the oppression of poverty with education, jobs, healthcare, and nutrition was an effective method for empowering Black Americans; but, their insistence on pushing a militant agenda led to their ultimate demise.

Being is not an entity but a totality that can never be expressed; however, when one thinks Being, one points towards the possibilities of that totality. Therefore, one must reject subject/object paradigms that conceal Being. Malcolm X reached this point of thinking Being, but sadly had no time to explore it further before his life was cut short. His final revelation was that the problem of racism is a human problem and not a social, political, or economic one that can be addressed by the people or leaders of any given nation. He recognized that racism is globally a human problem that extends beyond an analysis of various categories of the world and must be viewed in terms of our *existential* and *existentielle*. This becomes the hallmark of Black Rhetoric's ability to think Being; it is a mode of expression that like poetry creates an opening for the unconcealing of Being through signifying as opposed to representational language. Black Rhetoric escapes the West's propositional and representational mode of understanding the world and permits rhetors and hermeneuts alike to engage with the world by recognizing that speaking and listening are authentic ways of Being-in-the-world that think Being through a signifying language.

By way of bringing this dissertation's argument full circle, I offer a final analysis of President Obama's demonstrating Black Rhetoric's potentiality for thinking Being in order to deconstruct oppression, affirm humanity, and reclaim human dignity. On January 21, 2013, President Obama took his oath of office for a second time and commenced to reveal his mission for his second term in office. His speech incorporates the *tropes*

examined throughout this dissertation and in doing so fulfills the three canons of Black Rhetoric. On this occasion, President Obama takes up the mantle left by Dr. King, Malcolm X, and the Black Panther Party and speaks to the American people on behalf of those suffocating under the strangulation of a new oppression that has taken root in this country: corporatocracy. Racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and classism remain hurdles that this nation continues to leap. Corporatocracy has not replaced these social hurdles but has centralized them behind the mask of capitalism. Corporate supremacy is the new face of white supremacy and the newest enemy of humanity. Corporatocracy seeks one aim – profit – and does so by any means necessary. Corporatocracy transfigures racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and classism into hegemonic tools of oppression that build an income inequality gap in which power and wealth are centralized in the hands of the very few by exploiting the labor and objecthood⁸⁴ of Others. In order to deconstruct this new oppression in American society and affirm the humanity and human dignity of all Americans, President Obama situates his speech according to the canonical rules of Black Rhetoric and opens his speech with the *trope* of revisionist patriotism:

Each time we gather to inaugurate a President we bear witness to the enduring strength of our Constitution. We affirm the promise of our democracy. We recall that what binds this nation together is not the colors of our skin or the tenets of our faith or the origins of our names. What makes us exceptional – what makes us American – is our allegiance to an idea articulated in a declaration made more than two centuries ago. (“Inaugural Address” par. 2)

He quotes the Preamble in order to reveal the inclusiveness of its meaning and to assert that the promises made in that document remain relevant and applicable to all Americans. He claims that a government of the people is necessary in order to protect

⁸⁴ Thanks to Dr. Penelope Ingram for this term.

and promote the rights of citizens: “we have always understood that when times change, so must we; that fidelity to our founding principles requires new responses to new challenges; that preserving our individual freedoms ultimately requires collective action” (“Inaugural Address par. 12). President Obama challenges the notion that power should reside within the hands of the few at the expense of the many and incorporates Collaborative Deliberation and Humanist Reciprocity in order to appeal to Americans. He claims that the American people constitute a community in which individuals collectively work toward the greater good of the community: “No single person can train all the math and science teachers we’ll need to equip our children for the future, or build the roads and networks and research labs that will bring new jobs and businesses to our shores. Now, more than ever, we must do these things together, as one nation and one people” (“Inaugural Address” par. 12). President Obama’s testifies to successes of his previous term in office and situates himself to continue that success by tackling the growing issue of corporate oppression: “For we, the people, understand that our country cannot succeed when a shrinking few do very well and a growing many barely make it” (“Inaugural Address” par. 15). At this point in his speech, he signifies on the capitalist model of democracy as beholdng to free enterprise and the so-called inherent morality of the free-market in order to expose the mechanisms of oppression fueled by greed that are working to isolate wealth and power in the hands of the few via the exploitation of the masses and the crippling of the middle-class:

We believe that America’s prosperity must rest upon the broadshoulders of a rising middle class. We know that America thrives when every person can find independence and pride in their work; when the wages of honest labor liberate families from the brink of hardship. We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else, because she is an American; she is free, and she is equal, not just in the eyes of God but also in our own. (“Inaugural Address” par. 15)

The *tropes* of revisionist patriotism rooted in Enlightenment thinking, a secular application of Black Liberation Theology, testifying, revelating, signifying, double-consciousness, and of course the affirmation of humanity and the reclamation of human dignity through the deconstruction of oppression are evident throughout his speech and are particularly so in this segment. Rather than speaking from a position of race-based double-consciousness to race-based oppression, President extends the possibilities of Black Rhetoric to address oppression in all its various forms, including an economic oppression that serves the aim of corporate supremacy. This inaugural address, perhaps more so than any other in history, stands out because of the solidly liberal and progressive claims he makes.

President Obama, protected by never having to run for office again, was able to take political risks⁸⁵ in his speech and be the first president to mention climate change, gay rights, gun control, the newest assault on women's rights, and corporate greed in an inaugural address. President Obama's own Black Hermeneutic Situation and skills in Black Rhetoric permit him to extend Black Rhetoric's possibilities for thinking Being beyond the realm of race. Careful analysis of this speech reveals the President's careful imitation of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" in order to address the mechanisms of oppression still at work in America. Like Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" *anaphora*, President Obama casts his dream through the lens of a journey:

It is now our generation's task to carry on what those pioneers [(such as Dr. King, whom he mentions just before this segment of his speech)] began. For our journey is not complete until our wives, our mothers and daughters can earn a living equal to their efforts. Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law – for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well. Our journey is not

⁸⁵ The political risks he takes in this speech have the potential to harm the Democratic Party and not his own political career.

complete until no citizen is forced to wait for hours to exercise the right to vote. Our journey is not complete until we find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful immigrants who still see America as a land of opportunity – until bright young students and engineers are enlisted in our workforce rather than expelled from our country. Our journey is not complete until all of our children, from the streets of Detroit to the hills of Appalachia, to the quiet lanes of Newtown, know that they are cared for and cherished and always safe from harm. (“Inaugural Address” par. 26)

President Obama’s speech demonstrates a way of speaking and listening as care and concern for Being in which the canons of Black Rhetoric may be applied in order to resist oppression, affirm humanity, reclaim human dignity, and most important of all – think Being.

Chapter 6

Black Rhetoric: Signifying, Poetry, and the Art of Thinking Being

It is my desire that this dissertation not be the final word on the relationship between Black Rhetoric and Black Hermeneutics but instead serve as the beginning of a much-needed conversation on the two. Consequently, this chapter shall do less in terms of drawing sweeping conclusions and do much more in terms of opening up opportunities for discussion and academic inquiry with regard to the evolution of Black Rhetoric. In order to do so, this chapter shall continue my examination of President Obama as an example of a contemporary Black Orator by situating my examination of his speeches within the historical context that contributed to his own rhetorical productions – particularly his use of revisionist patriotism. Therefore, I shall begin by looking once more at the Black Hermeneutic Situation – a hermeneutic circle in which Black Rhetoric functions as a means through which one reclaims human dignity and at the same time recognizes white supremacy and whites’ ability to conceal human dignity, grounds Black Rhetoric in thinking Being. In order for Black Rhetoric to confront white supremacy’s ability to dehumanize Blacks, it must confront the institutions in which white supremacy operates. Revisionist patriotism⁸⁶ signifies on the constitutional promise of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” that Aryan Revisionists⁸⁷ claim to be the exclusive rights of

⁸⁶ As discussed in previous chapters, revisionist patriotism develops as a rhetorical *trope* under the influence of Enlightenment ideals popularized throughout the early formation of the United States – a democratic nation founded under the principles of liberty and basic human rights.

⁸⁷ This is the term that Martin Bernal uses in *Black Athena* to identify Eurocentric, white supremacists’ active engagement in revising history and affecting institutional powers in order to establish white, Christian males as the superior race.

white males and argues that this constitutional promise⁸⁸ is guaranteed to all citizens of the United States, regardless of color or gender.⁸⁹ In the opening lines of his March 2008 *A More Perfect Union* speech, Barack Obama draws inspiration from his antecedents (Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, and, of course, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.) in order to ground his own use of the revisionist patriotism *trope* within the history of Black Americans' struggle for equal rights. He describes his campaign's historical context as continuing the ever-necessary struggle for civil (i.e., human) rights that began with "words on a parchment" and has since been fought for through "protests and struggle, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience, and always at great risk" (*A More Perfect Union* par. 5). He situates his bid for the presidency within this specific historical context as his effort to continue the struggles of his antecedents: "This was one of the tasks we set forth at the beginning of this campaign – to continue the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America" (*A More Perfect Union* par. 6). In order to make his story an exemplum of the American Dream and forge ties with white Americans,

⁸⁸ In order for revisionist patriotism to be effective and hold up under Aryan Revisionists' attacks, it must be logically sound. Therefore, revisionist patriotism invokes the philosophical principles of the Enlightenment, rooted in Humanism, and argues that the Enlightenment's principles of liberty and human rights must apply to all human beings or risk being structurally unsound and therefore insufficient to defend the colonists' rights to declare independence from Britain. Consequently, revisionist patriotism is effective because it permits the Black hermeneut/rhetor to argue on the same grounds as his/her white counterpart by exposing that the claims to inalienable, uncompromised rights made in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution cannot be altered in order to suit the purposes of one group over another without being hypocritical and therefore incongruent. It is this power to expose the hypocrisy of whites that makes revisionist patriotism so effective as a rhetorical *trope*. However, it can only do so if at the same time arguments are made establishing the rightful humanity of Blacks and white supremacists' arguments can be refuted on the grounds of their being formed on the basis of ideological interests as opposed to material realities.

⁸⁹ This of course has since expanded to include various social categories other than race and gender.

which was necessary for him to do as a presidential candidate, he must situate his own life-story within a pro-multicultural interpretation (grounded in Enlightenment thinking) of the American Dream and appeal to his white audience on the basis of a legacy that he shares with whites (his white mother) as opposed to a history that he shares only with his fellow Black Americans (his Black father):

I chose to run for the presidency at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together – unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction – towards a better future for our children and our grandchildren. (*A More Perfect Union* par. 6)

Up to this point in his speech, President Obama has made his argument for an American citizenry united on the basis of common ground as opposed to divided by racial (or cultural) difference. He argues that the fate of all Americans is both intertwined and interdependent, regardless of creed, social status, gender, etc. Thus, the power Americans hold to perfect their Union is also intertwined, and interdependent with all social, gendered, and racial groups and therefore does not rest within the power of one racial group (i.e., whites). This argument rests upon his ability to navigate the rhetorical *trope* of revisionist patriotism successfully, which claims that the Constitution's language guarantees all citizens the right to live the American Dream and no longer makes exceptions on the basis of gender or race, as making these exceptions nullifies the logical grounding of the claim itself. Given the specific rhetorical context in which this

speech⁹⁰ was delivered, it was vital to the life of his campaign that then-Senator Obama testify to his ability to relate to and understand the needs of whites in order to narrow the divide between himself and the white voters. In order to do so, he introduces white Americans to the Black Hermeneutic Situation by focusing on what he, as a biracial man, has in common with white Americans as well as what makes his story somewhat different from but not entirely alien to whites' own stories.

Not unlike the Slave Narratives and Black Abolitionist speeches of the past, President Obama moves rather quickly from the revisionist patriotism evident in his opening lines, in which he identifies the mission of the nation's founding documents as securing the common good and inalienable rights of free and equal citizens, to his own experiences with white supremacy's efforts to suppress this promise – being careful not to alienate himself from white America: “I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton's Army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas” (*A More Perfect Union* par. 8). In these two sentences, President Obama manages to forge a biological link between his own heritage and that of the vast majority of white Americans. He invokes specifically patriotic, in fact iconic, images from World

⁹⁰ Barack Obama was compelled to answer the criticisms and fears white Americans expressed upon hearing clips from Rev. Jeremiah Wright's sermons that spread like a virus through the media. In keeping with the tradition of Black Sermonic Rhetoric, Rev. Wright speaks against the injustice of racial inequality and exposes the dehumanizing legacy of white privilege in decidedly theological terms from his pulpit (i.e., Black Liberation Theology). While Rev. Wright's so-called “God Damn America” sermon was not shocking to any listener familiar with Black Sermonic Rhetoric and Black Liberation Theology, to the untrained ear, Rev. Wright's words were frighteningly reminiscent of anti-white Black Nationalist Rhetoric. So as not to lose his political *ethos*, then-Senator Obama had to reject his pastor's language while at the same time interpreting the Black Hermeneutic Situation out of which Rev. Wright's sermons arose. The result of these efforts was his *A More Perfect Union* speech.

War II in order to solidify his genetic claim to the American Dream through his mother's birthright. He identifies his duality (i.e., Kenya and Kansas) but immediately focuses his audience on the white half of his ancestry in order to establish a common ground with white voters, particularly older whites. However, President Obama does not leave the testimony of his life-story there; he testifies to his experience with all walks of life and presents himself as embodying the American Dream by being the quintessential everyman:

I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and – an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible. (*A More Perfect Union* par. 8)

This introduction to his life story is not only the political capital with which he can appeal to each American voter but also serves to ground his hermeneutic situation as being unique to his political landscape. He does not reside on one side of the racial aisle nor does he straddle the color line; on the contrary, President Obama testifies to his existence as embodying the possibilities of Being-in-the-world absent a line of racial demarcation (i.e., the racial everyman). He is also careful to note his capacity to understand the world through various socio-economic lenses, which permit him to appeal to the full spectrum of economic possibilities comprised by the American voters (i.e., the poorest to the wealthiest). More importantly, his life story is rooted at both ends of American polarization (i.e., the white American war hero and the non-white immigrant): "It's a story that hasn't made me the most conventional candidate. But it is a story that has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts – that out of many, we are truly one [(i.e., e pluribus unum)]" (*A More Perfect Union* par. 9). President Obama frames his mini-autobiography within the scope of revisionist

patriotism by appealing to whites' notion of the American Dream as being rooted in opportunity and freedom and signifies on an Enlightenment reading of this dream as being promised to all Americans. He appeals to white voters in particular by revealing the legacy he inherited from his maternal grandparents. As has been the case throughout the history of Black Rhetoric, the Black hermeneut/rhetor invokes Black Rhetoric in order to appeal to whites more so than other Blacks. This remains the case with President Obama's *A More Perfect Union* speech. He delivers this speech in order to appeal to white voters who may fear, particularly in light of Reverend Wright's sermons, that he seeks the presidency in order to exact revenge on whites and to fulfill the long-held desires of Black Nationalists. He is also acutely aware of the fact that many who oppose him were invested in efforts to *other* him as an alien outsider (i.e., a foreigner) not deserving of nor entitled⁹¹ to the American Dream. The race-based fervor driving President Obama's opponents compel him to address the issue of race before the American people and speak directly to white voters who may fear what his presidency would do to the dynamics of race in America. Obviously, there exists within this country a faction of whites that continue to cling to white supremacist views and therefore no appeal could be made to them that would convince them to vote for a Black man; however, President Obama knew that he had to appeal to the vast majority of whites who do not necessarily cling to white supremacist views but are products (most of them unknowingly) of white privilege.

⁹¹ The belief (or hope) that Barack Obama was a Kenyan-born Muslim originated with the "birthers," who claim (and continue to claim) that Barack Obama was not born in the U.S. and therefore is not legally permitted to be president. Numerous sources attest to the underlying racism that drives the "birther" movement in its effort to cast President Obama as an illegitimate president. While this group had some momentum during his campaign and the first years of his presidency, Barack Obama's reelection in 2012 drove this movement to the fringes of American politics and is no longer taken seriously nor given any legitimacy by mainstream media, pundits, or politicians.

The mission of his *A More Perfect Union* speech is to appeal to white voters on the basis of the common ground President Obama shared with them and to use that common ground in order to expose white privilege's roots in white supremacy, which runs counter to the promises of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. In order to meet the objectives of this mission, President Obama's speech educates whites on the Black Hermeneutic Situation and the Black Sermonic Rhetoric of Reverend Wright through the lens of his own Black Hermeneutic situation and his own articulation through Black Rhetoric:

[T]he remarks that have caused this recent firestorm weren't simply controversial. They weren't simply a religious leader's efforts to speak out against a perceived injustice. Instead, they expressed a profoundly distorted view of this country – a view that sees white racism as endemic,⁹² and that elevates what is wrong with America above all that we know is right with America; a view that sees the conflicts in the Middle East as rooted primarily in the actions of stalwart allies like Israel, instead of emanating from the perverse and hateful ideologies of radical Islam. (*A More Perfect Union* par. 15)

Politically, President Obama must “condemn, in unequivocal terms, the statements of Reverend Wright,” or risk losing white voters who do not understand (or reject) the context and meaning of Reverend Wright's words (*A More Perfect Union* par. 14). However, his own hermeneutic situation and knowledge of Black Rhetoric (including Black Liberation Theology) permit him an opportunity and mode by which to educate

⁹² Rev. Wright's so-called “God Damn America” sermon in 2003 sparked a political “firestorm” in 2008. In his sermon, Rev. Wright makes the theological argument that God shall “damn American for as long as she acts like she is God and she is supreme.” Rev. Wright's sermon is rooted in Black Liberation Theology, which reads scripture as God's promise to liberate mankind from oppression through the destruction of the oppressors on the basis that God alone is supreme and the only judge of mankind. He also invokes the tenets of Black Liberation Theology that condemn white supremacy as violating God's commandment to love the neighbor. When listening to the full sermon, one discovers that Rev. Wright contextualizes this claim both scripturally and historically (e.g., the fall of the Roman Empire as the will of God). Of course, it was politically expedient for President Obama's opponents to select the clip of Rev. Wright saying, “God damn America” and ignore the context of those words.

whites on the Black Hermeneutic situation and Black Rhetoric: “race is an issue that I believe this nation cannot afford to ignore right now” (*A More Perfect Union* par. 26). President Obama uses the oversimplified and non-contextualized clips of Reverend Wright’s sermon as an opportunity to ground the reverend’s sermon within the context of white supremacy’s dehumanizing effects in order to educate his audience on the multi-faceted consequences of white supremacy through frequently covert efforts to secure white privilege: “The fact is that the comments that have been made and the issues that have surfaced over the last few weeks reflect the complexities of race in this country that we’ve never really worked through – a part of our union that we have yet to perfect” (*A More Perfect Union* par. 27). He casts his explication of Reverend Wright’s sermon as being necessary to fulfilling the mission of the nation’s founding documents: “Understanding this reality requires a reminder of how we arrived at this point” (*A More Perfect Union* par. 28). So as not to discourage his white audience with an exhaustive retelling of the nation’s indisputable history of racial injustice, President Obama first reminds his audience of the legacy of white supremacy and then connects this particular segment of American history to the larger narrative of economic and social inequality in America:

We do not need to recite here the history of racial injustice in this country. But we do need to remind ourselves that so many of the disparities that exist in the African-American community today can be directly traced to inequalities passed on from an earlier generation that suffered under the brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow. (*A More Perfect Union* par. 28)

He briefly catalogs the legal and social consequences of racism on the realities of Black American life: “lack of economic opportunity,” “shame and frustration,” “erosion of black families,” “lack of basic services in so many urban black neighborhoods,” “all [of which] helped create a cycle of violence, blight and neglect that continue to haunt us [(i.e., Black Americans)]” (*A More Perfect Union* par. 29). He then explains that this was the political,

social, and economic “reality in which Reverend Wright and other African-American’s of his generation grew up” (*A More Perfect Union* par. 30). He notes more specifically that Reverend Wright’s generation “came of age in the late fifties and early sixties, a time when segregation was still the law of the land and opportunity was systematically constricted” (*A More Perfect Union* par. 31). Consequently, the view of the world that Reverend Wright’s generation adopted was necessary for survival in world that set out both systematically and institutionally to marginalize, disenfranchise, and destroy the Black community. He explains that for “the men and women of Reverend Wright’s generation, the memories of humiliation and doubt and fear have not gone away; nor has the anger and the bitterness of those years” (*A More Perfect Union* par. 32). At this point in his speech, President Obama creates a space in which he can explain the words of Reverend Wright as born out of a particular hermeneutic situation (i.e., white supremacy) as well as create a generational distance between himself and Reverend Wright. More importantly, President Obama creates the room needed to link Reverend Wright’s worldview to that of white Americans struggling to survive in poverty. In order to do so, he notes that the anger Black Americans feel, which is generally not expressed in the presence of whites, may not always be “productive [as] all too often it distracts attention from solving real problems”; but, “the anger is real; it is powerful; and to simply wish it away, to condemn it without understanding its roots, only serves to widen the chasm of misunderstanding that exists between the races” (*A More Perfect Union* par. 33). At this point in the speech President Obama reflects the possibilities of Black Rhetoric’s ability to speak from a hermeneutic situation not necessarily rooted in skin color but one rooted in the social, political, and economic realities of a marginalized, disenfranchised, and

oppressed people. This segment of his speech marks a decided turn in Black Rhetoric's evolution in which white supremacy begins to give way to corporatocracy⁹³ and the Black Hermeneutic situation begins to view the world through an economic reality as much if not more than a racial reality. This is not to say that racism is no longer an issue. On the contrary, racism remains an issue for non-white Americans. However, a new ideology (i.e., corporatocracy) has taken root in America and the world as a whole and discriminates according to economic realities with little regard for race. While President Obama does not use this term within his speech, he speaks to the reality this term signifies:

In fact, a similar anger exists within segments of the white community. Most working- and middle-class white Americans don't feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race. Their experience is the immigrant experience – as far as they're concerned, no one's handed them anything, they've built it from scratch. They've worked hard all their lives, many times only to see their jobs shipped overseas or their pension dumped after a lifetime of labor. They are anxious about their futures, and feel their dreams slipping away; in an era of stagnant wages and global competition, opportunity comes to be seen as a zero sum game, in which your dreams come at my expense. So when they are told to bus their children to a school across town; when they hear that an African American is getting an advantage in landing a good job or a spot in a good college because of an injustice that they themselves never committed; when they're told that their fears about crime in urban neighborhoods are somehow prejudiced, resentment builds over time. (*A More Perfect Union* par. 34)

President Obama carefully exposes the root of whites' struggles with poverty at the hands of corporate greed in order to express his understanding of white fears, anger, and resentment at the loss of the American middle-class. He must present himself as capable of representing white Americans' interests, and to do so he must reveal his

⁹³ Corporatocracy is the term applied to capitalism's decided break with its theoretical roots and reveals the new economic reality in which corporations manipulate the world's economies, politics, militaries, and cultures in order to secure opportunities to maximize profits and power within the hands of a few powerful CEOs.

understanding of a white hermeneutic situation that does not necessarily see the effects of white privilege but instead stagnates under the oppression of corporate greed:

Just as black anger often proved counterproductive, so have these white resentments distracted from the real culprits of the middle class squeeze – a corporate culture rife with inside dealing, questionable accounting practices, and short-term greed; a Washington dominated by lobbyists and special interests; economic policies that favor the few over the many. And yet, to wish away the resentments of white Americans, to label them as misguided or even racist, without recognizing they are grounded in legitimate concerns – this too widens the racial divide, and blocks the path to understanding. (*A More Perfect Union* par. 36)

President Obama's speech reveals Black Rhetoric's possibilities for thinking Being by exposing its possibilities for thinking Being beyond race. Black Rhetoric is so named for the historical reality of its origination; it sought to reclaim human dignity from the suffocating grip of white supremacy. The Black Hermeneutic situation specifically opens up the possibilities for Black Rhetoric's ability to reclaim human dignity by confronting oneself more so than confronting others. In order to do so, Black Rhetoric must be rooted in a concern for humanity, human beings, and more importantly one's own desire to claim rights to human dignity. However, as a mode of expression (i.e., a language event), Black Rhetoric permits each rhetor an opportunity to confront himself⁹⁴ from his own hermeneutic reality. The terms 'Black Hermeneutics' and 'Black Rhetoric' do not suggest that only black-skinned individuals have access to these ways of Being (and speaking) -in-the-world. Rather, the qualifying label 'Black' points to a way of Being-in-the-world that was made an issue and is not necessarily a biological reality but a social reality constructed on the basis of biological diversity.

⁹⁴ I am suggesting here that Heidegger's "apophantic as" points to this particular notion of understanding phenomenon from the phenomenon itself rather than as a comparison to other phenomena.

Heidegger's claims about the competing roles Plato and Aristotle play in the history of rhetoric shed light on the significance of phenomenological hermeneutics' relationship to rhetoric and support my own claims about Black Rhetoric's possibilities for thinking Being. Robin Reames's "The μῦθος⁹⁵ of Pernicious Rhetoric: The Platonic Possibilities of λογός⁹⁶ in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*" claims that Socrates criticized rhetoric because it dealt with possibilities as opposed to absolute truths, which he believed was not only the proper task of the philosopher but a goal of any man desiring wisdom and virtue. Reames points out the tensions between Plato's λογός and that of Aristotle by examining Socratic dialogues that reveal Plato's disapproval of rhetoric. *The Republic* in particular exposes Plato's criticism of *logos* when not used propositionally: "The enslaving power of *logos* is derived in part from the style of the poet" (Reames 139). The musicality of poetry, according to Socrates, creates conditions that enable the poet to take on the identity of the poem's subject: "Certain *logoi* have a power comparable to music and rhythm [...] when the poet 'takes the person of Chryses'" (Reames 139). Socrates, however, rejects this form of mimesis claiming that Homer can never be Chryses: "his words can only be a form of mimesis and deception of the audience" (Reames 139). Plato emphatically rejects the poet's *logos* arguing that words "ought to accurately and proportionately describe reality. Narration is acceptable, imitative discourse is not" (Reames 139). Ultimately, Plato rejects poetic discourse as dishonest and consequently unable to access truth: "given the essential interconnectedness of speech and wisdom, it ought to be a 'formal abstract language' that communicates propositionally rather than poetically" (Reames 140). Plato's Socrates rejects poetic discourse as being unable to reveal truth or attain wisdom because it fails to fulfill his

⁹⁵ *mythos*
⁹⁶ *logos*

desire for a “dialectical dividing and classifying *logos*” (Reames 140). Consequently, rhetorical and poetic power-exploiting *logos* remain within Aristotle’s domain. Despite Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, it is Plato’s dialectical *logos* and not Aristotle’s “use of the power of *logos*” that takes root in the Occident (Reames 148). It is this loss of the pre-Socratic⁹⁷ understanding of *logos* (a phenomenological understanding) that Heidegger sees within Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and advocates for rediscovery. Heidegger reads Aristotle’s *logos* as being interconnected to *aletheia* and “the concept of *phainomenon* (phenomenon or ‘self-showing’)” (Reames 149). Reames explains Heidegger’s defense of a pre-Socratic understanding of Aristotle’s *logos* as identifying this interconnectedness: “These concepts are interconnected [...] because they collectively reveal how for the Greek mind *logos* and truth are a self-showing, the truth of which is not due to some correspondence with reality, but due to the function of letting something be seen, *discovered*, or blocking something from discovery” (149). The Western tradition abandons Aristotle’s pre-Socratic understanding of *logos* in favor of Plato’s dialectical one that classifies and divides in order to arrive at a propositional truth that relies on comparing phenomena. But Heidegger’s phenomenological hermeneutics unconceals the original Greek understanding of *logos*, in which “speech possessed the phenomenal self-showing power of truth” (Reames 152). It becomes clear that the Occident’s original understanding of *logos* was in keeping with Ancient Egypt’s *Nommo*. This, of course, is no coincidence as Ancient Egyptians settled into what became known as Ancient Greece and carried with them their philosophical understanding of the world. In time, the Greeks began to separate and distinguish their identity from their ancestral origins in Egypt, which they

⁹⁷ Aristotle’s interests in and definition of *logos* resides within pre-Socratic understandings and uses of *logos* as opposed to Plato’s.

referred to as the fatherland.⁹⁸ Consequently, Plato's dialectical *logos* dominates Western Rhetoric and relies on propositional truths, leaving the power of *logos* in its poetic form marginalized. Other scholars such as Penelope Ingram have noted this marginalization of poetic *logos* and address the role signifying plays in liberating poetic *logos*.

The final chapter of Ingram's *The Signifying Body: Toward an Ethics of Sexual and Racial Difference* addresses Heidegger's understanding of language and its relationship to thinking Being in such a way as to make clear that language "can reveal the possibilities projected by Dasein" (142). More importantly, she exposes the reality of language's complex role in thinking Being in that the possibilities projected by Dasein through language "are concealed from us in our ontic existence" (Ingram 142). For her own argument about the relationship of signifying to ethical encounters with the Other, Ingram posits that signifying language "discloses Being in the lighting of the ethical encounter with the Other" (141). The importance of signifying as opposed to propositional/representational language must be noted so as to avoid misunderstanding Heidegger's theories on the role of language to thinking Being. Ingram argues that signifying language, "rather than representational language, [...] leads us to ontological becoming and to ethical difference and that this ethical relation with the Other *is* authentic Being-in-the-world" (141). Heidegger recognizes the difficulties language poses: "Language is neither merely the field of expression, nor merely the means of expression, nor merely the two jointly" (*What is Called Thinking?* 128). If language is not an expression of thought, what is it? According to Heidegger, "To speak language is totally

⁹⁸ I shall not take the time here to defend this historical claim, but Martin Bernal's three-volume *Black Athena* provides more than adequate evidence of Ancient Egypt's cultural and philosophical influence on Ancient Greece.

different from employing language. Common speech merely employs language" (*What is Called Thinking?* 128). Language has "idle talk" as one potentiality for its being. Idle talk, however, does not have thinking Being as one of its potentialities for being. Poesy, however, does have thinking Being as a potentiality for its being. As noted in previous chapters, poetry, according to Heidegger, is the language that has the capacity to think Being because the poet creates the opening necessary to thinking Being because the thought revealed through poesy is "originary" (*What is Called Thinking?* 128). The poet concerns himself with what is originary, what is most thought-provoking. Thinking Being as unconcealing stands in opposition to concealment, idle talk. More often than not, Dasein flees in the face of anxiety, which emerges in the face of death, and seeks out idle talk in order to conceal the reality of Dasein's horizon for Being, death. Lost in the idle talk of others, Dasein conceals its possibilities for Being-in-the-world authentically and embraces inauthentic Being through the concealment of idle talk: "One being places itself in front of another being, the one helps to hide the other, the former obscures the latter, a few obstructs many, one denies all. Here concealment is not simple refusal. Rather, a being appears, but it presents itself as other than it is" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 52). In order for Black Rhetoric to have the potentiality to think Being, it must turn away from idle talk and concealment and create an opening for unconcealment, which takes place as a re-membering (re-collecting) that points towards Dasein's possibilities for Being, including the potentiality for death. In this sense, thinking, like Being, is temporal in as much as it is individual: "the opening up of the Open, and the clearing of what is, happens only as the openness is projected, sketched out, that makes its advent in thrownness" (*What is Called Thinking?* 69). Heidegger then notes that all art, "as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is, as such, *essentially poetry*" (*What is Called Thinking?* 70). Black Rhetoric, therefore, must not seek to fulfill

the conventions of poetry (i.e., a final product) but must instead create an opening for unconcealment through poesy (i.e., a process of composing), as Heidegger describes it. Black Rhetoric then is less about what has been said and more so about what one is saying: "Projective saying is poetry: the saying of world and earth, the saying of the arena of their conflict and thus of the place of all nearness and remoteness of the gods" (*What is Called Thinking?* 71). In other words, Heidegger asserts that poetry "is the saying of the unconcealedness of what is" (*What is Called Thinking?* 71). It is important to note at this point that in every case, "what is," is what Dasein unconceals when it confront itself with itself. Dasein is the being that is concerned with its own Being and Heidegger recognizes the impossibility of any given Dasein concerning itself with another's Being. This is not to be confused with Dasein's authentic way of Being-in-the-world as care and concern. Authentic Being-in-the-world has care and concern as a primordial way of Being, but this is rooted in Dasein's being-in-the-world-alongside-others. Ingram's argument for signifying as fulfilling the performative experience of language that permits beings to have ethical encounters with Others supports my claim that Black Rhetoric, rooted in the *trope* of signifying, offers a mode of language in which such signifying is possible.

Poetry, of course, is not without problems, and Heidegger notes these in his argument on the nature of language and thinking Being:

Poetry moves in the element of saying, and so does thinking. When we reflect on poetry, we find ourselves at once in that same element in which thinking moves. We cannot here decide flatly whether poetry is really a kind of thinking, or thinking really a kind of poetry. It remains dark to us what determines their real relation, and from what source what we so casually call the "real" really comes. But – no matter how we call poetry and thought to mind, in every case one and the same element has drawn close to us – saying – whether we pay attention to it or not. (*On the Way to Language* 83)

It is possible that the problem Heidegger identifies regarding the relation of poetry to thinking reveals poetry as an authentic way in which to think Being. One's inability to discern clearly whether or not poetry is a kind of thinking or thinking a kind of poetry suggests that an intrinsic relationship exists between poetry and thinking that cannot be segmented or categorized and classified as a thing with properties. The very nature of poetry as being indistinctive of thinking reveals its very nature as a way of thinking Being, which cannot be clearly and distinctively differentiated.

Poetry, according to Heidegger, provides a space where work is a happening: "the happening of truth is at work and, indeed, at work according to the manner of work" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 69). As an art, poetry does work; its nature as work is in unconcealing: "Art then is the becoming and happening of truth" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 69). Poetry, then, leads to a truth that Heidegger identifies as an opening up: "Truth is never gathered from objects that are present and ordinary. Rather, the opening up of the Open, and the clearing of what is, happens only as the openness is projected, sketched out, that makes its advent in thrownness"⁹⁹ (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 69). In other words, poetry as an art does work, and the nature of that work is a happening that is an opening; the opening allows an unconcealing that Heidegger identifies as truth; thinking truth is thinking Being. Therefore, we can gather thus far from Heidegger that phenomenological hermeneutics looks to poetry as an art that unconceals Dasein's thrownness as a way of understanding and thinking Being-in-the-world when thinking Being. Because of its nature as an art that unconceals, poetry thinks Being in that Being is a happening that unfolds in time. Being is that which unconceals and is by its nature unconcealedness in time: hence the title of Heidegger's magnum opus *Being and Time*.

⁹⁹ The "thatness" of Dasein – Dasein's facticity of being

Heidegger takes this notion of poetry and thinking Being a step farther and claims that poetry takes place in language but is not itself language: "Language is not poetry because it is the primal poesy; rather, poesy takes place in language because language preserves the original nature of poetry" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 72). As an art, poetry is an origin of thinking Being because "art lets truth originate" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 75). To understand art or poetry, then, means letting one's self wrestle with the riddle that is art itself; "the task is to see the riddle" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 77). Heidegger acknowledges that everything "is an experience"; however, experience initiates art's death, as an experience of art is not a creation of art and therefore not an origin or an unfolding but a finality, and end. Clearly, we cannot escape experience. Experience is a necessary element of the truth of art and Being; "Truth is the unconcealedness of that which is as something that is. Truth is the truth of Being" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 79). While experience in general is negative for Heidegger, he does leave room for the possibility that one can experience poetically, which is not negative. In fact, poetic experience unconceals Being. As with some Eastern religions that rely on the poetic form to reveal truth, Heidegger argues that poetic expression unveils and unfolds; it is a mode of expression that says something about the message itself. Poetry unconceals itself as a way of thinking – a way of experiencing that originates in Being. The lingering effects of Maatian ethics in Black Rhetoric and the concern for the Black Hermeneutic Situation within Black Rhetoric permit Black Rhetoric to say in the sense that Heidegger describes *saying* within his theories on poetic expression. The poet's saying is thinking Being because the saying is pointing towards that which is most thought-provoking, which is always grounded in Being.

Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics does violence to Western metaphysics by revealing its flaws in thinking, language, and thinking's relationship to

Being. He reveals the desire for objectivity that underlies metaphysics' understanding of language: "Metaphysics [...] thinks of man as *animal*, as a living being [...] defined by life and life-experience" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 176). This way of understanding human beings renders man an object in the world to be rationalized, categorized, and understood over time. At the same time, this way of understanding assumes that objective-seeking, demonstrative language has access to understanding. Rather than embracing a proclivity for objectivity that permits language to function in a subject/object binary, Heidegger rejects claims to objectivity and embraces the subjective nature of language through his understanding of the *apophantic as*. In other words, phenomenological hermeneutics identifies language's nature as one of subjectivity, which embraces perspectives on the world. Dasein's thrownness and thrown projection are essential to understanding the world as well as Dasein's Being-in-the-world because they note a perspective. Poetry, as it exists in language, challenges objectivity by embracing subjectivity and, rather than being shaped by Dasein, shapes Dasein instead: "Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 144). When Dasein assumes a position of authority over language and in turn assumes language has objective understanding as its essential nature, Dasein fails to heed the unconcealedness of poetry in language as thinking Being and fails to think Being altogether. Therefore, by allowing objective notions of language to withdraw and embracing instead the poesy available in language, Dasein takes a crucial step towards thinking Being and embracing the subjective nature of poetry. Poetry, then, is a way of thinking Being that rejects the wrongly assumed nature of language as being objective in favor of embracing a fully subjective way of thinking Being as evidenced by Heidegger's *apophantic as*. As a mode of expression, poetry permits Dasein to create an opening – a way – of thinking that indeed thinks Being

as an unfolding while at the same time having concern for the mode of expression itself that does the unfolding: "As soon as human cognition [...] calls for an explanation, it fails to transcend the world's nature, and falls short of it. The human will to explain just does not reach to the simpleness of the simple onefold of worlding" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 177). The will to explain as expressed in demonstrative language misses its mark because it assumes objectivity is expressible in language when only subjectivity is available to think Being in language as poetry. Dasein's Being is not an object with properties that can be differentiated from itself through distinguishing its various properties from one another; instead, Dasein's Being is an unfolding, a happening, that takes place between birth and death. Likewise, poetry is an unfolding, a happening. As a consequence, "the poetic is the basic human capacity for human dwelling" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 226).

Gadamer's *Truth and Method* offers an extension of Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics that includes dialogue as a mode of language that creates understanding as well as an examination of experience that relies on the historical for hermeneutic experience. Gadamer offers criticisms similar to those of Heidegger regarding the proclivity of science for objective thinking. Like Heidegger, Gadamer rejects science's desire for objective knowing: "The aim of science is to objectify experience that it no longer contains any historical element. Scientific experiment does this by its methodological procedure" (346). Science, including the human sciences, seeks experience that can be repeated as a means of reliable, verifiable knowing by making comparisons between phenomena. An experience's capacity to be repeated numerous times suggests reliable objectivity to the scientific observer. Science assumes that objectivity can be obtained if experiences are repeatable and therefore reliable. The problem with this epistemological model when it is

applied to language, communication, understanding, and human experience is that it negates the fact that human beings are not merely objects in the world nor can they ever negate their subjectivity. Dasein is not a being with properties that can be parceled out, differentiated, and understood. Rather, Dasein is a being that happens in a world for a time; time and world, therefore, are part of Dasein as much as Dasein is part of time and world. Only an unfolding in time can unconceal an understanding of Dasein, as Dasein is an unfolding. Hence, Gadamer claims that hermeneutic experience cannot be goal-oriented but is an unfolding of time from a perspective, as it is reliant on an individual observer who is witness to the unfolding. The saying of the Black Hermeneutic Situation through the expression of Black Rhetoric evidences Heidegger and Gadamer's claims that the saying is an unfolding of time from a perspective. A new experience negates a previous one, and in that negation, according to Gadamer, Hegel's Dialectic emerges within the experience. The process of negation that occurs when one experience does violence to another is also necessarily creative, indeed productive; hence, Hegel's thesis/antithesis emerges in experience as dialectical. Testifying, revealing, and signifying within Black Rhetoric specifically address the unfolding of time of which Heidegger and Gadamer refer. Therefore, as "Heidegger has pointed out [...] Hegel is not interpreting experience dialectically but rather conceiving what is dialectical in terms of the nature of experience. According to Hegel, experience has the structure of a reversal of consciousness and hence it is a dialectical movement" (Gadamer 354). Gadamer points out that what is significant in Hegel's dialectic is not necessarily that experience reveals knowledge but that understanding "the truth of experience always implies an orientation toward a new experience" (355). This orientation reveals that, not unlike Dasein, experience itself is an unfolding, a happening, a movement towards much in the same way that Dasein's thrown projection always orients Dasein towards the

future. Therefore, “The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself” (Gadamer 355). Black Rhetoric seeks to move away from one experience and toward another. Black Rhetoric may ground itself in a historical understanding that is formative of the Black Hermeneutic Situation, but Black Rhetoric itself is forward pointing. It points toward future possibilities. More importantly, “Real experience is that whereby man becomes aware of his finiteness” (Gadamer 357). Gadamer connects the significance between experience and time when he claims: “Genuine experience is experience of one’s own historicity” (357). Experience, then, is the future-oriented unfolding of Dasein between birth and death. When examined from this epistemological standpoint, which reconciles poesy as an expression in language that thinks Being and understands that Dasein is a being that attempts to understand Being by understanding experiences, phenomenological hermeneutics unconceals Black Rhetoric as a rhetorical tradition that embraces poesy as its primordial mode of expression. Black Rhetoric morphed in time as a prose/poesy hybrid that expresses an understanding of experience as being future-oriented while at the same time being aware of its historicity. Black Rhetoric, therefore, fulfills the Hegelian Dialectic as thesis-antithesis-synthesis in that it must think Being in order to reclaim human dignity.

An examination of Black Sermonic Rhetoric shall reveal this origin as a morphing from Western and Kemetic Rhetoric into Black Rhetoric. Ingram’s claims about signifying languages’ role in ethical encounters with Others notes Fanon’s recognition that European colonization produces a master/slave dichotomy (culturally and linguistically) on the basis of race in which reciprocal recognition is impossible: “there can be no mutual recognition between master and slave in a colonial economy where the value of the slave resides not in his self-consciousness, his subjecthood, but precisely in his labor and the

price extracted from such labor, his objecthood" (149). She then notes that Fanon's solution to this problem posed as a Hegelian Dialectic is not to reject 'blackness' but to embrace it: "Blackness as negativity is not to be overcome but to be celebrated" (Ingram 149). Ingram explains that Fanon's fulfillment of the Hegelian Dialectic in this sense means embracing nonwhites as "raced" as opposed to eliminating whites' racializing others: "To refuse negritude [...] is to refuse difference and thus to refuse the black man the opportunity to experience Being-for-itself" (150). Fanon refuses to deny the racialized world that white supremacy built. His embracing blackness reflects Black Rhetoric's speaking from the Black Hermeneutic situation, which seeks to unconceal the human dignity of Blacks that white supremacy sought to conceal. As an extension of Ingram's argument, I claim that Black Rhetoric has the potential to think Being because its speaking is an opening that unconceals white supremacy's effects and permits its speaker an opportunity to reciprocate a recognition of Others within a race-based world by pointing to that which is most thought-provoking. In a race-based world grounded in white supremacy, non-whites' own humanity (i.e, human dignity) is that which is most thought-provoking. Consequently, Blacks' embracing of blackness recognizes a race-based world in which white privilege is protected at the expense of Blacks' dignity; therefore, double-consciousness becomes a vital mode of understanding and speaking that unconceals Blacks' potentiality for human dignity that does not come at the expense of white dignity. In other words, Black Rhetoric rejects the zero-sum game of white supremacy without concealing the fact that the world is raced.

Examined under the lens of Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics, one can begin to see Black Rhetoric's potentiality for thinking Being if one sees white supremacy as occupying the role of death. According to Heidegger, Dasein either flees in the face of its anxiety in which it confronts the reality of its horizon as death

(inauthentic Being), or Dasein embraces its impending death and permits its anxiety to be its call to conscience for authentic Being-in-the-world. Black Rhetoric, as evidenced by Fanon, embraces white supremacy as the ultimate horizon for Being-in-a-racial-world. Black Rhetoric answers the call-to-conscience by embracing blackness and pointing towards the human dignity that white supremacy seeks to conceal. Therefore, Black Rhetoric, in order to think Being, must always be pointing toward that which is most thought-provoking. During Black Rhetoric's course of evolution, a new reality has emerged that threatens not only Black Americans but all those struggling under the oppression of poverty. White supremacy has been on its own evolutionary path and is now beginning to emerge in its newest form as corporatocracy. President Obama's *More Perfect Union* speech addresses this newest offspring of white supremacy, which concerns itself less with skin color and more so with wealth and power for the purposes of social stratification on the basis of haves and have-nots as opposed to whites and Blacks. In order to understand how Black Rhetoric has the potential to confront corporatocracy's dehumanizing effects on the poor as it does in President Obama's speech, it is necessary to examine its evolution from Abolitionist Rhetoric to the rhetoric of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements.

In order to grasp the extent to which Black Rhetoric is protest rhetoric, it is necessary to examine key arguments from the Abolitionist Movement. James Baldwin's 1963 *The Fire Next Time* notes that the Civil Rights Movement must stand on the shoulders of history if it to be successful:

But in order to change a situation one has to first see it for what it is: in the present case, to accept the fact, whatever one does with it thereafter, that the Negro has been formed by this nation, for better or for worse, and does not belong to any other—not to Africa, and certainly not to Islam. The paradox—and a fearful paradox it is—is that the American Negro can have no future anywhere, on any continent, as long as he is unwilling to accept his past. To accept one's past—one's history—is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it. An invented

past can never be used; it cracks and crumbles under the pressures of life like clay in a season of drought. (Baldwin 81)

Baldwin's words reveal a need to look closely and critically at the history of Black Rhetoric. Black orators from the Abolitionist Movement disclose the significance of Black Rhetoric's history to my current argument: "[B]lack spokesmen devoted a great portion of time to encouraging their own people to elevate themselves through hard work and the formation of various mutual beneficent and literary societies" (Dick 241). The Abolitionist Movement sought to protest oppressive government actions as well as an end to slavery. After the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, Blacks organized, protested, and resisted the white violence (both legal and physical) perpetrated against them. Their organizational efforts resulted in various outlets for protesting white supremacy – Negro Spirituals, Slave Narratives, Abolitionist speeches, and Black sermons. During this time, the Black Church's efforts and effects extended beyond plantations and attempted to integrate into established mainstream Christianity. Despite rejection from white congregations and church leaders, Black ministers began to organize and identify themselves according to pre-existing denominations, which led to their identifying themselves primarily as Methodists in the North and Baptists in the South. The Northern expansion gained the support of white Abolitionists while the Southern expansion fought "rigid resistance and legal restrictions" (Mitchell 92). The Black Church provided significant support for the Abolitionist Movement: "At every critical stage in its existence, the Black Church has preoccupied itself with the task of finding a way to respond appropriately to the racially charged context that conceived it and gave it birth" (Blount 42). The primary message from the Black pulpit was liberty realized as an end to racism and slavery: "Clearly, 'liberation' was a key principle in the life of the slave church. In a world where owners punished slaves for participating in unauthorized and unsupervised worship services in the late night woods or slave quarter[s]' root cellars, the very act of worship was an

expression of political defiance” (Blount 42). The role Black preachers played as civic leaders responding to racism as well as religious leaders interpreting Scripture as a plan for liberation for their congregation explains why many Civil Rights leaders were also ministers: “The civil rights movement provided an illustrative example of the Black Church’s commitment to social and political liberation” (Blount 43). While the Black Church and Black Sermonic Rhetoric clearly make significant contributions to the evolutions of Black Rhetoric, Abolitionist speeches provide further insight into this evolutionary process.

It is important to note the circumstances under which the Abolitionist Movement began:

The most important single incident in the American antislavery crusade was the conversion of William Lloyd Garrison and Theodore Dwight Weld to a belief in racial equality. These two men, and the thousands who flocked to their standards, held that no biological differences distinguished Negroes from whites. As this was the case, they argued, the slaves should be emancipated either immediately or gradually, then educated and equipped to share the responsibilities of society with their fellow citizens. The objective of [A]bolitionists from the day that Garrison proclaimed his intention to be “as harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice” until the last slave was freed was social and political equality for all Americans. (Billington 4)

While some white sympathizers agreed that slavery should be abolished, most felt that Blacks should retreat to Africa as a fair and effective solution to the race problem. For Garrison to claim that Blacks should remain in the United States and enjoy all of the same social, political, and legal freedoms as whites was a shocking proposition.

Garrison gained many comrades, known as Garrisonians, in his Abolitionist efforts, which signified that they adopted his specific standpoint on full and complete equality for all Black Americans. Among these Garrisonians were noted Black Abolitionists such as Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass.

Black Abolitionist speeches reveal Black Rhetoric in its infancy as a rhetoric that seeks to reclaim human dignity through various *tropes* such as signifying, testifying, and revealing. Black Americans have a unique hermeneutic position as a consequence of the Atlantic slave trade and chattel slavery in the United States. Black Abolitionist speeches play an important role in an examination of the history of Black Rhetoric because they provide textual evidence that allows for the emergence of Black Rhetoric as a hybridized tradition, which traverses its Western and Kemetic origins in order to emerge as a separate and distinct rhetoric. As was the case with many Slave Narrative authors, Sojourner Truth also delivered abolitionist speeches before white and Black audiences. The *Liberator*¹⁰⁰ reports that on July 4, 1854, Truth, accompanied by William Lloyd Garrison and Henry David Thoreau, delivered a speech on the horrors of slavery at a Fourth of July anti-slavery rally sponsored by the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. She delicately balances her speech as a blending of Western and Kemetic Rhetoric that ultimately reflects elements of both traditions. Truth begins her speech by boldly stating that “the evils of slavery could not be spoken of; they could only be *felt*” (*Liberator* 1). She fashions her speech as a response to a previous speaker, Mr. Cluer, who spoke of his sufferings during his imprisonment for being an abolitionist. While Cluer embraces Western Rhetoric’s *pathos* and attempts to evoke pity and sympathy from the crowd by recounting his tribulations in jail, Truth paves a new path for abolitionist speeches that relies less on an individual’s amplification and more on communal empathy. Truth reminds her audience of the interconnectedness of all people that slavery and white supremacy rejects: “it was good that white folks should sometimes feel the prick” (*Liberator* 1). Her speech signifies on white Christianity’s belief that God is the ultimate

¹⁰⁰ An abolitionist newspaper

moral authority as well as the ultimate judge of mankind: “God would yet execute his judgments upon the white people for their oppression and cruelty” (*Liberator* 1). The *Liberator* also reports that Truth “had often asked white people why God should have more mercy on Anglo-Saxons than on Africans, but they had never given her any answer; the reason, they hadn’t got it to give” (1). As a slave, Truth understood Christianity through the lens of Black Liberation Theology.¹⁰¹ She also understood that the Gospels promote charity through the commandment to love thy neighbor: “The colored people had labored and suffered for the white people, their children had been sold to help educate ministers of the gospel; and why did they [(whites)] hate them [(blacks)]” (*Liberator* 1). She finalizes her speech by reminding her audience that even “the blood of one man, Abel, did not call from the ground in vain”; therefore, God would enact justice in the end, as “the promises of Scripture were all for the black people, and God would recompense them for all their sufferings in this world” (*Liberator* 1). Truth argues that God shall punish white slaveholders for their sins committed against their Black neighbors.¹⁰² The *Liberator* quotes her final caveat for divine justice: “‘Wait a little longer,’ she said, ‘and I shall hail you where slaveholders do not come, and where bloodhounds cannot enter’” (1). Truth relies on her knowledge and understanding of Scripture to warn her audience that the sins of slavery shall not go unpunished for those who actively participate in and support chattel slavery.

Truth invokes *Nommo* and does so from the ethical position of Maat. Her sense of a global, even spiritual, community stems directly from the legacy of Maat that survived among African slaves in America. Maatian ethics relies on polarities for understanding

¹⁰¹ Of course, Black Liberation Theology was not fully formulated at this time but it was in its inception stage.

¹⁰² If once reads the Gospel of Matthew closely, the *Sermon on the Mount* reveals that everyone counts as the neighbor, without exception.

(i.e., good and evil) and strives for balance. Truth participates in Maatian ethics through her focus on *bit nfr* (good character), *mtw* (upright), *dw* (evil), *hnms* (friendliness, friendship) in her speech (Karenga *Maat* 97). Maatian ethics, which understands Maat “as a principle and force constitutive of creation itself, comes to mean, then, an order of rightness [that] permeates existence and gives life” (Karenga *Maat* 8). Evidence of Maat in Truth’s speech can be identified in her addressing the polarization between whites and Blacks, evidenced by her language. “White” and “Black” are not arbitrary terms but carefully chosen labels that communicate a particular moral position that reveals an understanding of the labels’ recipients within the context of a polarized world where “white” connotes goodness and righteousness and “Black” connotes the absence of these virtues. Truth also adopts the Enlightenment ideals of her time, which claim that liberty and human rights are necessary to democracy. More importantly, she embraces the notion of reciprocal recognition and rejects polarization for the purposes of social stratification. Truth’s speech reflects Kemetic Rhetoric’s adherence to Maatian ethics through her sense of community responsibility and desire for human dignity as fulfillments of truth and justice as well as believing that one’s deeds on Earth do not go unnoticed. The seven cardinal virtues of Maat – truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order – work in conjunction as a pathway to a greater good. Maatian ethics seeks these seven cardinal virtues in all human beings with regard to dealings with family, community, pharaoh, and the world as a whole, so as to ensure balance between this world and world of the divine. Black Christians transmuted Kemetic virtues into their newly adopted Christianity by maintaining their sense of communal and divine responsibility to one another as well as a belief in the afterlife and a judgment of human beings’ actions on Earth. What makes Truth’s speech an example of an emerging Black Rhetoric and not merely a combination of Western and Kemetic Rhetoric appears in the

form of her signifying and testifying. Truth signifies on the West's Enlightenment ideas of democracy by claiming her rights to be a citizen and therefore her rights to full and equal protection under the Constitution as a human being deserving of these rights.

The *Liberator* also provides details from Truth's speech that reveal another *trope* identified with Black Rhetoric: call-and-response. Call-and-response evolved directly from Kemetic Rhetoric, which understood the audience as an equal participant in the speech act. Black Rhetoric transfigures this Kemetic principle into a new rhetorical *trope* by evoking a desired response from audiences as essential components of eloquent and effective speech. As one of Maat's cardinal virtues, reciprocity applies to *medu nefer* (eloquent and effective speech) in that all people equally bear virtue and dignity as a consequence of being divine creations. Thus, *medu nefer* rejects the notion that an orator, by virtue of being an orator, is somehow superior to his or her audience or even that an orator stands in authority over an audience. On the contrary, Ptahhotep, Khety, Djedi, and other Kemetic authors identify in their writings that orators who practice eloquent and effective speech accept the imperatives of reciprocity and wisdom; they therefore demand that speakers take into consideration the dignity and divinity of their audiences. Maulana Karenga notes this ethical stance in his essay, *Nommo, Kawaida, and Communicative Practice*, as well as in his book, *Maat: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt*. In both texts, he identifies the significance of reciprocity and dignity in Kemetic Rhetoric. Truth's speech reveals this component of Maatian ethics, as evidenced by the *Liberator*, which indicates moments in Truth's speech where her audience responds to her as she anticipates their doing so; they laugh, cheer, and applaud when appropriate so as to assure her that she is speaking both eloquently and effectively.

The *trope* of call-and-response extends Kemet's Maatian ethics and opens a space for audiences to participate alongside orators as orchestrated yet organic

participants in the speech act. Truth engages a longstanding tradition of call-and-response that encourages her to view her audiences' responses as being important to her speech. Hence, she inserts an apostrophe so as to address her audience on familiar rather than formal terms:

One day they would meet the poor slave in heaven, 'his robes washed white in the blood of the lamb,' coming through much tribulation," ('you know what that means,' said Sojourner; 'it don't mean you; white folks don't suffer tribulation; it means the black people, and those friends who have suffered with them,') to peace and joy in the kingdom. (*Liberator* 1-2)

Truth purposely interrupts her own speech with an apostrophe – “you know what that means” – in order to address her audience personally and informally rather than continue impersonally and formally. She does so to create a sense of familiarity that in turn fosters a sense of community among those who genuinely understand her meaning. This sense of community in turn generates a specific response from her audience that indicates an insider's knowledge of the subject matter at hand, which, as the *Liberator* indicates, she receives through “Loud applause” (2). Even though Truth travels and speaks at the same time Slave Narratives are being written, Black Abolitionist speeches such as hers provide evidence of the call-and-response *trope* as a significant *trope* in Black Rhetoric's earliest stage of evolution. Black Abolitionist speakers, then, participate in signifying and testifying as well as call-and-response in order to compose and deliver eloquent and effective speeches. The call-and-response *trope* functions as a form of immediate affirmation and confirmation, or rejection and denial, of the speaker's message. It opens up the possibility for encountering others through a mode of language that encourages reciprocity. The speaker anticipates this contribution by the audience and amplifies or adjusts accordingly. Audiences of Black Rhetoric receive recognition and significance equal to that of the speaker; they are not passive vessels that merely receive information and process that information internally for a delayed response. On the contrary, call-and-

response allows speakers of Black Rhetoric to receive immediate feedback that in turn indicates a mutual exchange between speaker and audience.

In addition to the *tropes* listed above, the motifs of freedom and justice reveal an important and longstanding practice in Black Rhetoric. Black Abolitionist speakers signify on the notions of freedom, justice, and equality expressed in the Declaration of Independence. On July 5, 1852, Frederick Douglass delivered his famous speech, *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*, in which he asks his white audience for reasons that he should desire to speak on behalf of a holiday that celebrates independence and freedom for whites while Black Americans remain shackled in slavery. Douglass begins his speech by offering his respects to the Enlightenment thinkers behind the Declaration of Independence and heralds them as great men; however, he then follows this sentiment with the following rhetorical questions:

Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why I am called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? And am I, therefore, called upon to bring our humble offering to the national altar, and to confess the benefits and express the devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us? (*Africans in America*).

He recognizes the significance of the claim, “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness,” and signifies on this proclamation by revealing the irony of his speaking on behalf of the Fourth of July. As a Black man, despite having escaped to freedom in the North, Douglass was still not free. Regardless of the facts that he acquired literacy and escaped from slavery, Douglass lived in world where he was unable to participate fully as a free citizen. While he could speak at a celebration, he could not speak in court. While he could speak about justice, he had to commit a crime in order to secure his own freedom. Lastly, despite being free in the North, he was never

free of the fear of being lynched at the hands of whites. In his speech, Douglass signifies on the very meaning behind the Fourth of July by calling the audience “fellow citizens,” knowing that he did not have the citizenship status¹⁰³ his white audience enjoyed. Understanding the difference between his legal status as opposed to that of whites, he signifies on the distinctions between his state of freedom and that of white Americans within a so-called democracy:

Fellow-citizens, above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! Whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, to-day, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them. If I do forget, if I do not faithfully remember those bleeding children of sorrow this day, “may my right hand forget her cunning, and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth?” To forget them, to pass lightly over their wrongs, and to chime in with the popular theme, would be treason most scandalous and shocking.” (*Africans in America*)

Douglass signifies on the notions of freedom and equality in the Declaration of Independence as well as its expression of duty to one’s citizenship. He signifies on this specific sense of citizenship by calling his audience “fellow-citizens” but then acknowledges the fact that he cannot participate in their jubilation, as he is not legally a member of the citizenry. Douglass sets some of the groundwork for Black Rhetoric with regard to white privilege by identifying the fact that the polarization of the labels ‘Black’ and ‘white’ reflect the harsh reality of the polarization between Blacks and whites as slaves and masters. In doing so, he establishes a sense of Black community that identifies itself according to what it means to be not-white. Douglass remarks on this distinction when he tells his audience that, despite being free,¹⁰⁴ he lives in a pseudo-freedom. He is not free of his Black skin and what it means to be Black in America in

¹⁰³ Black Laws, confirmed a few years after Douglass’s speech by the Dred Scott decision of 1857, prevented slaves and free Blacks alike from testifying in court.

¹⁰⁴ Of course, this is a pseudo-freedom. Douglass is not free in the sense that whites are free.

1852, nor is he free from his sense of responsibility to his fellow Black Americans who, as slaves, remain oppressed by white supremacy. He refuses to forget those who are not free. He refuses to embrace a holiday that celebrates independence, when it is an independence secured on the backs of enslaved Blacks. His sense of community and speaking on behalf of the Black Community resonates among Black Abolitionist speakers such as Truth, who discuss liberty and equality not in terms of abstract, ideological rights but as concrete, human necessities. Douglass utilizes his opportunity to speak before an audience not to benefit himself personally but to benefit the Black Community as a whole, by raising awareness of Blacks' trials and tribulations, as well as drawing attention to their suffering under the dehumanization of racism.

He does not, however, depart from his audience on a note of hopelessness. On the contrary, Black Rhetoric is a rhetoric of hope as much as it is a rhetoric of liberation, revolution, resistance, struggle, community, and reclamation of identity and dignity.

Douglass focuses on the motif of hope near the end of his speech:

Allow me to say, in conclusion, notwithstanding the dark picture I have this day presented, of the state of the nation, I do not despair of this country. There are forces in operation [that] must inevitably work the downfall of slavery. "The arm of the Lord is not shortened," and the doom of slavery is certain. I, therefore, leave off where I began, with hope. While drawing encouragement from "the Declaration of Independence," the great principles it contains, and the genius of American Institutions, my spirit is also cheered by the obvious tendencies of the age. Nations do not now stand in the same relation to each other that they did ages ago. No nation can now shut itself up from the surrounding world and trot round in the same old path of its fathers without interference. (*Africans in America*)

Douglass reveals to his audience his awareness of his own Being by thinking Being through his speech and does so by pointing to that which is most thought-provoking (i.e., Being): "The very fact that we already live in an understanding of Being is still veiled in darkness proves that it is necessary in principle to raise this question again" (*Being and Time* 23). That is, Douglass, albeit well before Heidegger's time, has a sense that he

must think what is to be thought, what is most thought-provoking: Being. Douglass is particularly keen on this desire to think Being as a consequence of his being a slave (i.e., dehumanized). In other words, Douglass's suffering dehumanization as a result of white supremacy in the form of slavery made him keenly aware of his desire to be seen as a human being with dignity and respect; therefore, he concerns himself with his humanity and his potentiality. In doing so, he concerns himself with his Being. Of course, Being is not something that dehumanization can actually destroy: "The Being of entities 'is' not itself an entity" (*Being and Time* 26). Even though Being cannot be destroyed, it can be concealed. White supremacy, then, conceals Blacks' Being, whereas Black Rhetoric unconceals Blacks' Being.

Black Rhetoric thinks Being in so far as it thinks what is most thought-provoking (i.e., Being). The process of dehumanization that accompanied slavery in America placed Black Americans in a unique position to contemplate Being in a manner not demanded of white Americans. By holding the reigns of power, whites were able to forget about their Being and stop inquiring into Being almost altogether. Only after slavery ends in Europe do we see thinkers such as Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger question Being once again. Metaphysical thinking conceals Being and attempts to pursue ontology without inquiring after Being. Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates argues that man desires only that which he does not already possess. If we apply this principle to Black Hermeneutics, we find that Black Americans desire the human dignity white supremacy denies them. A system of oppression such as slavery, which dehumanizes, keeps human dignity just out of reach of the oppressed. Thus, the oppressed begin to question Being in their efforts to reclaim human dignity. The unique historical circumstances of chattel slavery in the United States created a hermeneutic situation for

Black Americans that encouraged them to think Being in order to find ways to reclaim their humanity and thus their human dignity.

The evidence provided thus far in my argument reveals the manner in which Black Hermeneutics, which understands and communicates the world through the lens of Black oppression in a white supremacist society, fosters a desire to reclaim humanity and therefore human dignity expressed in the form of Black Rhetoric. This uniquely Black hermeneutic situation manifests itself as an equally unique Black Rhetoric in that a hermeneutic circle emerges and speaks specifically from and through a Black hermeneutic position, which means that Black Rhetoric seeks to reclaim human dignity for people who wish to throw off the shackles of slavery and white supremacy in order to establish a means by which to participate in society as equals both socially and politically. Black Abolitionist speeches reveal that Black Rhetoric emerges in its infancy as a rhetoric that seeks to reclaim human dignity through various *tropes* such as signifying, testifying, call-and-response, as well as revelating. Black Americans view the world from a unique hermeneutic position that results from the consequences of the Atlantic Slave Trade and chattel slavery in the United States. Because of this unique hermeneutic position, Black Americans have developed a unique response to this legacy in order to reclaim human dignity by thinking Being. Slave Narratives, Black Sermonic Rhetoric, and Black Abolitionist speeches unconceal a black rhetorical form that later flourishes during the Civil Rights Movement, supported by Black Liberation Theology.

Examining black sermons under the lens of phenomenological hermeneutics reveals that the historical plight of Black Americans through Black Rhetoric has been to protest white supremacist oppression and to reclaim human dignity. These protests and reclamations emerge in time as an unfolding of the Black American experience. Chapter Three of this dissertation argues that the origins of Black preaching lie in the religions of

African ancestors that maintained some of their beliefs and practices during slavery. Black preaching began on plantations by combining “Bible stories told in English [...] with African retellings and interpretations, primarily in African folk styles. The most important elements were vivid narration and call-and-response” (Simmons and Thomas 3). As literacy increased among Black preachers, so did the complexity of their Biblical exegesis. While the Bible itself as a textual authority for Christianity has a long-standing tradition of being central to the Black Church, it was not historically viewed as a text that should be subject to literal translation and interpretation. Therefore, the role of preacher as an interpreter, in fact as a diviner, remains a constant. The art of interpretation in the Black Church views preaching in a unique perspective because preaching intends to make the Bible “come literally alive by means of an eyewitness style of picture painting and narration” (Simmons and Thomas 7). Slave preachers’ sermons relied extensively on “existential exegesis” as a “close observation of life” that provided “profound sermonic insights” regarding the relationship between slave life and biblical stories (Simmons and Thomas 7-8). Moses, Abraham, Job, David, and Jesus are biblical figures that speak directly to the slave condition in that they represent God’s unyielding desire for His children to be liberated from oppression through their devotion to God’s word. They represent God’s promise of salvation in the Promised Land despite hardships on Earth. By observing slave life, plantation preachers constructed sermons from the position of a pastor who functions as a messenger of God’s word as well as a paternal figure who guided and instructed his children. Black exegesis and homiletics held the position that God spoke through the preacher with the evocation of the Holy Spirit – not unlike divination in Vodun and Voodoo. The preacher stands before a congregation as a mediator – a messenger – of God’s word. The preacher, then, is a rhetorical figure not unlike Legba who understands that a higher, divine power is at work facilitating the

delivery of God's word to the people: "the black preaching tradition is aware of dependence on a power beyond the preacher's power [and may] be called transcendence, divine beneficence, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost, or the Spirit" (Simmons and Thomas 8). The glory of the message must be given to God and not to man, because the preacher is not the originator of the Word but is a rhetorical facilitator of God's Word. The preacher recognized the numerous roles that were to be fulfilled as a facilitator: social activist, spiritual leader and healer, Christian teacher, and motivator. Simmons's and Thomas's *Preaching with Sacred Fire* separates these roles into four categories of Black preaching: "social activist preaching," "black identity preaching," "cultural survival preaching," and finally, "empowerment preaching" (10). These categories help refine the argument that I have been making thus far; Black Sermonic Rhetoric speaks on behalf of the Black Hermeneutic Situation rooted in shared oppression in order to respond to white supremacy as a means of liberation from that oppression. As an institution, albeit one lacking formal, unified, and widespread organization, the early Black Church participated in "social and religious practices from preaching to conjuring rebellion-hatching, to mourning, to moaning, to calling on Jesus as [Blacks] knew him, all of which was done – [and] allowed blacks to establish a cultural shelter for a new black identity in a strange land" (Simmons and Thomas 21-22). As a cultural institution that was hyper-aware of the conditions of oppression that resulted from white supremacy, the Black Church established itself through Black Sermonic Rhetoric as the frontline against white supremacy in order to reclaim, preserve, and maintain a Black identity free from white supremacy's destructive influence.

The three areas of Black Preaching that dominated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries continue to be relevant today: "enabling blacks to survive the hardships of life, church doctrine and instructing persons relative to behavior or conduct,

and abolishing slavery” (Simmons and Thomas 23). Of course, the latter of the three has evolved since the Emancipation Proclamation as a means of abolishing institutional and social oppression that results from white supremacy and white privilege rather than abolishing slavery. As an origin of Black Sermonic Rhetoric, the early Black Church addressed the conditions and needs of its followers and has upheld this relevance throughout its history thus far. Despite many violently physical and rhetorical attacks from white supremacists, the Black Church has endured because of the Black preacher’s entanglement with all of Black life, which solidified the role of the Black preacher as a leader in the Black Community.

Plantation-style lay preachers were not the only contributors to Black Rhetoric; on the contrary, we have textual evidence of Black preachers formally trained in exegesis and homiletics in the Black Church’s early history. Many of these preachers were ethnically mixed and received formal educations. Black preachers such as Lemuel Haynes and John Chavis taught and preached whites as well as Blacks. However, none seems to be able to hold these positions long, as white supremacy regularly interfered and removed Blacks from any position of authority over whites. Believed by many scholars to be the first Black preacher of a white church, Lemuel Haynes was born to a white mother and Black father but “lived with the Rose family in Granville, Massachusetts as an indentured servant” before he married a white woman and had ten children (Simmons and Thomas 56). Trained in Greek and Latin, Haynes “became a licensed preacher [and was] ordained in 1785 as a Congregationalist¹⁰⁵ minister” (Simmons and Thomas 56). Haynes’s sermons helped to establish an important *topos* in Black Rhetoric: identifying the role of the preacher as God’s messenger.

¹⁰⁵ Congregationalists were Protestants that had local, independent, and self-governing churches.

Haynes delivered a sermon in 1805 opposing a commonly held belief in universal salvation and focused his instruction on the role of the preacher strictly as being a messenger of God's word. As a Calvinist, Haynes held the belief that predestination alone fulfills the will of God. Haynes's sermon attacked the more popular belief, particularly among Black Christians, of universal salvation, which was defended by Reverend Hosea Ballou, a white, Universalist preacher (Simmons and Thomas 57). Haynes responds to Ballou's claim that God intended salvation for everyone with a critical outline of the role of the preacher and suggests that Ballou's misunderstanding of Scripture results from his misunderstanding his role as a preacher. Despite the fact that Haynes's theological position was not one that would dominate Black Sermonic Rhetoric, his style and emphasis on the role of the preacher as God's messenger were basic, foundational practices in the Black Church. Haynes's sermon argues that ministers "should not be proud of their preaching. If they preach the true gospel, they only, in substance, repeat Christ's sermons" (Simmons and Thomas 61). His message reveals a *topos* in Black Sermonic Rhetoric that reflects an important position in Kemeti Rhetoric that argues eloquent speakers are vessels through which to reveal divine speech to the non-divine. The preacher is a messenger and therefore not a creator of the message. While Haynes's particular position on universal salvation did not prevail in the Black Church, his understanding of the preacher's role did. Not unlike Voodoo priests, Black Christians in general view Black Preachers as vessels carrying God's word. They are the Protestant interpretation of Legba, individuals who are blessed with the gift to divine God's word. The rhetorical significance of the preacher's role expands as the Black Community's needs evolve into more secular needs, which allows for the Black preacher to be a civic as well as religious leader in the Black Community. Examining the roots of Black Sermonic Rhetoric reveals the process by which the Black preacher evolved into a

civic leader and the development through which Black Sermonic Rhetoric evolved into a more mainstreamed Black Rhetoric that was made evident during the Civil Rights Movement.

One preacher in particular, John Chavis, from the early formation of the Black Church, contributed to a long-standing *topos* in Black Sermonic Rhetoric in that he upheld the position that God intended salvation for all humanity, a message that continues to be popular in Black Liberation Theology. Chavis “was born a free man in approximately 1763, in or around Granville County, North Carolina” (Simmons and Thomas 31). He was born of mixed heritage (white, black, and Native American) to the “largest landowners in the colonies prior to the Revolutionary War” (Simmons and Thomas 31). He fought in the Revolutionary War for the colonies, studied at Princeton, “completed his studies at Washington College in 1802, [and] was the first ordained African American Presbyterian preacher” (Simmons and Thomas 31). By arguing that God did in fact create all men as equal and intended salvation to be available equally to all his creation, Chavis disclosed the white supremacist argument as a severe contradiction to the Christian message of universal salvation. Chavis defends his position on universal salvation in a letter he composed to the Moderator of the Orange Presbytery of North Carolina. In the letter, he suggests that he once defended the limited atonement of Christ, but believes that God revealed to him that Christ’s atonement knows no limits. Also concerned with the role of the preacher, Chavis reveals that he always reflected on his sermons to seek out any errors in doctrine so as to correct his errors:

At a certain time I preached to a large congregation, and my subject led me to treat the fall of man, and of the remedy that was provided for his recovery, and I invited my congregation with all the pathetic zeal of which I was capable, to come and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that they might be saved; that he was the only Saviour of sinners and the only way to eternal life; that unless they were regenerated and born again of the spirit, they could not enter the kingdom of heaven; yea, I felt as though I

was standing on the brink of eternity and my congregation ready to be precipitated into utter destruction. (Simmons and Thomas 33)

Chavis's letter claims that suddenly, as though someone had spoken to him, he questioned the position of limited atonement of Jesus Christ and quickly "became satisfactorily convinced that the atonement [that] our Saviour had made was commensurate to the spiritual wants of the WHOLE HUMAN FAMILY; that he had made it possible for each individual to be saved" (Simmons and Thomas 33). His letter defends his revelation with Scripture and concludes that if "Jesus Christ did not die to make atonement for each individual, why preach to each individual?" (Simmons and Thomas 35). Chavis's letter reveals two foundational *topoi* in Black Sermonic Rhetoric: the role of the preacher as a messenger and the significance of universal salvation to liberation.

Applying the Hegelian dialectic (thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis) to this history reveals the hybridization of Western and Kemetic Rhetoric that forms Black Rhetoric. Chavis's education at Princeton University and Washington College clearly places him in the Western tradition; however, his dealings with racism in the form of white supremacy also place him in the Black Hermeneutic Situation. What emerges is a synthesis of these two disparate world-views (Western and Kemetic) that seeks to eliminate white supremacy by revealing it as a social construct and purely ideological rather than as a construction found inherently in nature or ordained by God. This synthesis reveals itself in historical figures such as Chavis and Hosea Easton, another free man born of a mixed yet privileged heritage. Easton's own life reflects the nature of hybridity found in Black Rhetoric. Easton's family was "among the black elite of Massachusetts" (Simmons and Thomas 45). Easton attempted to open a school in New Haven for young Black men, but it closed after ten years. Sometime later, Easton "became the pastor of the black Talcott Congregationalist Church in Hartford [but] a white mob burned the church to the ground in 1836" (Simmons and Thomas 46). Despite his education, access to property and

money, and his mixed heritage, whites labeled Easton as Black and treated him accordingly. In one of his more well-known sermons given at a Thanksgiving service, Easton expressed to his congregation that white “racism is intractable and that there is nothing that blacks can do to alleviate it. Whites themselves must defeat it” (Simmons and Thomas 46). Easton’s sensitivity to white racism and the black struggle under white supremacist oppression reflects the standard position taken by the Black Church: black liberation is the responsibility and divine right of Black Americans, but eliminating white racism is the responsibility of whites. Therefore, Black Liberation Theology takes the stance on white supremacy that ideology is next to impossible to change from the outside – but laws are not. The early Black Church, then, held the position that upholding the Constitution and extending its protection to all Americans was the proper and prudent path to take.

Easton’s 1828 *Thanksgiving Day Address* before a black population highlighted a significant *topos* in Black Rhetoric: the Constitution’s claim to equality of and liberty for all men – revisionist patriotism. This particular *topos* remained a standard motif in Black Rhetoric throughout Abolition, Emancipation, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, and remains so even until today as evidenced in President Obama’s speeches. Easton’s sermon, not unlike Douglass’s *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July*, points out the irony of the holiday for Black Americans. While white Americans may rejoice in the prosperity in America, Black Americans crumble under its cruel fist of oppression: “But while I have endeavored to inspire your hearts with thankfulness to God, there have reflections [sic] forced themselves into my mind[,] which has caused me to tremble for the fate of this country. O, America! Listen to your subjects. Allied to you by birth and blood. Shut out from all slavery [what] you have riveted on their necks” (Simmons and Thomas 48).

Blacks' clinging to vestiges of African spirituality in a Protestant world, as a consequence of segregation and disenfranchisement, permitted slaves to maintain some of their Kemetic traditions. Black Rhetoric reveals the prevailing theme of human dignity's preservation through divine speech in the form of *Nommo*,¹⁰⁶ *mdw nfr*,¹⁰⁷ and *mdw ntr*¹⁰⁸ from Kemetic Rhetoric is evident in early Black Sermonic Rhetoric through Slave Narratives. I posit that as a result of Kemetic Rhetoric's traditional belief that human language is a divine gift for human beings for the purpose of improving the human condition through dignity, early Black lay preachers often invoked their roots in African spirituality in their sermons as reactions to white supremacy. Flora Wilson Bridges defines the parameters of this spirituality as following four predominant themes:

(1) a unified worldview; (2) black people's self-determination of human identity; (3) spirituality embodied as the call to protest; and (4) the quest for community as these themes are undergirded by the motif of freedom. These are the materials, lifted out from and justified by their preponderance in black history and culture, needed to build a picture of a comprehensive African-American spirituality. (5)

Blacks' struggle for human dignity reveals Black Americans' hermeneutic situation as one that not only seeks freedom from oppression but one that views Blacks as foreigners and seeks a sense of belonging within the human community. Du Bois views this hermeneutic situation as the impetus for Black double-consciousness. On the one hand, Black Americans feel alien in their own country and have a desire to belong; on the other hand, they view America as the seat of white supremacy and reject it as evil and desire not to belong to or identify with a system of oppression. Therefore, struggle becomes a common motif as this double-consciousness reveals itself in Black Rhetoric. The manner in which one was to survive and achieve victory in one's struggle for human dignity was

¹⁰⁶ The creative power of language gifted to humans from the divine.

¹⁰⁷ Good speech

¹⁰⁸ Divine speech

through self-determination: “A first step toward liberation through self-determination for the enslaved in America (as for any oppressed person or people) was to name one’s experience for one’s self” (Bridges 43). This struggle reveals the significance of Black Rhetoric as well as Black Rhetoric’s origins in Black Sermonic Rhetoric in the quest for human dignity:

In fact, a central aspect of black history is the persistent public discussions related to the black man’s American experience. Having to defend his humanity, agitate for minimal rights, and soothe the raw emotions of his mistreated brethren, the black speaker was forced to develop articulate and effective speech behavior on the platform. (Smith and Robb 1)

Examining early Black Sermonic Rhetoric constructed by lay preachers offers insight into the manner in which these speakers developed an effective rhetorical tradition for speaking about the Black American struggle for human dignity and freedom. Absalom Jones, who was born in slavery in Delaware in 1746, provides an example of early lay preaching. Jones acquired his literacy in the home of his slave masters and in 1778 was able to purchase his wife’s freedom and his own in 1784 (Simmons and Thomas 68). As a lay preacher in Philadelphia, he used his position in the pulpit to draw attention to the plight of Blacks suffering under the oppression of slavery. On January 1, 1808, after the abolition of the slave trade, Jones delivered *A Thanksgiving Sermon* in celebration of the end of the African slave trade. In this sermon, he invokes a common motif among Black preachers whereby his scriptural exegesis serves to construct an analogy between Black slaves and the Israelite slaves in Egypt for the purposes of exposing the evils of slavery as well as God’s favoring the oppressed over the oppressor. Negro Spirituals such as “Go Down Moses,” Slave Narratives such as *Harriet Tubman, the Moses of Her People*, and numerous Black Sermons often constructed this same analogy. Analogizing Black

slaves to Israelite slaves became fundamental and indeed foundational to Black Liberation Theology's argument that the Bible is a text that reveals God's plan for liberation from oppression. In order to make this analogy clear and relevant, Black ministers often cataloged the similarities between the 'slaves in Egypt' and the African slaves in America. Not unlike Western Rhetoric's *enumeratio*, Black Rhetoric engages in cataloging in order to reveal, in the form of revealing, the dire and often grave treatment Black Americans experienced under slavery.

Jones's sermon engages in cataloging as revealing in order to compare the Israelites' bondage in Egypt to the Africans' bondage in America and to reveal God's ultimate plan for liberation of the oppressed. Jones begins his sermon by identifying that he intends to make this comparison between the slaves in Egypt and the slaves in America: "These words my brethren, contain a short account of some of the circumstances [that] preceded the deliverance of the children of Israel from their captivity and bondage in Egypt" (Simmons and Thomas 69). He then catalogs their afflictions: "their privation of liberty," "compelled to work in the open air, in one of the hottest climates in the world," "their work was of a laborious kind," they "performed under the eye of vigilant and rigorous masters," were "punished by beating," and he notes that their "food was of the cheapest kind" (Simmons and Thomas 69-70). This exercise in cataloging the Israelites' afflictions resounded with Jones's black audience, as they could identify the connection between themselves and the Israelites through this sermon. He ends this list by orchestrating an explication with lyrical elements in order to excite *pathos* in his audience:

While the fields resounded with their cries in the day, their huts and hamlets were vocal at night with their lamentations over their sons; who were dragged from the arms of their mothers, and put to death by drowning, in order to prevent such an increase in their population, as to endanger the safety of the state by an insurrection. In this condition, thus degraded and oppressed, they passed nearly four hundred years.

Ah! Who can conceive of the measure of their sufferings, during that time? What tongue, or pen, can compute the number of their sorrows? To them no morning or evening sun ever disclosed a single charm: to them, the beauties of spring and the plenty of autumn had no attractions: even domestic endearments were scarcely known to them: all was misery; all was grief; all was despair. (Simmons and Thomas 70)

Constructing an analogy between the Israelites and Black Americans helped establish Black Liberation Theology's argument that God reveals His plan for liberating the oppressed from oppression in the Bible, beginning with the exodus of the Jews from Egypt. Jones's audience could relate to the Israelites described in *Exodus*. Therefore, this analogy functions in such a way as to conclude that God favors and in fact assists the oppressed in a fight for liberty and flight from oppression. Jones reveals to his audience that despite the Israelites' longtime suffering, God had not forgotten them. In fact, he argues that it was God's wisdom that demanded the delay in their exodus from Egypt, not his apathy: "Though, for wise reasons, he delayed to appear [on] their behalf for several hundred years; yet he was not indifferent to their sufferings" (Simmons and Thomas 70). While Jones does not attempt to understand God's wisdom, he does make it clear to his audience that the important lesson in *Exodus* is that God clearly appears on behalf of the oppressed and not the oppressor: "The history of the world shows us that the deliverance of the children of Israel from their bondage is not the only instance in which it has pleased God to appear [on] behalf of oppressed and distressed nations, as the deliverer of the innocent, and of those who call upon his name" (Simmons and Thomas 70-1).

When one examines the early stages of Black Rhetoric through Black Sermonic Rhetoric, it becomes clear that social activism, black identity, cultural survival, and black empowerment are necessary components of a rhetorical tradition that seeks to think Being in order to reclaim humanity, as all are necessary to argue for the liberation of an oppressed people. Black Rhetoric opens a way toward understanding as

unconcealedness rather than as a mere method for understanding aspects and properties of black life. Jones's sermon does more than reveal properties of blackness during slavery; it reveals life as a happening, an event unfolding through time. Like Heidegger's notion of poetry as a space where happening occurs, Jones's sermon creates a space for unconcealedness. Heidegger's unconcealedness is not simply a revealing of thoughts, emotions, or historical facts. Unconcealedness accepts that Being is an event that unfolds through time and presupposes a 'there' where an unfolding may occur in openness. Unconcealedness supersedes any notion that Being may be understood as an object capable of representation. Consequently, Black Rhetoric does more than represent Black life; it is the unfolding of life as an event that unconceals. However, the stripping away of concealedness cannot be understood as a stripping away of properties. The notion that human beings are objects with properties conceals the primordial nature of Being. Black Rhetoric's cataloging, as evidenced by Jones's sermon, is not merely listing properties of Black life; rather, Jones's sermon unconceals the primordial nature of human beings caught up in white supremacy. He unconceals Being by allowing Black life to unfold as an event in time that seeks an understanding of Being as being more than a person with properties. The desire for human dignity sets Black Rhetoric apart from its Western parentage because it unfolds in time as an event that responds to white supremacy. Unfolding and unconcealing are evident in Jones's sermon. Therefore, the poetical nature of his sermon supersedes mere convention and literary device; the sermon itself is poetic in that it thinks Being in terms of understanding as unconcealedness and life as an event.

In reviewing Heidegger's 1924 Summer Semester, Daniel Gross notes that Heidegger's lecture posits that rhetoric is the expression of our concrete existence: "Rhetoric is nothing less than the discipline in which self-elaboration of Dasein is

expressly executed. Rhetoric is no less than the elaboration of Dasein in its concreteness, the hermeneutic of Dasein itself" (1). Black Rhetoric reflects Heidegger's notion that rhetoric is the elaboration of Dasein. Heidegger asserts that because rhetoric is primarily a linguistic expression, *tropes* assist language's ability to form and communicate concepts: "Without the ambiguous turn in language measured out in a [*trope*], human expression would be one dimensional [...] We would lose the unique capacity we have as speaking beings to disclose ourselves against the world, to see always that 'things might be otherwise'" (Gross 3). While evidence of this expression of concreteness exists in most, if not all, rhetorical traditions, Black Rhetoric in particular relies on a handful of specific *tropes* in order to express the concreteness of everyday black existence. Gross understands Heidegger's 1924 lecture as demonstrating that *tropes* are not "ornaments to a univocal core of language" (3). He identifies the audience's role in rhetoric not as passive listeners but as active hearers who help shape the argument. Heidegger argues that effective rhetoric forms a relationship between orator and audience such as that seen in Black Rhetoric. Because language is understood discursively, language exists "neither as an ideally transparent means of communication between minds nor as an arbitrary system of differences" (Gross 3). Because language is understood discursively, it is "rooted in shared moods, human institutions, and the nonchronological history these institutions compose" (Gross 3). Rather than the traditionally understood definition of rhetoric as the "art of speaking," Heidegger "describes rhetoric as the art of listening" (Gross 3). Therefore, language must be understood as a "medium, not [a] means" (Gross 3). While Heidegger's claims offer a better understanding of Black Rhetoric, one of his arguments in particular stands out among the others: "Heidegger characterizes [*pathos*] (variously 'passion,' 'affect,' 'mood,' or 'emotion') as the very condition for the possibility of rational discourse, or

[logos]" (Gross 4). The reason for this is that according to *Being and Time*, Dasein, factually, is always already in a mood: "The fact that moods can deteriorate [verdorben werden] and change over simply means that in every case Dasein always has some mood" (*Being and Time* 173). It is Dasein's mood that allows Dasein to have a perspective, a take, an understanding of its world: "having a mood brings Being to its 'there'" (*Being and Time* 173). *Pathos* understood as understanding oneself, others, and the world in terms of moods that provide perspectives and possibilities for understanding means that in "having a mood, Dasein is always disclosed moodwise as that entity to which it has been delivered over in its Being; and in this way it has been delivered over to the Being which, in existing, it has to be" (*Being and Time* 173). However, it is vital that one understand that "to be disclosed" absolutely does not mean "to be known as this sort of thing" (*Being and Time* 173). On the contrary, Dasein is never a thing to be understood or known; Being is never a 'thing' and as such can never be a 'thing' understood or known. It is for this reason that one must view Being as an event unfolding, i.e., unconcealedness. Unconcealedness as an event is never static and therefore can never be captured in its totality. Only in death does the event of life as an unfolding, as unconcealedness, cease. Consequently, when one examines Black Rhetoric from the perspective of phenomenological hermeneutics and its possibilities, it becomes clear that Black Rhetoric reflects Heidegger's notion that Being can never be an entity nor a thing grasped in its totality, because Dasein always has a mood by which it perceives the world, and that Being is an event that unfolds as unconcealedness. Unconcealedness as an event then becomes the focal point of and foundation for understanding, communication, and interpretation as rhetorical exercises. Therefore, if there were no *pathos* (no moods) "we would have no grounds for concern, no time and place for judging, no motivation to discourse at all" (Gross 4). The fact that Dasein's

facticity of Being includes moods suggests that when we discourse we speak from a mood, to a mood, as well as listen while in a particular mood. A study of Black Hermeneutics reveals that certain moods remain present, despite the increase or decrease of their proportion to other moods: struggle, suffering, hope, despair, angst, alienation, and more importantly, a desire for human dignity underlie every other mood in the Black Hermeneutic Situation. Thus, Black Rhetoric speaks from and to these moods at every turn; even when they are not visible on the surface, they remain affective in the background.

W.E.B. Du Bois identifies Black Americans' dualism as double-consciousness. Racism (i.e., white supremacy) he says, denies Blacks a true self-consciousness, only letting them see themselves "through the revelation of the other world" (11). He explains the peculiarity of double-consciousness as a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois 11). In what I posit as a struggle for identity, particularly for a rhetorical-minded sense of self, Du Bois articulates Black Americans' duality: "One ever feels his two-ness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideas in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (11). His articulation of Black Americans' struggle between two ways of Being in the world reflects my argument for Black Rhetoric's dual parentage. Black Rhetoric emerges from this struggle as an answer to the identity loss Du Bois laments. Double-consciousness does not dissipate with Black Rhetoric's emergence; on the contrary, it survives as a major tenet of Black Rhetoric by occupying the place of both a *trope* as well as a mood. Black Rhetoric has the potential to think Being because it engages *tropes* that listen to and speak from the position of Black Hermeneutics's moods: angst, anxiety, and fleeing in the face of death, fear for

loss of a physical life and of individual identity. In doing so, Black Rhetoric concentrates on unconcealment: thinking Being.

The pedagogical implications of studying Black Rhetoric in the university system are significant. There is much to be learned not only as a consequence of finding integrity in the history of this uniquely American rhetoric but also that its practical applications can serve our rhetorical needs quite well. In a world where it grows increasingly more important to begin our communication with one another grounded on a foundation that acknowledges, validates, recognizes, and understands the humanity and dignity (i.e., what is ontologically closest) of Others despite our differences (i.e., what is ontically closest), Black Rhetoric reveals its capacity for thinking Being and offers a rhetorical opportunity to engage with Others in an ethical way. Therefore, there is value in studying Black Rhetoric beyond its historical significance and individual devices because it fulfills a much-needed purpose: thinking Being. There is an entanglement of logos and mythos in Black Rhetoric that struggles to think Being, but the privileging of mythos (i.e., a signifying language engaged in saying) over logos (i.e., representational language concerned with what has been said) permits Black Rhetoric to engage in ontology in such a way that one indeed does have the potentiality for thinking Being as a possible way of Being-in-the-world. Consequently, it is my hope that the scholarship done in this dissertation will open an avenue of possibility for the future integration of Black Rhetoric into a standard university curriculum whereby the three canons of Black Rhetoric (i.e., Collaborative Deliberation, Forensic Resistance, and Humanist Reciprocity) shall share in the same integrity afforded to the canons of Western Rhetoric (i.e., Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, and Delivery).

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Biographical Information

April Leigh Kinkead's interests in Black Studies and Rhetoric began to take shape during her undergraduate studies at the University of Texas at Arlington. After earning her Bachelor of Arts in English in 2002, she continued her studies at the University of Texas at Arlington, earning both her Master of Arts and her Doctorate of Philosophy in English. In her first semester as a Master's student, April took a critical theory course on Michel Foucault. In this course, she encountered Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, an encounter that would later push her to study Continental Philosophy more broadly. Inspired by the new world she discovered through the lens of critical theory and Continental Philosophy, April began to see her own work in Black Studies and Rhetoric transform. Throughout the remainder of her graduate studies, she focused on the intersections of Black Studies and Rhetoric through the lens of Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics. While she intuitively felt a significant relationship existed between Heidegger's theories on thinking Being and Black Studies, her intuitions did not begin to formulate cohesively until she began writing her dissertation. Inspired and encouraged by the discoveries she made in the process of writing her dissertation, April intends to focus her future scholarly efforts on furthering her inquiries into the intersections of Black Rhetoric, Black Hermeneutics, and Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics by focusing much more on Western Rhetoric's ruptures in metaphysics' dialectical *logos*.