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Mammy: From Pancakes to Grenades

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Mammy: From Pancakes to Grenades

Nichol Michelina Pagano

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for a degree of Master of Arts in English at Longwood College,
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“[Mammy] appeared first there as a person of substantial leisure, to be found in the shade [. . .] with her little charges in her arms, sleeping in her ample lap. But she was also industrious in her assistance to the plantation mistress in raising the white children. Clearly she regarded her own family with indifference at best, demonstrating a harshness to her children which contrasted with her tenderness to her white charges.”

-The Old South

Thomas Nelson Page

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Introduction - Mammy: From Pancakes to Grenades

From an image draped in calico and flipping pancakes to a figure wearing pearls and throwing hand grenades, Mammy exists as part of America's cultural heritage since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Mammy character evolved in American iconography from the subservient kitchen Aunt Jemima to a modern aggressive woman ready for military combat. Early depictions of Mammy show her as being very humble, plain in dress and appearance, and subservient to her white masters. In From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond, Sue Jewell states, "[Mammy] is portrayed as an obese African-American woman, of dark complexion, with extremely large breasts and buttocks and shining white teeth visibly displayed in a grin. Most portrayals of mammy depict her wearing a calico dress or the type of uniform worn by domestics" (39). Today, this nineteenth-century construct continues to confine and define African-American women. However, African-American artists and writers strive to transform the image of the black female icon that literary mythology helped to create into an independent model for black womanhood.

One of the best known literary works that relies on the Mammy figure is Harriet Beecher Stowe's sentimental novel Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852). Stowe, a white northern abolitionist, details the dynamics of the Southern pre-emancipation plantation in her work in an attempt to expose the brutalities of slavery. She uses the dynamics of the Southern plantation as the basis for her fictional treatment of the African-American. Stowe draws on the plantation myth stereotypes of Sambo, Uncle Tom, Jezebel, and Mammy. As Stowe explores the myth of Mammy within her work, she also perpetuates Mammy's

stereotype. For Stowe's contemporary readers, the word "Mammy" evokes ambiguous feelings due to its racist overtones and sexist implications about motherhood and sexuality. To understand the background and creation of the Mammy myth modern readers must investigate the culture of the North and South prior to emancipation.

Fearful of black and white differences, white society chose to fictionalize racial differences in an attempt to restrict blacks. Writers from the white, dominant class assigned fictional Mammy's physical characteristics, emotional make-up, and domestic duties. In fiction, white society determined black women's identity. Thus, if African-American women were not domesticated Mammies, they were characterized as old "work-horse" field hands or highly sexed Hottentots and Jezebels. In "The Development of the Mammy Image and Mythology" Cheryl Thurber comments on the differences between black plantation women as portrayed in fiction: "The mammy, in contrast to the stereotype of the "loose" young black woman, was represented as a sexually non-threatening older black woman [. . .] as a contrast to the Jezebel, or promiscuous young black woman" (88-9). Stowe's Mammy, Aunt Chloe, serves as the opposite of the "loose young black woman" and represents the domesticated conception of the ideal black woman: loyal, subservient, and asexual.

Nine years after the publication of Stowe's novel, the North won the Civil War and Southern blacks were emancipated. However, the legacy of the "Old South" continued and African-American women were still burdened by the brutality of the white race during the aftermath of the war. Black women continued to receive unequal treatment in American society. Fifty years after the publication of Stowe's novel, African-American woman faced the derogatory image of the black Mammy that Stowe's

novel helped empower. Thurber suggests that beginning in 1905, more references to Mammy appeared in popular fiction, songs, memoirs, and collectibles than in any other period (92). Mammy found her way into the iconography of the middle-class, white American homes in the form of kitchen ornaments such as ceramic cookie jars, clay spoon rests, and cloth bread loaf covers. In Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies, Patricia A. Turner asserts that “Mammy/auntie figures constitute the most frequently depicted characters in the realm of contemptible collectibles [. . .] a way of buying and selling the souls of black folk” (11). The period of Mammy’s glorification coincides with the South’s need to solve its racial problems. Thurber continues, “Certainly the ideal of a loving and faithful mammy contributed to the illusion of peace. With the expression of pious devotion and support for mammy, proper Southerners could convince themselves and others of their own goodness [. . .] the Old South came to be viewed as an idyllic society” (98). White society not only confined and objectified black women through the historical realities of slavery but also the racist and sexist imagery prevalent in sentimental fiction, kitchen collectibles, and popular culture.

The mythology of the Mammy emerges in the early years of the nineteenth century and expands to serve the needs of a generation of nostalgic Southern whites searching through their pasts perhaps in an attempt to justify race relations. After emancipation, post-bellum Southerners stood unsure about how to treat black people and Northerners remained uneasy about the influx of blacks into their communities. In portraying the negro character, Southern writers focus on the sexual, comical, quaint, or criminal side of black personality. Mammy appears in many works from the nineteenth century including Caroline Howard Gillman’s The Recollections of a Southern Matron,

Mary Eastman's Aunt Phillis's Cabin, and Thomas Nelson Page's Red Rock. All of these works show Mammy as mother surrogate to white children, a powerful woman within her white family, but still powerless outside the domestic realm.

By the 1930s Mammy became the central maternal figure, the matriarch, always present in literary portrayals of the South. In the 1930s and 1940s, authors of popular and sentimental fiction continued to embrace the Mammy stereotype, as Margaret Mitchell's 1936 best-selling novel Gone with the Wind demonstrates. Mitchell's portrayal of Mammy reflects a conscious desire to return to an era Margaret Mitchell and her contemporaries idealized and romanticized. The novel emphasizes the Civil War and its aftermath and sentimentalizes the "Old South." Mitchell reveals just how firmly embedded the Mammy character became in the minds of white Americans who longed to return to the "Golden Age" of the South.

In Gone with the Wind, Scarlett O'Hara and her Mammy serve the needs of the new Southern woman who emerges in the 1920s and 1930s. Mammy becomes the last link between the New South and the Old South. In Mammy's presence, the new Southern woman finds comfort, shelter, and compassion from the confusion of the emerging New South. The predominance of the Mammy figure in sentimental fiction written before and after the Civil War suggests that she was a woman with whom white women, abolitionists and post-Civil War Southern apologists alike, could live.

In 1939 Hattie McDaniel's rendition of Mammy in the movie version of Gone with the Wind reignited mainstream America's fascination with Mammy. McDaniel's character further reinforces the Mammy archetype. Gone with the Wind Mammy dolls, posters, jingles, and songs breathed new life into this stereotype. The racist and sexist

toys and advertising of this era greatly influenced Mammy's physical image. Once again, society characterized Mammy with a head bandanna and calico dress, dark skin, wide eyes, elated smile, and kitchen utensils in her chubby hands. The Mammy image allowed white society to portray black women as unattractive and non-sexual so African-American women could be kept in a non-threatening domestic role. Doris Y. Wilkerson states, "Black dolls and toys seem to have peaked about 1932, which coincides with the period of mammy glorification" (3). Companies began manufacturing Aunt Jemima dolls in the late 1890s and their production continued until 1945. For advertisers, Aunt Jemima represented the nostalgic view of a kind, nurturing black woman immortalized as the ideal domestic. Other manufactures from the period that marketed the Mammy trademark included Aunt Dinah Molasses, Luzianne Coffee, Fun to Wash Laundry Soap, and Dinah Black Enamel. Northern advertisers knew they could bring their products to the South if they picked an icon that bridged racial boundaries. By introducing Mammy back into Southern culture, advertisers appealed to the sentimental audiences of the South who longed for "the good ol' days" of slavery.

For over a hundred years, writers and advertisers created and recreated Mammy and shackled her into a domestic role. By the 1940s and 1950s the distortion of Aunt Jemima and Gone with the Wind memorabilia had reached its pinnacle. Following this decade, in the 1960s and 1970s, black society aggressively confronted the power of this image. During this period, black writers and artists fought to shatter the image of Mammy and to redefine black women's identity. In 1976, Ishmael Reed's Flight to Canada introduced readers to Mammy Barracuda, a parody of the Mammy stereotype. An assertive, self-serving, highly sexed, and duplicitous character, Mammy Barracuda

stands in direct opposition to Aunt Chloe, Mitchell's Mammy, and Aunt Jemima. In the 1970's and 1980's, visual artists also began to rescue Mammy from the passive oblivion of white people's kitchens. For example, Joe Overstreet's The New Aunt Jemima, Betyre Saar's The Liberation of Aunt Jemima, and Joyce J. Scott's Nanny Now, Nigger Later, explode the Mammy stereotype. In these works, Mammy iconography changed from the biscuit-making domestic to an aggressive, flamboyant, slim, well-groomed, grenade throwing, and machine gun carrying figure.

This thesis will examine the literary, iconographic, and artistic depictions of Mammy during the 1850s, 1930s, and 1970s. By looking at the literary and cultural changes of the last one hundred and thirty years, modern audiences can better understand Mammy's evolution: Mammy's birth, rebirth, and transformation. Chapter 1 focuses on the historical context of this stereotype. It traces the beginnings of the Mammy myth prior to emancipation and investigates Harriet Beecher Stowe's perpetuation of this myth in Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852). It focuses on how society accepted the racist and sexist Mammy stereotype and how such a derogatory image was brought to the forefront in American society. In addition, this chapter explores how white society recreated the Mammy archetype through the art of contemptible collectibles.

Chapter 2 focuses on how Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind (1936) further sentimentalizes the stereotype of the devoted Mammy. It establishes that in the 1920s and 1930s Southerners sought to justify race relations in the South and turned to the Mammy stereotype for comfort. Mitchell and her contemporaries looked back to the idyllic figure of Mammy when romanticizing the "Old South." Although Mitchell publicly spoke against the validity of Stowe's work, she uses a similar depiction of

Mammy and rekindles the relationship between Mammy and the plantation mistress. In addition, this chapter explores the 1939 movie production of Gone with the Wind and draws parallels between Hattie McDaniel's onscreen character to the archetype of Stowe's Aunt Chloe. This chapter also connects the movie production of Mitchell's Mammy and the promotion of Aunt Jemima in the period of the 1920s and 1930s to illustrate Mammy's peak period of glorification. Mammy's "glorification" in advertisements and promotions further reinforced the domestic role of black women. As a result of the Mammy figure's popularity, society continued to regard black women as kitchen help and maids during this era. Society offered black women little freedom. If black women were not classified as Mammies then society cast them into the contradictory image of the promiscuous and wild Jezebel.

Chapter 3 explores the damaging effects the Mammy image had on African-American women's economic and social growth and how contemporary writers and artists have been fighting to recast this image. This chapter focuses on how a black male writing in the twentieth century, Ishmael Reed, explodes the character of Mammy in Flight to Canada (1976). Reed's Mammy Barracuda challenges Stowe's Aunt Chloe, Mitchell's Mammy, and Aunt Jemima in her revolutionary appearance, attitude, and actions. In addition, this chapter examines the contemporary artists' works that attack the Mammy icon, particularly Joe Overstreet's The New Aunt Jemima, 1962, Betyre Saar's The Liberation of Aunt Jemima, 1972, and Joyce J. Scott's Nanny Now, Nigger Later, 1986, and how these visual representations liberate the black Mammy stereotype. These artist's works recast Mammy into new images that parody her traditional dress and servile role. For example, Betyre Saar couples Mammy's broom with a rifle and her

broad smile with a vengeful grimace. These artists confront Mammy's domesticated features and offer her freedom in the outside world.

Through the study of racist and sexist plantation mythology, fictional characterizations, collectible objects, and commercial images, modern society can understand why African-American women, often ascribed to domestic roles in art and reality, have faced difficulty claiming their womanhood. When referring to the period before the Civil Rights Era, Jewell suggests that African-American women were either absent within American culture or labeled as Mammy or Jezebel (41). By tracing the literary, artistic, and iconographic shapes Mammy assumed from the beginning of the nineteenth century up to the present, this thesis examines both the racism and sexism that undergirds American cultural mythology and African-American efforts to explode this myth and reclaim black female identity.

Chapter 1 - Mammy: An Image Perpetuated by Harriet Beecher Stowe's

Uncle Tom's Cabin and Commercialized by American Collectibles

"You do not know how dear a mammy is, to a southerner. I nursed at Mammy's breast. I cannot remember a day in my life without her."

Dorothy West "Mammy," 1940

In "Strategies of Black Characterization in Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Early Afro-American Novel" Richard Yarborough states, "Uncle Tom's Cabin was the epicenter of a massive cultural phenomenon, the tremors of which still affect the relationship between blacks and whites in the United States [. . .] Stowe's work played a major role of establishing the level of discourse for the majority of fictional treatments of the Afro-American that were to follow" (46). The black figures readers meet in Uncle Tom's Cabin include comic minstrel types Sam and Andy, devoted Mammy Chloe, giggling pickaninnies, minstrel show girl Topsy, and reliable Uncle Tom. While not the first novel to present black stereotypes, Stowe's novel gained such popularity that these stereotypes were brought to the forefront in one of the most widely read novels of the period.¹ Yarborough points out that Stowe's novel presents black characters, "however

¹ Plantation mythology is rooted in Southern culture. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese explains that the difficulty in pinpointing the first creation of the black caricatures lies in the fact that stereotypes exist from a combination of each culture's religious, political, and social make-up. Prior to the publication of Stowe's novel slaveholding women recorded their lives in private diaries, journals, and short narratives. Genovese states that it was not until the 1830s, in the North, that women began to record the culture around them in terms of race (Within the Plantation Household 273). She further notes that women's writing focused on the home, religion, and child-rearing. Although the folklore of Mammy started in the South, it is difficult to establish Mammy's literary birth because most of the writing from this period was not published (Genovese 290). Harriet Beecher Stowe herself claimed that she had no literary predecessors. However, in 1839 Theodore

derivative and distorted, who leaped with incredible speed to the status of literary paradigms and even cultural archetypes with which subsequent writers – black and white – have had to reckon” (47). For example, from Stowe’s main character, Tom, comes the phrase “Uncle Tom.” Looking back at Uncle Tom’s Cabin a hundred and fifty years later, readers better understand the evolution of one of these stereotypes, the Mammy, and how white society recreated this figure in American literature, collectibles, and commercialization.

A fictionalized view of slavery, Uncle Tom’s Cabin not only reflects Stowe’s religious and social background but also the political changes of the time. Stowe, a white Northerner, hoped Uncle Tom’s Cabin would expose the brutalities of slavery. As an abolitionist, Stowe was closely involved in America’s great debate over slavery. In fact, when meeting Stowe at the White House President Abraham Lincoln allegedly said, ““So this is the little lady who made the great big war”” (qtd. in Reynolds 146). Through her novel, Stowe presents the changing political decisions that divide the North and South. In Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture, Patricia A. Turner describes the importance of the time period: “The year 1851 was a watershed in the history of both fictional images of black women and genuine African-American women. The serial newspaper installments (1851) and subsequent publication

Dwight Weld anonymously published American Slavery as It Is in the North (Reynolds 54). The novel is written from the abolitionist viewpoint and presents the stereotypes of “Mammy,” “Uncle Tom,” and “Sambo” as characters of Southern slavery. According to Stowe, she was familiar with Weld’s work. However, in Uncle Tom’s Cabin and Mid 19th Century U.S. Moira Reynolds states that “how much it [Weld’s novel] influenced Stowe is unclear” (55). Typical of Stowe’s period she would have read Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier, Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, Cervantes, and Byron. In Uncle Tom’s Cabin and American Culture, Thomas Gossett suggests that Stowe’s ideas on race come from the merging of Southern culture and Western thought (82-3).

(1852) of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin brought into the homes of thousands of Americans a glimpse of the fictionalized black female house servant" (45). Liberal whites and audiences abroad searched for a way to understand Southern slavery. William Andrews comments that Stowe presented a solution for those who "longed for a standard by which to judge slavery and that exotic being, 'the Negro,' [and] embraced Uncle Tom's Cabin as a kind of literary plentitude" (179). Harriet Beecher Stowe's work served as a model for white Northerners attempting to understand the black race.²

Although Stowe intended her novel to end slavery, at times she remains ambivalent in her portrayal of black characters within Uncle Tom's Cabin. Perhaps Stowe's own ambivalence prevented her from writing a full-fledged indictment of slavery. According to Eric J. Sundquist, editor of New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin, "Like any great work of literature, Uncle Tom's Cabin may well transcend the issues and events of its own era but nonetheless be seen to be firmly anchored in them. This is emphatically true of Stowe's novel, which is so deeply *political* in nature – despite seeming at times oblivious to crucial realities in America's great debate over slavery" (1). Stowe's novel helped to instigate the Civil War, but after the war ended Stowe's work did little to better social conditions for black people.³

² In Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture, Thomas F. Gossett points out that Stowe was the first, and most influential writer, to create what white Northerners thought a successful interpretation of the African race (170). Gossett argues that the fictional characters presented by Stowe were widely accepted in the North as realistic depictions of the black race. However, Southerners did not have the same response to Stowe's work. The majority of Southerners thought Uncle Tom's Cabin an inaccurate portrayal of life in the South that wrongfully attacked the institution of slavery that Southerners relied on for survival.

³ In the closing of Uncle Tom's Cabin Stowe emphasizes that slaves should receive freedom in the South and education in the North and be returned to Africa. Stowe

Stowe wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin in reaction to the Compromise of 1850, the main provisions of which admitted California to the Union as a free state and organized the New Mexico and Utah territories without prohibiting slavery. In addition, the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 required Northerners to aid in the return of escaped slaves to their Southern masters. To Stowe and other Northern abolitionists the Fugitive Slave Law ordered a hateful extension of slavery beyond its legal borders (Reynolds 3). After the Compromise passed at the end of the year, Stowe's sister-in-law challenged her to "write something that will make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is" (qtd. in Sundquist 7). Stowe stood and declared in a mighty voice, "I *will* write something. I will if I live" (qtd. in Sundquist 7). Stowe hoped Uncle Tom's Cabin captured the injustices of the institution of slavery. Stowe also hoped that America would recognize that a woman was responsible for this representation.

Stowe comments that she wanted to write a series of sketches "to illustrate the cruelties of slavery [. . .] to liberate blacks to take care of themselves. [. . .] to awaken sympathy and feeling for the African race, as they exist among us; to show their wrongs and sorrows, under a system so necessarily cruel and unjust" (qtd. in Reynolds 7).

suggests to America that once slavery ends, blacks should be reformed and sent to Liberia. In the last chapter, Stowe advocates a mass conversion of Southern slave owners giving their slaves freedom. Perhaps the attitudes echoed in the final chapter explain why Stowe decided to send Eliza and George to Liberia and why she recommends colonization. Stowe writes, "To fill up Liberia with an ignorant, inexperienced, half-barbarized race, just escaped from the chains of slavery, would be only to prolong, for ages, the period of struggle and conflict which attends the inception of new enterprises. [. . .] Let the church of the north receive these poor sufferers in the spirit of Christ; [. . .] until they have attained to somewhat of a moral and intellectual maturity, and then assist them in their passage to those shores, where they may put in practice the lessons they have learned in America" (443). Stowe does not believe slavery is a lawful institution within America, but she does conclude that keeping Africans grouped together in their homeland is a moral practice.

Sundquist suggests Stowe thought that by creating “pictures” of Southern plantation life, she could “paint” the hardships black people endured while enslaved (8). However, Sundquist further notes Stowe’s minimal experience with slavery and blacks. Sundquist states that “she appeared willing to ignore a problem of which critics of sentimental literature had long been aware – that simple pictures are easily reduced to stereotypes and might possibly lead to emotional indulgence and a cathartic dispersal of heart-burnings and anger in her audience rather than mobilizing action on behalf of the oppressed” (10).

While Stowe understood the power of melodrama to move an audience and filled her novel with “pictures” of slave life, particularly domestic slave life, she may not have accurately represented reality (Sundquist 8). In “The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830” Ronald Walters states, “The risk lay in the fact that, although Christianity made it possible for abolitionists to find solace in the lowly condition of black people, [. . .] [it might] have allowed abolitionist imaginations to see slavery abstractly, as a moral drama rather than as interaction among human beings” (2). Stowe did not anticipate the problems that her melodramatic stereotypes would produce for the black race.

Stowe detailed the lives of her black characters in the tradition of the sentimental novel. Richard Yarborough believes Stowe uses sentimentalism because it focuses on emotion, sensibility, and the feminine (62). By writing in the sentimental tradition, Stowe overindulges her reader in emotion. Through sentimentality, Stowe attacks Southern culture at a crucial time when Southerners faced the idea that their entire way of life might end with the abolishment of slavery.

In Sensation Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860 Jane Tompkins asserts that the tradition to which Uncle Tom's Cabin belongs “represents a monumental effort to reorganize culture from a woman's point of view” (3). Thus, whether consciously or unconsciously, Stowe's writing served her own personal intent. As she outlined the fragmentation of the black households and the sorrowful lives of her black characters, white consciousness was still her focal point.⁴ Although she sympathized with the slaves, her commitment to challenging their inferiority was frequently undermined by her perpetuation of racial stereotypes.

Intrigued by the oral stories of escaped slaves, Stowe also read written slave narratives and became influenced by the stories, characters, and themes they presented. While visiting her brother Edward Beecher in 1851, Stowe met Josiah Henson, a freed slave, who published his slave narrative, Life, a year earlier. Intrigued by Henson's narrative Stowe further studied the genre of slave narrative.⁵ Stowe's work differs from the traditional slave narrative because Stowe's main theme is not black freedom nor is her work autobiographical. Yellin explains that slaves like Henson centered their narratives on black man's quest to achieve freedom, yet Stowe's work concentrates on the white

⁴ In Uncle Tom's Cabin Stowe's concern lies in how the white race will be affected by the ending of slavery. As a Northerner, she was not concerned with the economic loss that would result for white Southern plantations when slaves were freed, but she was concerned about the infiltration of blacks into her own Northern culture.

⁵ In The Intricate Knot Yellin discusses the form of slave narratives. Yellin states, “In structure, the narratives generally follow a standard pattern. They begin with a portrayal of life under slavery which usually includes facts about food, clothing, shelter, relationships between master and slave, and information about slavery as an economic system. [. . .] They end with a portrayal of life in freedom, frequently commenting on racial discrimination and discussing the narrator's work in the antislavery movement” (126).

dilemma (127). Her focus deals with the white struggle of choosing a role in the fight over the Fugitive Slave Law.

Another way Stowe's work differs from the slave narrative is her story does not come from *her own* experiences as a slave. Instead, Stowe took what history and culture taught her about the institution of slavery and tried to understand the black race to form her own opinions. Although Stowe believed her involvement with slaves was great, history proves that Stowe actually had little direct involvement with slave life. In Stowe's opinion, she transformed what she learned from former slaves about slavery to create her novel. In fact, Uncle Tom's Cabin was created from a vision, or dream, she had of a man beaten to death in slavery. Reynolds states that when leaving church Stowe became mesmerized by this dream and "prayed that those who had wronged him [the slave] would be forgiven" (7). Later the same day Stowe wrote out the names and scenarios of the characters that appeared in Uncle Tom's Cabin. Included in these preliminary sketches were Uncle Tom and Aunt Mammy.

One of the most referenced stereotypes in American literature and culture is the South's black Mammy. In Uncle Tom's Cabin Stowe perpetuates the stereotype of the Southern Mammy through the one-dimensional character Aunt Chloe. Stowe defines Aunt Chloe by a single stereotypically female skill, her culinary ability. Stowe writes, "A cook she certainly was, in the very bone and centre of her soul. Not a chicken or turkey or duck in the barnyard but looked grave when they saw her approaching, [. . .] and certain it was that she was always meditating on trussing, stuffing, and roasting" (20). These lines reduce Aunt Chloe to a character whose soul can be found in her master's tastebuds. In Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture, Thomas F. Gossett

argues that “Stowe also thought that black women have a racial trait which makes them better cooks.[. . .] She thought blacks especially suited by their racial traits to perform menial labor” (73). Stowe emphasizes the inherent domestic role of black women through Aunt Chloe’s character instead of liberating black characters in Uncle Tom’s Cabin.⁶

Stowe tends to accept the idea of women’s roles and casts her female characters within domestic roles that her New England background instructed as correct female behavior.⁷ As an abolitionist, Stowe should sympathize with the black women confined

⁶ It is difficult for readers to understand Stowe’s one-dimensional portrayal of black females given her involvement in ending slavery. Women’s participation in the abolishment of slavery began in the 1830s. By the novel’s publication date of 1852, the debate over women’s role in society had raged for over a decade. Key voices in this debate that influenced Stowe included abolitionists Sarah and Angelina Grimké and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s sister Catherine Beecher. Like the Grimké sisters, Stowe recognized that slavery and women’s rights were two political issues directly related because they both dealt with the social conditions of two different groups that were viewed as inferior. Catharine Beecher believed that women’s sphere was the home, all women’s work reserved to childrearing, education, and subservience to her husband. Catherine did not believe women should have any involvement in the abolishment of slavery. For more information on female domesticity see American Women’s Home, co-authored by Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe. In this work, the Beecher sisters discuss the hardships women faced as they worked within their homes. The Beecher sisters do not reject domestic service but suggest the problem with house servants is that they are not treated or cared for properly. This source also offers explicit informative on female education and religious duty.

⁷ A product of New England Victorianism, Stowe was taught women were supposed to stay in the home, the “sanctuary [. . .] where sympathy, honor, and virtue are assembled” (Cott 64). In The Bonds of Womanhood, Nancy Cott describes the New England ideal. According to Cott, “The canon of domesticity and its enveloping social circumstances presented difficult choices for women from this period” (80). For example, Lydia Maria Child’s wrote in Mother’s Book, “The care of children requires a great many sacrifices, and a great deal of self-denial, but the woman who is not willing to sacrifice a good deal in such a cause, does not deserve to be a mother” (qtd. in Cott 91). For more information on the difficulties that Northern women faced during the industrial and commercial changes in the North see Morina Davidson Reynolds’ Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Mid-Nineteenth Century United States. Reynolds details the poor conditions many Northern women faced. Reynolds states that a woman of this time period “who lived in a town or

by slavery and construct positive black characters in Uncle Tom's Cabin however the characters Stowe creates do not illustrate a desire to liberate black womanhood but reinforce the notion the black women are content within slavery. Perhaps, Stowe creates inferior black female characters because of her own fear and confusion.

Stowe created Aunt Chloe as a black individual with whom both Northerners and Southerners would be comfortable. In describing Aunt Chloe's physical appearance Stowe writes, "A round, black, shining face is hers, so glossy as to suggest the idea that she may might have been washed over with white of eggs, like one of her own tea-rusks. Her whole plump countenance beams with satisfaction and contentment from under her well-starched checked turban" (19). The language Stowe uses to describe Aunt Chloe suggests that she is a polished slave that white Southerners would allow in their homes. Through her description, Stowe removes some of the qualities that she perceived as African or that she associated with the black race. By taking the focus off Aunt Chloe's blackness Stowe suggests a fear of something "African." To a nineteenth-century Southern middle-class American, "African" meant devilish darkness, animal-like traits, strong sexuality, mental deficiency, and childish, unmanageable behavior (Gossett 73). Aunt Chloe stands in direct opposition to this foreign and feared individual. Stowe believes that African-Americans can be reformed within domestic service if masters offer their workers love, respect, and education (American Woman's Home 323). Perhaps

city – and this would have included Harriet – led a very different life. She [woman] lacked modern conveniences [. . .] was not even comfortably dressed [. . .] [and] if she had time for reading, she could turn for advice to the magazine Godey's Lady Book. Advice from all quarters emphasized the necessity of discipline of childraising" (99-100).

Stowe, even though an abolitionist, felt more comfortable with domesticated blacks like Mammy or “reformed” Africans like Josiah Henson.

Stowe accepts Mammy because she embodies the proper nineteenth-century ideal of womanhood: generosity and graciousness. Stowe defines Aunt Chloe as a peaceful domestic and perpetuates the stereotype of the happy slave. Mammy symbolizes the selfless, ideal servant. Aunt Chloe remains in high spirits if she is performing actions of servitude like cooking. For example, “Her corn-cake, in all its varieties of hoe-cake, dodgers, muffins, was a sublime mystery to all less practiced compounders; and she would shake her fat sides with honest pride and merriment, as she would narrate the fruitless efforts that one and another of her compeers had made to attain her elevation” (Stowe 20). Aunt Chloe appears to find joy in pleasing her master. In Uncle Tom’s Cabin and American Culture Thomas Gossett explains, “on many occasions, Stowe praised blacks for being jolly, cheerful, gregarious, and affectionate, with the implication that these qualities are inherent” (69). Thus, Stowe seems to confirm the Southern view of the happy slave instead of creating a confrontational character who might attack or refuse a domestic life of servitude.

Modern readers face difficulty when trying to understand why Stowe portrayed a female character that affirmed the cheerfulness of an enslaved person. The role of the jubilant domestic Stowe ascribed to Aunt Chloe foreshadows the role American culture associated with the black female during the years after the first publication of Stowe’s novel. The cultural changes that occurred after Stowe’s age allow modern readers to see Mammy, a character nineteenth-century society saw as representing loyalty and love, as absurd and demeaning. In Goodbye to Uncle Tom, J. C. Furnas studies the novel’s

relationship to the realities of slavery, its popularized versions, and derivative cultural stereotypes. He reveals what he sees as Stowe's role in perpetuating "the misconceptions, Southern and Northern, the wrongheadednesses, the distortions and wishful thinkings about Negroes in general and American Negroes in particular that still plague us today" (3). Because of the gender conventions Stowe illustrated, society aligned black women with images of motherhood and domesticity. Uncle Tom's Cabin brought black stereotypes to the forefront of American culture. The same Sam and Andy, Mammy, pickaninny, and Uncle Tom figures of Uncle Tom's Cabin were reproduced in American collectibles.

Blacks received freedom during emancipation however society continued to figuratively own a piece of black identity long after the Civil War. Both Northern and Southern Americans surrounded themselves with collectibles that reinforced the jovial nature of domestic workers during slavery. These reproductions of black life predominantly existed in Southern homes. However, the North was responsible for the production of the majority of black figurines and some Northerners did display "darkie" images in their homes. The art of collecting "darkie" figures began in the 1850s around the same time of the publication of Stowe's novel. Collectibles continued to reinforce the "darkie" and Mammy stereotypes of blacks. Like Stowe's work, these collectibles remained in fashion after slavery ended. In Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies, Patricia Turner explains how inanimate objects represent, or rather commercialize, the sentiment of whites. Turner states, "Mammy/auntie figures constitute the most frequently depicted characters in the realm of contemptible collectibles. Draped in calico from head to toe, Mammy and her cronies pose no sexual threat to their white mistresses.

They want to nourish rather than seduce white men. The artifacts they grace belong almost exclusively to the kitchen” (11). The idea that white culture created icons that continued to keep black women in the domestic sphere causes little surprise. With Mammy in the kitchen she posed no threat to the authority and status of white women.

Stowe’s Aunt Chloe was recreated on spoon rests, cookie jars, broom pads, and tissue boxes. These relics display Mammy’s smiling black face and all align the black female with domestic work. These objects suggest that Mammy finds happiness in making pancakes, washing clothes, scrubbing floors, and feeding the white family. Through these playful caricatures white women avoided their fears of black women controlling the home, stealing the affection of their husbands, and being elevated within society. Who praises a domestic, except in the kitchen?

The figurines, plates, and silverware from Stowe’s era offer a tangible record of American cultural abuse. These items adversely perpetuate the relationship of Southern white women and black domestics, suggests Turner: “The mammy figures convey the notion that genuine fulfillment for black women comes not from raising their own children or feeding their own man but from serving in a white family’s kitchen” (25). White women of the South convinced themselves of slavery’s goodness because black women found fulfillment in raising their master’s white children instead of their own. By suggesting that the same personages represented in these images ran white ante-bellum households, America commercialized on a mythological Southern past that removed the harsh realities of actual servitude.

In American culture, the art of collecting ceramic Mammy highlights the dynamics of a fearful white race. Turner believes that the art of collectibles was a way

for white society to continue owning blacks even after 1865 (29). She explains how black bodies were sold both literally and figuratively: "Beginning in 1619, black human beings were bought and sold in America [. . .] In 1863 the selling of real black human beings was at long last over, but the selling of distorted characters had just begun" (29). Black faced icons surfaced in the 1850's and have resurfaced in American culture for the last one hundred and twenty years. While America's political, social, and cultural make-up began to change after the publication of Stowe's novel and the emancipation of the slaves, the Mammy stereotype did not change. Instead, Mammy characters and images lived. Americans continued to live in a world eager to develop new reasons and rationales for commodifying blacks during and after slavery.

Chapter 2 – Southern Plantation Mythology: Fiction to Film,

Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind

"I had so much tried to portray the wonderful women of the South [. . .] Mammy was as uncompromising about right and wrong as was possible. The stout-headed matrons who knew right from wrong refused to tolerate Scarlett."

- Margaret Mitchell

For nearly a century, from 1865-1960, the stereotypes perpetuated by Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin and commercialized by "darkie" collectibles gained even more power in American iconography. Returning to the racist and sexist stereotypes of slavery comforted white America, allowing it to deal with the crisis years that followed the Civil War. Richard Yarborough states, "The controversy over Uncle Tom's Cabin did not die out with the emancipation of the slaves and the military defeat of the South" (66). The slaves gained freedom with the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and the North victory in the Civil War, but the South dealt with the effects of both, particularly Southern blacks who experienced the economic and social constraints that Stowe detailed in her novel. Instead of moving forward with the changing nation, Southerners from Thomas Nelson Page in the late nineteenth century to Margaret Mitchell in the 1930s looked back at works such as Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin and romanticized slavery and the ante-bellum South to deal with the trials of *their* time.⁸

⁸ Thomas Nelson Page's Red Rock (1898) characterizes Southern attitudes towards the post-war past. In "Race, Romance, and the Southern Literary Tradition" Kenneth O'Brien states that Page's black characters were "invariably carefree and childlike and were the loved and adoring intimates of their white families" (155). Page's work differs from Stowe's novel because his intent is not to show the brutalities of slavery, but to

Like Uncle Tom's Cabin, Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind quickly became a phenomenon in American culture. Although Margaret Mitchell intended to defend the South against Stowe's criticisms and to prove Uncle Tom's Cabin an inaccurate portrayal of the South, Mitchell's work shared many common themes with Uncle Tom's Cabin. In a letter to Mr. Alexander May on July 22, 1938, Mitchell wrote, "It makes me very happy to know that Gone with the Wind is helping refute the impression of the South which people gained from Mrs. Stowe's book. Here in America Uncle Tom's Cabin has long been forgotten and there are very few people who have read it. They only know it as the name of a book which had a good deal to do with the bitterness of the Abolition movement" (rpt. in Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind Letters 1936-1949 215-7). As a Southerner, Mitchell thought it her duty to rewrite the history of the South and to present Southern culture in a more positive light than earlier literary depictions. While Stowe wrote to expose the brutalities of Southern slavery, Mitchell wrote to recast the period of slavery as the South's Golden Age.

During their periods of publication, as well as today, both Stowe and Mitchell's novels have been criticized for disregarding history, perpetuating stereotypes, and portraying false race relations. Yet both works are deeply rooted in American literary history, culture, and iconography. In Scarlett's Women, Helen Taylor states, "As Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin was a reference point in the nineteenth and early

illustrate the glorious days of the "Old South." Yet, like Stowe, Page still relies on plantation mythology and perpetuates black stereotypes. In addition, O'Brien comments that Page's work influenced Margaret Mitchell's creation of her loyal household blacks, including Mammy. O'Brien continues, "Both Page and Mitchell portray blacks as helpless innocents, children who are incapable of initiative and who require a strong guiding hand. Mammy is a powerful figure but only within a well-defined structure" (156-7).

twentieth centuries for all white and black authors writing about slavery and The Birth of a Nation was the reference point for Southern films, including Gone with the Wind, so since the 1930s Gone with the Wind has taken both their places” (161). Mitchell’s work became one of the most widely read and publicized novels of its era and its influence was greatly extended through the popularity of the movie. But modern readers must not regard Gone with the Wind as an accurate portrayal of its era but rather as representative of the South’s period of search for proper social and stable economic development during the Reconstruction.

Southern writers, ranging from Margaret Mitchell to William Faulkner, used their fiction to appeal to wealthy and poor, male and female, black and white, and Northern and Southern readers. In presenting the problems facing America to such a varied audience, Southern writers justified and explained the past in an attempt to resolve racial and economic dilemmas. In “Scarlett O’Hara and the Two Quentin Compsons” Louis Rubin explains that Margaret Mitchell represents the Southern fiction writers who began to write in the 1920s because they needed to understand their regional environment, the South (7). By returning to the “Old South,” writers could trace and understand the death of the South’s original way of life and attempt to restore what Southerners saw as “the good ol’ days” before the Civil War (Rubin 8).

In portraying the South, Mitchell relies on plantation mythology to help tell her story. Contrary to literary depictions, history proves that Mammy, a recurring character in plantation mythology, not only differed in her composition and appearance, but also appeared less frequently in pre-emancipation homes. However, Mitchell disregarded

history and relied on prior characterizations of Mammy to present her story.⁹ Taylor states, “This revered Mammy figure has been the stuff of white idealization since the early Southern novels, in which she was described as central to harmonious relations on the happy plantation. Harriet Beecher Stowe put her on the map in the world-famous Uncle Tom’s Cabin” (169).¹⁰ Stowe’s perpetuation of Mammy gave audiences a false representation of African-American women’s appearance, disposition, and role as a slave woman, but Mitchell capitalized on this Southern myth.

After the publication of Stowe’s novel, the Mammy figure became a large part of American culture. Mammy’s reign “of glory” continued well into the 1930s and coincided with the South’s need to solve its racial problems. Mammy became a shelter for the South, an intermediary between blacks and whites, and a figure whose strength and power within both races could be seen as representative of the idyllic society Southerners sought. As a woman who experienced Southern life forty years after the devastation of the Civil War, Margaret Mitchell returned to an era that she and her contemporaries idealized and romanticized, an era in which Mammy could offer the

⁹ For example, Mitchell relied on Thomas Nelson Page’s Red Rock (1898). In “Race Romance, and the Southern Literary Tradition” Kenneth O’Brien states, “Thomas Nelson Page was the leading exponent of the Southern school; indeed, his name has become synonymous with all its sentimental conventions” (152). Other novels from this era that examine racial issues include Joel Chandler Harris’s Gabriel Tolliver (1902) and Thomas Dixon’s The Leopard Spots (1903).

¹⁰ Helen Taylor offers more examples that present Mammy as a figure of white idealization. Taylor states, “[. . .] in other novels as different as Thomas Nelson Page’s Red Rock (1898), Ellen Glasgow’s Virginia (1913) and William Faulkner’s The Sound and the Fury (1929) – as well as films from The Birth of a Nation (1915) to Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner (1967) – she is a solid, enduring presence” (169). Taylor argues that for over a century Mammy has been celebrated in novels and films to plays and poems as the devoted and loyal servant of white families. However, her appearance within these works is representative of white thought, not black.

comfort and support she represented in the “Old South.” In “The Development of the Mammy Image and Mythology” Cheryl Thurber states, “The Mammy, one of the central figures in the plantation legend of the Old South, reached her greatest popularity in the era of the New South and Progressivism.[. . .] the Old South came to be viewed as an idyllic society” (87).¹¹ To American culture, the Mammy figure represented the “Old South.” By including Mammy in the “New South” Mitchell reassures frightened Southerners and promotes racial harmony.

In Gone with the Wind, Mitchell idealized the loyal field hands who kept Southern families wealthy through their work, the comic minstrel-type slaves who provided entertainment to her ancestors, but above all the devoted house slave, the Mammy figure she had been told helped raise generations of whites before her. Margaret Mitchell was born in Atlanta, Georgia, thirty-nine years after the Civil War.¹² Her family

¹¹ After the war, The New South advocated progress, industrialization, and capitalism. However, this lifestyle change was difficult for a region that relied on farming. As the North became more industrialized, Southerners feared loss of economic power and became more determined than ever to return to slavery. Southerners remained ambivalent about accepting the “New South Creed.” This ambivalence is illustrated in Mitchell’s work. In “The Simple Story’s Ideology: Gone with the Wind and the New South Creed” Richard King states, “Though bearing its own share of nostalgia, the obscure object of the novel’s desire is as much new South promise as it is Old South tradition” (171).

¹² At her family farm in Clayton County, as well as the city of Atlanta, Mitchell felt close to the Civil War and remained conscious of how important this era’s history was to her heritage. She states, “When I was a child [. . .] [I was] forgotten for the rest of the afternoon while the gathering spiritedly refought the Civil War. I heard about the fighting and the wounds [. . .] I heard about the burning and looting of Atlanta [. . .] I heard about everything in the world except that the Confederates lost the war” (qtd. in Farr 17). Mitchell’s family reminisced about the days of glory and never mentioned the South’s defeat. Mitchell remembered that as a young girl it felt like the war still raged throughout the homes, families, and stories of the South (Farr 17). Even though the Civil War ended, in Atlanta the destruction remained a visible reminder. Margaret Mitchell looked at her family and their history as resources she could combine in an effort to

was woven around the wars that changed America. Mitchell's father, a minister, gave his church as a Civil War hospital; Mitchell's uncle, an officer in the Civil War, gave his life for the South; and a revolutionary officer Mitchell's grandfather sacrificed his family for America. War was a familiar topic within the Mitchell family.

During the period of search, continuing sixty years after the Civil War, Mammy also served the needs of the new Southern woman emerging in the 1920s and 1930s. Prior to this period, most Southern women remained oblivious to political concerns, such as women's suffrage and the black vote. By returning to an imaginary "Old South," while also affirming that the "Old South" has ended, women could avoid these controversies. Southern women looked to the character of Mammy for reassurance during this tumultuous era. A constant figure in plantation mythology, Mammy never changed; Mammy represented total loyalty and pure devotion. Because the mythological Mammy always put her own family second to the needs of her plantation masters, Southern women in the 1920s and 1930s thought Mammy would not change, like the South, but remain steadfast and loyal to the family she served.

In Gone with the Wind Mammy is subservient, asexual, and loyal to her white mistress. In Southern plantation novels, "[Mammy] is a solid, enduring presence. Passive, patient, with no apparent needs or desires of her own, she is loyal to 'her' white 'family,' hostile to Yankees, white trash and uppity Negroes, and a constant source of emotional and physical solace" (Taylor 169). By including Mammy in her work, Mitchell reassured frightened whites that there were 'good' black women. The idea of

devise what she called "her own version of past and place" (qtd. in Farr 89). Mitchell used the "past and places" of the South as a backdrop for Gone with the Wind to help piece together the lifestyle she longed to understand.

“good” blacks verse “bad” blacks is constantly referred to when discussing the hidden fear white women felt towards enslaved blacks. In From Mammies to Militants Trudier Harris discusses that “good” blacks reside in defined roles. For example, maids and Mammies are roles for black women that white society dictated. Harris states, “They are more likely to be ‘ideal servants,’ the mammy figures traditionally identified with the southern plantation households. These women usually compromise everything of themselves and of their connections to the black community in order to exist in the white world” (23). Mammy figures, “good blacks,” stand in direct opposition to the stereotypes of the loose Jezebel or field hands that are characterized as “bad” blacks.

White Southern women admired Mammy because she displayed good spirits when serving her white masters. In Mammy: From Mrs. America and Beyond Sue Jewell states, “The continuous displaying of teeth, in a grin or a smile, suggests satisfaction or contentment, which was important to white slave owners” (41). In Gone with the Wind Mammy’s obesity and constant smile are paired with her “shining black” color (Mitchell 530). Mammy, like her literary counterparts Sambo and Uncle Tom, remains in a jovial state symbolic of eternal happiness and serves as a form of entertainment to her white employers. Mammy acts as the matriarch for the O’Hara children and offers Scarlett comfort in her “ponderous” body and “monumental, sagging breasts” (Mitchell 532). Mammy functions within the novel as the “good” maternal provider; she is happy to subordinate her own identity as a black woman and mother for her role in the O’Hara family.

In Gone with the Wind, readers see little of Mammy’s own identity. The lack of true black character development stems from the white production of Mammy. Mitchell

never offers the reader a glimpse of Mammy's own family. Helen Taylor explains the relationship between Mammy and Mrs. O'Hara: "In the absence of any name or family of her own, [Mammy] cares passionately for her white family's welfare, wealth, physical, and moral health. A substitute mother, given her close daily contact with her charges, she is a fixed point throughout all the turbulences of the O'Hara family and her own race" (172). Mammy even voices the conservative views and values of her mistress, Ellen O'Hara, particularly when reprimanding Scarlett for bad behavior. When Ellen O'Hara, Scarlett's mother, dies, Mammy serves as the children's only maternal provider: "Scarlett ran to her [Mammy], laying her head on the broad breasts which had held so many heads, black and white. Here was something of stability, thought Scarlett, something of the old life that was unchanging" (Mitchell 412). Mitchell employs the Mammy figure in Mrs. O'Hara's absence because the black Mammy epitomized motherhood.

Although Mammy holds very strong ties to Scarlett and the O'Hara plantation, she is a slave. At times it is difficult for the reader to remember that Mammy is a possession of the O'Hara household, not part of the family, as Mitchell's descriptions suggest. In Southern Women, Patricia Morton states, "In the 1930s, for Southern whites, it was the claim to actually have mammy in the family which imparted the status" (35). Southern plantation masters viewed domestic workers as prized possessions. In Me and Mammy (1906) Mary Brabson Littleton states, "Having a mammy became a badge of having been 'raised right' as a proper Southerner. In the mythology, the white folks were firmly left in control of the subservient and dependent mammy who knew her place, and because of that mammy could be seen as having power within the household" (98). Mammy possesses power in the O'Hara household, but only within a well-defined

structure. After the war, the degradation of Tara defeats her: “[H]er shoulders dragged down [. . .] her kind black face was sad with the uncomprehending sadness of a monkey’s face” (Mitchell 842). Although Mammy remains steadfast and loyal to the O’Hara household, she is unable to manage Tara in the absence of whites.

In the second half of the novel, which takes place after the Civil War, Mitchell relies more on the characteristics of Southern romance and the plantation myth. After the South’s defeat, some of the O’Hara servants refuse their freedom and stay on the plantation to work. Mitchell’s Mammy figure also settles on the plantation and remains loyal to the O’Hara family. Through sentimentalism Mitchell emphasizes the intimate bond between slave and master. After the war, when Scarlett returns to Tara with the knowledge that her mother is dead and her father has gone crazy, one thought consoles her: “Soon. Mammy would be with her—Ellen’s Mammy, her Mammy [. . .] Scarlett ran to her, laying her head on the broad, sagging breasts which had held so many heads, black and white. Here was something of stability, thought Scarlett, something of the old life that was unchanging [. . .] Mammy, the last link with the old days” (Mitchell 1037). After Scarlett’s tragic return, she longs to reverse her own course and seeks to lose herself in the old, matriarchal shelter of Mammy and Tara. For Scarlett, Mammy and Tara both embody the idea of home.

Although the South never returned to the pre-Civil War days that Mitchell and her contemporaries idealized, Mitchell successfully presents a world that seemed romantic to her Southern audience. Kenneth O’Brien remarks, “The story’s characters, places, and themes are so much a part of American culture that references not only to Scarlett and Tara but to not giving a damn” are constantly heard (2). According to the Atlantic

Monthly, the book became a commercial and cultural phenomenon that “sold over a million copies during its first month in print” (qtd. in Leff 106). In 1939, David O. Selznick bought Margaret Mitchell’s novel for \$50,000 and today the film remains a testament to the glory of the Hollywood studio system. By then end of the 1930s Mammy’s presence in American iconography had been established not only in fiction but also in film. In Divided Sisters, Midge Wilson and Kathy Russell state, “The new industry of film became yet another powerful medium through which the stereotypes of blacks and white women were perpetuated. Nowhere was this more evident than in the film Gone with the Wind. The movie was released in 1939 by MGM, and went on to win a record with ten Academy Awards” (248). Today, Gone with the Wind stands as one of the all-time top grossing films in history.

Gone with the Wind was not an easy novel to adapt to film. Critics further criticized Mitchell’s work as presenting an inadequate history of the South and distorting race relations.¹³ Opinions of the movie production were two-fold. In “Gone With the Wind and Hollywood’s Racial Politics” Leonard Leff states, “Some opposed the production and release of the picture; others hailed it as a fine showcase for black actors. The lack of consensus not only complicated the production for David Selznick, whose liberal instincts warred with his intention of producing his story of the Old South his way, but also made Gone with the Wind a barometer of American race relations in the 1930s

¹³ When referring to the accuracy of the movie version Gone with the Wind Gerald Wood argues that it is not supposed to be a realistic portrayal of race in the South. Instead, in “The Loss of American Innocence” he states, “The Birth of a Nation and Gone With the Wind are domestic melodramas which express popular myths of history in their respective times—the progress myth and the Eden myth. [. . .] Gone With the Wind sees American history as a fall from innocence and imagination into experience and reality” (133-4).

and 1940s” (107). Contacted by members of black colleges, the black press, and radical groups, black audiences begged Selznick not to turn what they saw as an “anti-Negro” novel into an “anti-Negro” film. Very aware of the issues of race that Gone with the Wind presented, Selznick hired both black and white technical advisors to aid in the casting of the black character’s dialect, costumes, and introductions to the press. Even though Selznick was extremely cautious in presenting the movie’s black characters, America’s opinions were still split. Hattie McDaniel herself said that she hoped her role “was always a credit to her race,” even though black reviewers said the film merely presented a collection of flat black characters (qtd. in Leff 113). A critic for the Chicago Defender said, “Hattie McDaniel’s character has helped keep her people enchained for centuries” (qtd. in Leff 112).

Hattie McDaniel’s film rendition of Mammy further reinforced the Mammy image. When referring to Mammy’s role in the movie production, Wilson and Russell comment that “although many of the relationships in Gone with the Wind left indelible marks in the minds of viewers, one of the most enduring was that between the white plantation mistress Scarlett O’Hara and her house slave, Mammy [. . .] Like Aunt Chloe in Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Mammy is completely devoted to Scarlett, highly maternal, and devoid of any sexual allure” (248). McDaniel became, perhaps, the supreme example of the Mammy image. As a cultural archetype, Mammy was now not only present in American fiction and film but also entered homes through popular advertising and commercialization.

With the movie release of Mitchell’s work, Mammy imagery gained even more momentum in America. McDaniel’s face became synonymous with the maternal

Mammy Americans were longing for, the mythology of the Mammy extended within American popular songs, memoirs, and advertising.¹⁴ Society used Mammy in an attempt to present pleasant race relations between whites and blacks. Cheryl Thurber states, "Using the specific relationship between individuals to explain and justify race relations in general has been a frequently repeated pattern in southern culture. The implication is that if all blacks could be like mammy then race relations would be harmonious" (98). Now that Mammy had become a part of America through McDaniel's visual representation, whites could claim that they understood blacks because they knew and understood her.

Prior to McDaniel's debut, the first "ideal" black female figure that both Northern and Southern America accepted was Aunt Jemima. In 1898 producers introduced the notorious image of Mammy, Aunt Jemima. Thirty-five years later, Gone with the Wind's movie characterization sealed Mammy's fate as the quintessential image for black females. Society ascribed the same physical characteristics and domestic role associated with Aunt Jemima to Hattie McDaniel's character. Although American culture changed drastically within the thirty-five year span between Aunt Jemima's introduction and Hattie McDaniel's unveiling, American culture had not changed its conception of the black female. Patricia A. Turner states, "Ask most people to name a mammy and they will respond 'Aunt Jemima.' An advertising trademark for one hundred years, the toothy

¹⁴ In Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies Patricia Turner asserts that advertisers and producers who portrayed Mammy merely capitalized on an inaccurate image. She states, "Harriet Beecher Stowe and the other mid- to late-nineteenth century writers who 'birthed' the first mammies inadvertently presented the world with a ferociously durable symbol of black womanhood. The early twentieth-century moviemakers, advertisers, and other American dream merchants recognized and profited from the public's love affair with the smiling faces and stocky shapes of the mythical mammies" (60).

grin and calico-swatched plump face is synonymous with wholesome, nutritious breakfasts” (49).¹⁵

As an instrument of the privileged and wealthy, mass media negatively defined black identities by proliferating certain beliefs and stereotypes based on the mythology of the Southern plantation. Through film, television, radio, and advertising, the dominant culture continued to portray the cultural image of the subservient black woman. Racist and sexist depictions limited the black female’s role and achievement in American society. Sue Jewell believes that “in order to challenge the myths and stereotypes inherent in traditional cultural images of the African-American women, the inconsistencies and contradictions in the institutional treatment of African American women must be exposed” (12). Jewell acknowledges that these images have made black women less valued in society. She argues that white families gave African American women a lower status because traditionally whites held the money and means to construct such self-serving imagery.

A series of indefatigable Mammy figures trooped through the first several decades of twentieth-century literature, film, and popular culture. These figures left a very limited

¹⁵ Aunt Jemima was first introduced at the Columbia Exposition in Chicago. The company hired Nancy Green, a black cook, to give demonstrations of pancake cooking and play the part of Aunt Jemima. Turner continues, “Green, a former domestic servant for a Chicago judge, was a hit. Her pancake flipping dexterity and wholesome stories about life in the Old South garnered more than 50,000 merchant orders for Aunt Jemima Pancake Mix” (49). Once again, Mammy images appeared throughout American popular culture. Although the purchasing of black women had ended with emancipation, Aunt Jemima was still marketed and bought by both white and black Americans. Other manufacturers who used the Mammy trademark were Luzianne Coffee, Fun to Wash Laundry Soap, Aunt Dinah Molasses, and Dinah Black Enamel, all products that associated the black woman with domesticity.

and distorted visual record of the black women of the South. As representative of Mammy's evolution, Stowe's Aunt Chloe, Margaret Mitchell's Mammy, Hattie McDaniel's screen portrayal, and Aunt Jemima's commercialized face, have all built upon one another and confined the black female to a racist and sexist image. All these representations characterize the black woman as being so loyal to her white masters that she refuses the freedom that comes with emancipation because she enjoys being enslaved. Instead of becoming independent and free, she remains jovial and content in her domestic role.

Gone with the Wind was not the first book or film to feature Mammy, but it certainly sealed her fate in racial myth. Mammy's dark skin, broad smile, plump body, culinary skills, and nurturing breasts confined her to the role of the selfless, idealized, black matriarch of Southern mythology. Through the plantation myth, Mitchell builds a bridge, on the backs of black women, between the Old South and the New South in hopes that the South can again triumph. Both Stowe and Mitchell looked to American society and history to help explain their own generation's needs, especially the needs of women. Although their portrayals of slavery differ, they both create and recreate history to fit their own personal agendas. Stowe's and Mitchell's dangerous and harmful depictions of blacks perpetuate stereotypes and leave racist and sexist imagery for society to combat.

Chapter Three - Parody and Pictorial: Ishmael Reed Attacks Plantation Mythology in Flight to Canada and Artistic Communities Explode the Stereotype of Mammy in Joe Overstreet's The New Aunt Jemima, 1962, Betye Saar's The Liberation of Aunt Jemima, 1972, and Joyce J. Scott's Nanny Now Nigger Later, 1986

"Art is an escape from the sorrows of life." – Anne Goldthwaite

In 1976, Ishmael Reed's Flight to Canada introduced readers to Mammy Barracuda, a parody of the Mammy stereotype. An imposing, self-serving, highly sexed, and duplicitous character, Mammy Barracuda stands in direct opposition to Aunt Chloe, Mitchell's Mammy, and Aunt Jemima. White nineteenth-century works of fiction depict black female slaves as happy and content with their duties as domestic servants. In From Mammies to Militants Trudier Harris states, "Mammy signaled the wish for organic harmony and projected a woman who suckled and reared white masters.[. . .] The image displaced sexuality into nurture and transformed potential hostility into sustenance and love" (292). However, after the Civil Rights Era Ishmael Reed re-cast Mammy into a modern, aggressive figure in control of her own identity.¹⁶ From 1962 to 1967 Reed lived in New York City and participated in both the Civil Rights Movement and the

¹⁶ Ishmael Reed belongs to the African American literary tradition that is rooted in the first-person slave narratives. Ishmael Reed's Long Fiction states, "Until the middle of the twentieth century, Afro-American fiction, although enriched by the lyricism of Jean Toomer and Zora Neale Hurston, concentrated on realistic portrayals of black life and employed familiar narrative structures. This tendency toward social realism peaked with Richard Wright's Native Sun (1940) and Black Boy (1945) [. . .] [and] by authors such as James Baldwin" (<<http://na.atu.edu/ensign/Brucker/Reed.html>>). Reed belongs to a divergent tradition, inspired by Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man (1951), a counter-tradition that includes the work of Leon Forrest, Ernest Gaines, James Alan McPherson, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker.

Black Power Movement.¹⁷ Reed played an active role in the literary and artistic achievements of this era and claims that his own novels compose “an art form within its own laws” (qtd. in O’Brien 167). He encouraged the work of other minority artists and in 1965 organized the American Festival of Negro Art. Part of the exhibit, Joe Overstreet’s The New Aunt Jemima also parodied the traditional image of Mammy. Ishmael Reed’s Flight to Canada, Joe Overstreet’s The New Aunt Jemima, Betye Saar’s The Liberation of Aunt Jemima, and Joyce J. Scott’s Nanny Now, Nigger Later all explode the stereotype of Mammy and offer American culture new representations of the black woman.

In Flight to Canada Reed parodies the dominant characters of plantation mythology: Uncle Tom, Mammy, the Plantation Master, and the Southern belle. Set in the Civil War South, the novel focuses on an aristocratic plantation master, Arthur Swille, and his relationships with his ostensibly stereotyped slaves. The novel presents the slave narrative of Uncle Robin, who parodies Stowe’s Uncle Tom, the most loyal of Swille’s slaves. The narrator of the story, Raven Quicksill, is Master Swille’s first slave who can read and write. Quicksill serves as an interlocutor who explains the events of the narrative in terms of the mythological past. In telling Uncle Robin’s story, Quicksill jumps back and forth interweaving the Civil War, contemporary American politics, and

¹⁷ During the period of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement artists and writers living in New York City discussed ways in which their art could represent the climate of social and political turbulence they faced. Ishmael Reed was closely involved in the cultural quest to define whether black writing and art was Black Art or American Art. In African American Art Sharon F. Patton states, “Artists [wanted to] show their sympathies and support the civil rights movement, while sustaining their individual artistic identities.[. . .] Not since the Harlem Renaissance had such a group of artists been formed around a political, aesthetic, and social agenda” (185).

ancient myths. In “From Krazy Kat to Hoodoo: Aesthetic Discourse in the Fiction of Ishmael Reed” James R. Lindroth states, “Ishmael Reed is a conscious part of the Afro-American literary tradition that extends back to the first-person slave narratives, and the central purpose of his novel is to define a means of expressing the complexity of the Afro-American experience in a manner distinct from the dominant literary tradition” (167). Revolutionary in his approach to slavery, Reed refuses to give readers another sentimental narrative full of the injustices of slavery; instead, Reed attacks the system of American slavery through wit, sarcasm, and imagination. Reed targets the institution of slavery by concentrating on the absurd, grotesque, and outrageous.

Flight to Canada serves as an irrepressibly funny and mordant deliberation on slavery in America. Reed recreates the American Civil War and includes characters that satirize earlier representations of black men and women present in nineteenth and early twentieth-century works of fiction. In “A Fantasia on Black Suffering” Edmund White reviews Flight to Canada as “blend[ing] the attitudes and trappings of the past century with those of today” (123). By modernizing the American Civil War Reed considers the eternal presence of slavery that exists in American culture. Re-constructing African-American culture through his speculative and bizarre references to the past, Ishmael Reed distorts the history of slavery from both a nineteenth and twentieth-century perspective (White 124).¹⁸

¹⁸ For more information on Reed’s historical references see Matthew R. Davis’s 1996 article “Strange, history. Complicated, too”: Ishmael Reed’s Use of African-American History in Flight to Canada.” Davis states, “Reed’s tricky and unstable relationship with history is apparent throughout the novel. Not only are we bombarded with historical speculation and inaccuracies, but Reed consistently references history as strange [. . .] flexible, mutable, and, perhaps more importantly, incomprehensible” (744). Reed repeatedly questions history and never seems to come to terms with the past in his novel.

As a contemporary black writer, Ishmael Reed's parody of plantation mythology suggests that modern African American writers strive to overturn all that Uncle Tom's Cabin and Gone with the Wind represent.¹⁹ Reed's characters subvert and distort the characters of plantation mythology. Edmund White continues, "The finest character Reed has ever created is the hair-raising Mammy Barracuda. She has so thoroughly identified herself with the oppressors of her race that after the war she entertains reunions with Confederate soldiers with rousing renditions of Dixie" (124). By distorting mythical Mammy's actions, Reed reverses Mammy's traditional image and explodes the stereotype white society associated with black womanhood.

Mammy Barracuda serves as the antithesis of the traditional image of the Mammy; she is modern in her physical appearance, emotional make-up, and domestic duties. Mammy dresses meretriciously. Raven Quicksill describes Mammy's clothing: "Barracuda has a silk scarf tied about her head. A black velvet dress. She wears a diamond crucifix on her bosom. It's so heavy she walks with a stoop. Once she went into the fields and the sun reflected on her cross, so, two slaves were blinded" (Reed 20). Mammy Barracuda replaces the traditional domestic's checkered bandanna with a silk scarf and exchanges the billowy white dress of house servants with black velvet. In

¹⁹ In Flight to Canada Reed constantly distances himself from Harriet Beecher Stowe. He makes references to Stowe as a trashy television talk-show host instead of as the abolitionist author of Uncle Tom's Cabin. Reed destroys Stowe's reputation and attacks the racist and sexist sentiments present in Uncle Tom's Cabin. In "I'll fly away: Ishmael Reed Refashions the Slave Narrative and Takes It on a Flight to Canada" Janet Kemper Beck states, "Reed cites the most well-known theft of a slave's story, Harriet Beecher Stowe's adaptation of Josiah Henson's story in Uncle Tom's Cabin." (134). Part One of Flight to Canada is entitled "Naughty Harriet," an obvious reference to Stowe. Beck claims that Reed's sarcasm is a direct attack on Harriet Beecher Stowe, the "cultural oppressor" (135).

Reed's portrait, Mammy refuses to hold a rolling pin in her hand or to cherish her master's children at her ankles. Instead, Mammy Barracuda accessorizes her chest with a gold cross and showcases expensive jewels on her fingers. When serving Master Swille, Mammy carries a silver tray and wears "a purple velvet dress with her silver hoops, a pongee apron with Belgium lace, and emerald earrings" (Reed 109). Everything about Mammy Barracuda's dress contradicts earlier fictional portrayals of Mammy and aligns her with wealth and power.

Reed takes a satirical twist when describing Mammy's most appallingly exaggerated qualities: her breasts and buttocks. When referring to the Mammy stereotype in From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond Sue Jewell states, "Two of mammy's most endowed features are her breasts and buttocks.[. . .] Both breasts and buttocks are enlarged in all images that symbolize womanhood. However, in mammy these features are extremely exaggerated and place mammy outside the sphere of sexual desirability and into the realm of maternal nurturance" (40). In contrast, Reed does not draw attention to Mammy Barracuda's chest as a haven of nurture and comfort but decorates her bosom with elaborate jewelry, tempting her master and emphasizing her sexuality. Describing Mammy's mesmerizing power over Master Swille, Edmund White continues, "By catering to the depraved tastes of Master Swille for drugs and violence, the Mammy has won herself a cabinet full of jewels from Cartier's" (124).

Neither weak nor submissive, Mammy Barracuda reigns as a stoic figure over the plantation. Like Mitchell's Mammy, Reed's Mammy has power over the plantation; however, Mammy Barracuda's power exists outside of a well-defined structure. The presence of Mitchell's Mammy declines as Tara is defeated, but Reed's Mammy gains

even more power from the fall of the Swille plantation. On the Swille plantation, Mammy Barracuda rules her masters. When entering a room Mammy Barracuda refers to Massa Swille by his first name until she notices another slave present: Mammy states, ‘Arthur,’ then, noticing Uncle Robin, ‘Oh, I mean Massa Swille’” (Reed 20). Reed implies a bond between Mammy Barracuda and her master and draws attention to their relationship through Mammy’s sexuality, actions, and flirtation.²⁰

Reed’s Mammy also overturns the traditional asexual Mammy figure through her over-sexed interactions among the other slaves and among the plantation visitors. Mammy Barracuda uses her charms to win the affections of the males on the plantation. When an unknown visitor comes to the plantation Mammy Barracuda yells out, “‘Massa Swille, there’s some poor-white trash down in the kitchen’” (Reed 38). After learning the visitor is President Abraham Lincoln, she affectionately attends to him throwing herself into his arms. Mammy Barracuda grabs President Lincoln by the waist and waltzes him about singing, “‘Oh, Mr. Linclum! Mr. Linclum! I admires you so. [. . .] Hello, Abbbbbe. Well, hello, Abbbbbe’” (Reed 39). Mammy Barracuda continues to seduce Mr. Lincoln; as they waltz he blushes and giggles in her company. When referring to their interaction Mr. Lincoln states:

They had this old mammy up there. She began singing and dancing me

²⁰ Traditionally, Mammy did not represent sexuality in the plantation home. Instead, black female sexuality was represented by Jezebel or tragic mulatto characters. In Within the Plantation Household Elizabeth Fox-Genovese states, “The image of Jezebel explicitly contradicted the image of Mammy [. . .] Jezebel lived in free social constraints that surrounded sexuality. She thus legitimized the wanton behavior of white men proclaiming black women to be lusty wenches in whom sexual impulse overwhelmed all constraint” (292). For Reed to reverse these roles and align Mammy with intense sexuality contradicts previous depictions.

around. The first time in these years I took my mind off the war. I felt like crawling into her lap and going to sleep. Just sucking my thumb and rolling my hair up in pickaninny knots [. . .] I can't get these shines off my mind. My dreams [. . .] she must do Swille a lot of good.

(Reed 46-7)

Through Lincoln's remarks, Reed again alludes to and destroys the master/slave relationship through Mammy's sexual allure.²¹ Reed takes his satire a step further by poking fun at a celebrated hero. President Lincoln visited the Swille plantation in hopes of convincing Master Swille to give money to help finance the Civil War. Swille donates money to Lincoln but makes fun of his appearance and style saying "[g]o the theatre. Get some culture" (Reed 37). By suggesting Lincoln is desperate enough to be seduced by Mammy as well as to beg a Southern Plantation Master for money, whose profits come from slavery, Reed further mocks the character of "The Great Emancipator."²²

Reed continues to satirize Mammy's character through her interactions with Mrs. Swille, a parody of the Southern belle. Mammy Barracuda refuses to perform domestic duties to help Mrs. Swille in the house, but takes an aggressive and violent role in

²¹ In the traditional master/slave relationship, black female slaves were at the mercy of their masters. History indicates that masters had free reign of their female slaves' bodies. It was not uncommon for a master to take one of the house slaves as his mistress. For an example, refer to Harriet Jacobs slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in which she illustrates the oppression and sexual aggressiveness of her white master.

²² Reed also ignores history and continues his parody of Lincoln by showing his shooting on television. In "A Fantasia on Black Suffering" Edmund White states, "When Lincoln is shot, the event is served up to viewers again and again through instant replay on television. Lincoln himself is a hypocritical and befuddled Nixon, a racist who thinks of emancipation as a ploy" (123).

reprimanding the Mistress.²³ Reed mocks the plantation wife of Southern mythology who spends her days arranging flowers, throwing dinner parties, sending cards, and buying new dresses. White states, “Barracuda insults and terrorizes the poor woman back into being a Southern belle. [. . .] In this home of putrescent flowers, languishing belles and blood-curdling screams, Barracuda prevails” (124-5). Mammy Barracuda tells Mrs. Swille that her room stinks, insults her, beats her, and threatens to kill her. The house servant continues to attack Mrs. Swille: “Barracuda gives her a kind of football-punt kick to her naked hip, causing an immediate red welt [. . .] Barracuda pulls her razor, bends down and puts it to Ms. Swille’s lily-white neck. ‘You see that, don’t you? [. . .] Now do what I say’” (Reed 112). Mrs. Swille cries and begs to be unleashed from Mammy Barracuda’s strong grip. However, her sobbing only provokes Mammy Barracuda and she pushes Mrs. Swille into the bathroom and hollers, “‘Now move, you old mother fukin she-dog. You scarecrow. You douche-bag! You fleas-sack drawers! You no-tit mother of a bloodhound’” (Reed 113). Mammy Barracuda addresses the plantation mistress with familiarity and contempt, a wrathful depiction that attacks the kind benevolence of traditional Mammy.

²³ Instead of remaining subservient to Mrs. Swille, Mammy aligns herself as Master Swille’s confidant. Mammy Barracuda knows that within the plantation home the master remains in charge and Mammy goes out of her way to win his approval. Mammy Barracuda interferes in the relationship of the couple when she tells Master Swille that his wife is sick again and only lies around watching television and eating candy: “‘She drinks an awful lot, too, Mr. Swille. She has been listening to that Beecher Hour again’” (Reed 110). Master Swille replies, “‘Well, Mammy, in that case, you know what to do’” (110). Mammy enters Mistress Swille’s room in a dominant stance with her hands on her hip, taps her foot, and begins to yell at Mrs. Swille, “‘What’s come ovah you, you she-thing? Got a good man. A good man. A powerful good man. And here you is – you won’t arrange flowers when his guests come. You won’t take care of the menu. You won’t do nothing that a belle is raised to do [. . .] Straighten up [. . .] What kind of wimmen is you?’” (Reed 111-2).

Through the dialogue and actions of Mammy Barracuda, Reed attacks the plantation mythology of the subservient Mammy and the dignified, untouchable Southern belle.²⁴ Reed condemns both the black servitude that is present in Uncle Tom's Cabin, as well as white delusion that is present in Gone with the Wind through his satires of black and white characters. On the Swille plantation Mammy's role differs from the role of her literary predecessors. Both Stowe and Mitchell's Mammy characters existed as loyal, devoted possessions of their masters. Aunt Chloe and Mitchell's Mammy dressed plainly, cooked endlessly, and suckled white children relentlessly. Reed's portrait of Mammy contradicts this image.²⁵ Mammy Barracuda refuses the dress, manners, and role of the traditional Mammy figure.

By including caricatures of Uncle Tom, Mammy, Plantation Master, and Southern belle, Reed amuses his readers with the absurdity of nineteenth-century plantation mythology. In "I'll fly away: Ishmael Reed Refashions the Slave Narrative and Takes on

²⁴ In plantation mythology the Southern Belle stood in direct opposition to her female slaves. In Southern Women Caroline Matheny Dillman states, "the cultural expectation that 'Southern ladies' ought to be weak, dependent, illogical, and pure served the purposes of ideology—that it was to keep the ruling gender/class/race ruling; specifically, that this definition-myth was self-consciously used to justify the domination of both Southern ladies and slaves by elite white men" (19). However, in Reed's story Mammy replaces the white male and dominates the Southern lady.

²⁵ Instead, in Flight to Canada Mammy Barracuda nurtures and comforts her masters with injections of drugs. Mr. Swille asks Mammy to administer to him with what he calls his "'Siesta [. . .] perhaps some of those Tennysonian poppies which were shipped over from the Epicurean Club last week? [. . .] Quite good, quite good, Mammy,' he said, wetting his lips" (Reed 108-9). Mammy also injects Mistress Swille with valium through a hypodermic needle. Mammy Barracuda is the antithesis of the traditional Mammy stereotype. Barracuda's role on the plantation includes sexually pleasing her master, tricking and patronizing the other slaves, beating her mistress, and drugging her employers. Reed reverses the power structure of the plantation within his novel; in Flight to Canada black characters are the ones in control.

a Flight to Canada” Janet Kemper Beck states, “[Reed] sees, what is to him, an obvious correlation between the 20th century black American writer and his 19th century counterpart. To develop this parallel, Reed creates a 19th century narrative in theme and plot and overlays it with a 20th century cornucopia of in-your-face ridicule, rebuke, and sarcasm” (132). Reed reclaimed the slave narrative from white writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe who tried to use the genre of slave narrative a century earlier for her own purpose. In “Ishmael Reed: Flight to Canada” Joe David Bellamy states, “Reed is writing about what Robert Burns Stepto has called ‘narrative control’—the possession of one’s own story, be that our collective history or even one’s very own autobiography” (122). Reed’s work encourages African-American men and women of today to reclaim their histories and stories and construct and to reconstruct cultural images that are consistent with their own interests, experiences, and expectations. Sue Jewell believes African-Americans must assume a proactive position by looking to models such as Reed to redefine cultural imagery and to realistically represent black identity through modern art forms: narratives, songs, paintings, and sculptures (51).

Indirectly influenced by how writers such as Ishmael Reed attacked the sentimental tradition of Mammy, visual artists of the 1970s and 1980s also began to debunk and to satirize the racist boundaries of the black matriarch Stowe and Mitchell represented a century earlier. Reed’s involvement in the quests of both writers and artists to define Black Art within America is evident through his collaboration with key artists of the period. Visual artists who worked within this time period included Joe Overstreet, Betyre Saar, and Joyce J. Scott who used the creative mediums of painting, assemblage, and sculpture to parody the traditional Mammy figure. Similar to Reed’s Mammy

Barracuda, Overstreet's, Saar's, and Joyce's portraits refuse to cast Mammy into a stereotypical role; instead, they introduce her to society as a figure in control of her own destiny.

The first black artists who became aware of "race consciousness" were the musicians of the 1900's and 1910's. In A Modern Negro Art James a Porter states, "The painter and sculptor were not aware of the folk heritage of the Negro" (75). The history of race consciousness among African-American visual artists grew very slowly within America. Early artistic depictions of slave life were a patronizing distortion of slave attitudes and lifestyles. In the introduction to Some American History Charles Childs states, "[. . .] distortion and correction occurs to a significant degree in American paintings of the 1800's. [. . .] [Distortion began] with the burlesque of black life depicted in the Currier & Ives Darktowns series and the depiction of the "good nigger" typified in Eastman Johnson's Old Kentucky Home paintings" (11). Similar to the fiction of Stowe and Mitchell, black visual art from this time period also sentimentalized or distorted black life.²⁶ Not until after the Civil War did African-American art become classified as "fine" art, prior to this period black art consisted of metalworking, quilting, and carving. Black subjects were not treated sympathetically nor were they given prominence until the early realists, who were the first to address concerns about the political and social issues of the time. Realist Thomas Eakins, 1849-1916, and African-American artist Henry O.

²⁶ Abolitionists began to support black visual art during this period. However, most of the artists that abolitionist patronized relied on the same distorted, sentimental images of black life that Stowe perpetuated. Works such as Uncle Tom and Little Eva painted by the black artist Robert Duncanson evoked the romantic sentimentalism of Stowe's novel. In African-American Art Sharon Patton states, "The Detroit Free Press called the work 'Uncle Tomitude'" (75). Even Duncanson ridiculed his painting and was uncomfortable with its subject matter (Patton 75).

Tanner, 1859-1937, painted humane and dignified black subjects to help counterbalance earlier absurd and grotesque images.²⁷

The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s was the first collective attempt to showcase African-American writers and artists. During the Harlem Renaissance, the Negro middle class began to recognize the absence of accurate representations of black life in art. Their goal was to expose black heritage and experience to the world. Visitors from abroad came to Harlem intermingling and fostering an artistic atmosphere they hoped would change the cultural expression of a race that had long been divided from American life.

However, even after this period of rebirth, Porter affirms that the black race still faced adversity in becoming part of American culture. Porter claims that “the perpetuation of such Negro stereotypes as the grinning, sentimental servant of Reconstruction literature and art, the tragic-comic mulatto, and the lustful black peasant of the race-problem of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century” (88) lived. In combating these images during the first half of the twentieth century, African-American artists continued to search for realistic images of black men and women to represent in their art.

The few positive images of black life were shadowed by numerous negative representations of blacks throughout American society. Sue Jewell asserts that certain images persist over time because the media provides this imagery. The legacy of Uncle Tom, Mammy, Jezebel, and Sambo linger. Jewell comments that the media’s extension of derogatory African-American cultural images adversely affects black quality of life

²⁷ For a good overview of artists Eakins and Tanner see African-American Artists 1880-1987: Selections from the Evans-Tibbs Collection. Eds. Guy McElroy, Richard Powell, and Sharon Patton, 1989. Both Tanner and Eakins are identified as early realists.

(16). The images created during slavery and the Reconstruction by white novelists were “reborn” in mass culture through the media. Stereotypes and plantation images, particularly the Mammy icon, pigeonholed African-American females. Jewell continues, “After repeatedly purveying images that characterize groups of individuals in a certain fashion, whether positive or negative, these images become firmly rooted in American culture. Hence, images of societal groups became symbols of those groups and their members” (24). The Mammy image, which gave birth to Aunt Jemima, historically symbolized African-American womanhood. Assigned a domestic role, American culture aligned African-American women with cultural imagery that led to little economic growth and little societal worth. In the 1960s and 1970s African American artists fought against the racist implications of this image; African-American groups continued to challenge the belittling legacy left by Hattie McDaniel’s portrayal of Mammy in Gone with the Wind as well as General Mill’s advertising icon Aunt Jemima.

During the Civil Rights Era, writers and artists protested mainstream media’s depiction of the black race. Their works criticized the distortions of black men and women that had been a part of America since Stowe’s treatment of racial stereotypes in the 1850s. During the aftermath of the Civil Rights Era visual artists, including Joe Overstreet, Betye Saar, and Joyce J. Scott, confronted nineteenth and twentieth-century images. Finally, in the 1970s and 1980s black artists constructively combated the stereotypes earlier white writers and artists created. Artists, scholars, and writers worked hard reshaping the twisted images of the black female.

Rooted in the days of slavery, these images suggest the black domestic existed as the antithesis of female beauty and femininity. The difficulty for the artist rests in

deconstructing the lies and fabrications of traditional imagery. African-American artists removed reassuringly domestic depictions of Mammy and replaced old cultural images with new images. For example, Overstreet's Aunt Jemima carries a club instead of a kitchen spatula, Saar's Mammy holds a rifle instead of a rolling pin (Figure 1), and Joyce's Nanny wears a jeweled head wrap instead of a bandanna (Figure 2). African-American artists took a proactive position and defined and redefined the image of the black woman in popular culture. In the exhibit catalogue Some American History, Charles Childs states, "Overstreet, who normally paints in a non-figurative genre nevertheless departs from his usual style in a work which borrows the benevolent figure of Aunt Jemima from the familiar box of pancake flour. Flip-flopping this image, Overstreet gives us a new and more volatile Aunt Jemima" (17-8). Like Reed, Overstreet reverses and overturns the traditional imagery associated with the Mammy stereotype. In his image, Overstreet raises Aunt Jemima's skirt to her knees, gives her a club to carry, and paints a vicious warrior ready for attack. When referring to the traditional image of Mammy, Overstreet states, "How many older black women must have resented this image, [. . .] [now] the old image of Aunt Jemima, unless things change drastically, can erupt into a whole new personality" (qtd. in Childs 18). In his work, Overstreet creates an image that shocked American audiences and blatantly confronted the traditional stereotype of the Aunt Jemima icon.

More aware than male artists of what Mammy meant to their gender, African-American women constantly confronted the ramifications of this image. Attacking the imagery of the Southern plantation myth, Betye Saar describes her work as "assemblages that express her intense feelings about racial stereotypes" (qtd. in Lewis 201). Saar felt

assemblage the best medium to use because it allowed her to work with fragmented material, which abstractly represents the fragmentation of black women's identity. Assemblage is defined as "the art of combining varied materials to form an artistically interesting construction. When viewed individually, the components of a successful assemblage are often aesthetically insignificant. Much of the meaning and impact of an assemblage depends on the artist's ability to orchestrate such materials into a collective whole" (Lewis 198). Assemblage allowed Saar to reject traditional aesthetic values and focus more on the message her work conveyed to her audience. Through the medium of assemblage, Saar's work "challenged the dominance of fine or 'high' art by using found objects and recycled materials, and also the dominance of painting by emphasizing symbolism and allegory" (Lewis 201).

In The Liberation of Aunt Jemima (Figure 1), Saar transforms the smiling face of Aunt Jemima into that of a grimacing avenger. In one hand Aunt Jemima holds a broom and in the other a rifle. Within her assemblage, Saar uses the broom, rifle, flag, grenade, and apron as symbols of the African-American woman. In African American Art and Artists Samelia Lewis states, "In [Saar's] Liberation of Aunt Jemima, the well-known symbol for a line of food products is transformed into a gun-carrying warrior. A collage of pancake-flour labels acts as a background for the imposing figure. Although the lower portion of the doll's body carries a sign of her former role, the viewer senses that the real Aunt Jemima will be free" (202). Like Reed's Mammy Barracuda, Saar's image only gains power over white society through aggression and destruction. By combining both domestic symbols and symbols of destruction, Saar illustrates that Aunt Jemima is no longer the docile servant of the South but rather an armed figure ready to fight for her

stolen identity. Again, Saar's assemblage is similar to Reed's description of Mammy Barracuda's approaching Mr. and Mrs. Swille with hypodermic needles.

Like Reed, Saar understands that in art, the aesthetic and political are inseparable and that by combining both she can reach a larger audience. In addition to using images that are significant to Mammy, Saar, "hoping to expose the racism they conveyed, [also] incorporated into her work the emblems of such products as Darkie toothpaste, Black Crow licorice, and Old Black Joe butter beans" (Lewis 202). In creating assemblages Saar consciously chooses her materials because she does not want the "emblems" to perpetuate the racial and gender myths she aims to destroy.

Joyce J. Scott, another female artist fighting to destroy nineteenth and early twentieth-century representations of Mammy, reverses Mammy's appearance. Joyce J. Scott recreates Mammy in sculptures that represent the antithesis of Aunt Jemima. Scott takes a different approach than Reed, Overstreet, and Saar; her work is powerful, but not shocking or abrasive. Commenting on Joyce's work Terry Gips states, "In the Mammy/Nanny series, objects made from 1986 to the early 1990s, Scott confronts the viewer and the contradictions and hypocrisies embedded in the historical-and continuing-culture surrounding the Black women who served as nannies for white America" (312). Scott alters Mammy's distorted physical features and jests with her audience through Mammy's refined figure. Similar to the literary picture of Reed's Mammy Barracuda wearing "black velvet," Scott removes Mammy's domestic rags and replaces them with a leather dress, pearl necklace, and jeweled head wrap emphasizing Mammy's sexuality. In the sculpture Nanny Now, Nigger Later (Figure 2), Mammy's appearance seems featureless, almost as if she is encased in a black leather skin or shell. In each sculpture

from this series, Mammy holds a white child constructed from jewels and beads in her arms or on her hip while the black children remain on the floor at her ankles. Gips continues, “These sculptures also remind us that the Black children of nannies often seem to take a backseat to the white children their mothers cared for [. . .] While the days of the wet nurse’s need to shoo her own children for her masters are behind us, the tug-of war over her body still exists” (312). Scott’s work intends to overturn the domesticated matriarch present in both Stowe and Mitchell’s novels. In her work, Scott confronts white culture through the simplicity of her subjects. Her intent is not aggressive, but suggestive. In Nanny Now, Nigger Later Scott wants white culture to understand the basic implication that black women’s true identity was masked and her own culture forgotten in her role of servitude.

Contemporary literature and art both remain successful media for writers and artists transforming the Mammy image. As vehicles of expression, literature and art allow artists to create alternative representations of black womanhood. Reed’s literary portrait of Mammy and the visual images portrayed in the works of Overstreet, Saar, and Joyce represent a black woman with whom nineteenth and twentieth-century audiences would have been uncomfortable. Reed subverts the image of Mammy propagated in sentimental fiction by authors like Stowe and Mitchell. If Stowe’s Aunt Chloe and Mitchell’s Mammy represented “good” black women with whom whites felt at ease, then Reed’s Mammy Barracuda and modern artistic representations provide an uncomfortable alternative. Mammy Barracuda refuses the role dictated to her by her white employers and serves as the antithesis of earlier depictions of Mammy.

During the same period Reed published Flight to Canada, additional black female

characters began to replace the old literary portrayals of the devoted Mammy figure.²⁸ As demonstrated by Reed, visual artists Joe Overstreet, Betye Saar, and Joyce J. Scott also created alternative images of black womanhood through the mediums of painting, assemblage, and sculpture. Their renditions of Mammy replace the ever-pleasing domestic that sold laundry soap, pancake mix, and cleaning supplies. Ishmael Reed's literary portraits of Mammy Barracuda coupled with the visual images by Overstreet, Saar, and Scott reinforce the notion that the black female cannot stay confined within a stereotype created one hundred and fifty years ago. Today, modern writers and artists continue to elevate the African-American woman in society and to fight to reclaim her identity. In the media, images of an independent new black woman have begun to replace Aunt Jemima in American culture. Writers and artists strive to explode the stereotypes of Southern plantation mythology and to reinforce the idea that Mammy only truly existed in white fantasies captured in fiction, collectibles, film, and pancake boxes.

²⁸ For examples of other artwork that contradict the traditional image of Mammy and recast her into an aggressive role, see Barbara Wood's The Final Supper, 1970, Ted Shine's Contribution, 1968, and Ed Bullins' The Gentleman Caller, 1969.

Conclusion

Although Mammy rapidly declined after the Civil Rights Era in literary references and visual representations, Mammy is still a figure that both white and black society confronts daily. Modern readers face difficulty trying to understand how Mammy became such a glorified symbol of African-American womanhood. Mammy's appearance in one hundred and twenty-years of American culture shocks contemporary audiences because historical evidence suggest that Mammy was not a figure from American history, but a product created out of white idealization. Derogatory depictions of Mammy within American culture ceased by the 1960s but the Mammy legacy continues as a testament to the power of this cultural image. In "The Mammy of Them All" Helen Taylor states, "If you drive along one of the main highways out of Natchez, Mississippi, you could not miss an extraordinary sight. Towering at least twenty feet above the road is a vast, grinning, turbaned, earringed, tray-carrying Mammy.[. . .] In order to eat, you enter a door in her voluminous skirts and order your hominy grits and black-eyed peas within her warm, welcoming body" (168). This roadside icon stands as a visual reminder of the Mammy figure Southern plantation mythology helped produce. Eager to represent this obese, asexual, and subservient creature American culture, created and recreated Mammy in literature, film, art, and advertisements.

The stereotypes of plantation mythology including, Uncle Tom, Jezebel, Sambo, and Mammy, all force black Americans into racist and sexist cultural roles. Celebrated for over a century, black stereotypes appear in American arts and commercialization. When referring to the stereotypical image of Mammy, Taylor continues, "Harriet Beecher Stowe put her on the map in the world-famous Uncle Tom's Cabin" (169). Although

Stowe intended to illustrate the brutalities of slavery in her novel, her own ambivalence towards blacks and the institution of slavery did not allow her to write a full-fledged indictment of slavery. Instead, Stowe's work sentimentalized the role of the subservient slave and perpetuated a host of racist and sexist black imagery.

Torn by the aftermath of Stowe's novel, confused Americans did not know whether to accept Stowe's work as an accurate record of black America or to cast aside the novel as racist sentimentality. While Southerners criticized the novel as an inaccurate portrayal of race relations in the South, an interesting cultural movement occurred in mid-nineteenth-century America. During the 1850s, black men and women were not only characterized in fiction but also appeared within American homes in the form of collectibles. The art of "darkie" collecting attracted both sides of America. Kitchen relics ranging from Mammy dolls, cookie jars, and clay spoon rests offered a way for Northerners to feel as if they understood black womanhood because they understood Mammy. For Southerners, Mammy collectibles allowed whites to feel comfortable and safe with black women, particularly since these articles kept Mammy in the kitchen.

A presence in both the North and South, fictional Mammy gained even more popularity in the twentieth century. Taylor continues, "This revered Mammy figure has been the stuff of white idealization since the early South [. . .] in which she was described as central to harmonious relations on the happy plantation" (171). After the South lost the Civil War a period of searching resulted. Southerners sought to recreate what they viewed as the idyllic "Old South." In Gone with the Wind Margaret Mitchell intended to recreate a world where Americans could retreat from the emerging controversies that divided the North and South. Mitchell used Mammy as a symbol of the world that had

rapidly declined. By focusing on the harmonious society of the “Old South” Mitchell avoids the changes that occurred in the “New South” and asks her readers to return to slavery. Although Mitchell emphasized the glorious days of slavery, both Northern and Southern audiences loved Gone with the Wind. For Southern women, Mitchell’s novel represented a luxurious world full of devoted servants even though this world was only a product of white idealization.

Gone with the Wind was an instant success and, like Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, became an influential part of American culture. After the novel’s filming, “darkie” memorabilia resurfaced throughout America. The image of Mammy was reborn and commercialized through Gone with the Wind dolls, songs, and posters. Hattie McDaniel’s on-screen portrayal of Mammy sealed black women’s racial fate in American popular culture as the quintessential Mammy figure.

Advertisers knew Mammy signified devotion and wholesomeness in America. Since most production occurred in the North, Northern advertisers targeted the South by promoting their products with the idyllic image of motherhood that Mammy represented to Southern whites. Mammy also won the devotion of Northern consumers. By purchasing a product endorsed by Mammy, Northerners believed they understood black women because they accepted Mammy. Black stereotypes sold pancake syrup, biscuit mix, tooth enamel, and cleaning supplies. Today, if an American is asked for an example of a Mammy figure they still respond “Aunt Jemima.” The presence of Mammy suggests to Americans that the product is both good and wholesome because Mammy represents nutrition and motherhood to all of America.

For one hundred and twenty-years, Mammy existed as a one-dimensional

individual without her own identity. Not until the Civil Rights Era of the 1960s did Americans question how a country that claimed “all men are created equal” could promote such destructive imagery of black men and women. In the 1960s black audiences stopped associating Mammy with matriarchy and fought for companies to cease typecasting black women in images like Jolly Aunt Jemima.

After the Civil Rights Era, Ishmael Reed wrote Flight to Canada which parodies both Stowe’s and Mitchell’s Mammy figures. Through over-sexed Mammy Barracuda, Reed introduces readers to a more modern, aggressive character. Reed’s Mammy Barracuda offers black women an alternative identity to the subservient Mammy of Stowe’s and Mitchell’s literature. However, by casting Mammy into a new role, Reed had to be careful not to introduce different stereotypes for the black women.

Shadowing the literary liberation of Mammy, another movement occurred simultaneously within American popular culture. As writers like Reed re-cast Mammy’s role, artists began to recreate Mammy’s image within visual culture. Contemporary writers and artists fought the image of Mammy as a selfless, anonymous figure without a history and family of her own. The efforts of modern writers and artists illustrate that literary and cultural Mammy is a product of both Northern and Southern ambivalence towards the black woman. The visual works of Joe Overstreet, Betye Saar, and Joyce J. Scott, replace the traditional imagery of the early maternal Mammy with a de-feminized, militant figure who fights to recover black female identity. In reconstructing the image of Mammy these artists must convince America that Mammy only lives in mythology.

The difficulty in understanding Mammy’s presence within American culture lies in the fact that Mammy has been perceived as both legend and historical person. From

the 1850s until the 1970s cultural depictions suggest Mammy served as the devoted servant synonymous with the “good” black qualities that white culture accepts. As a figure representing the black race, Mammy was someone both Northern and Southern audiences understood. By tracing the literary, artistic, and iconographic shapes Mammy assumed since the nineteenth century to the present, modern readers gain both a literary and visual record of American cultural abuse. This thesis proves Mammy only truly exists in mythology, fiction, collectibles, film, advertisements, and along a highway in Mississippi.

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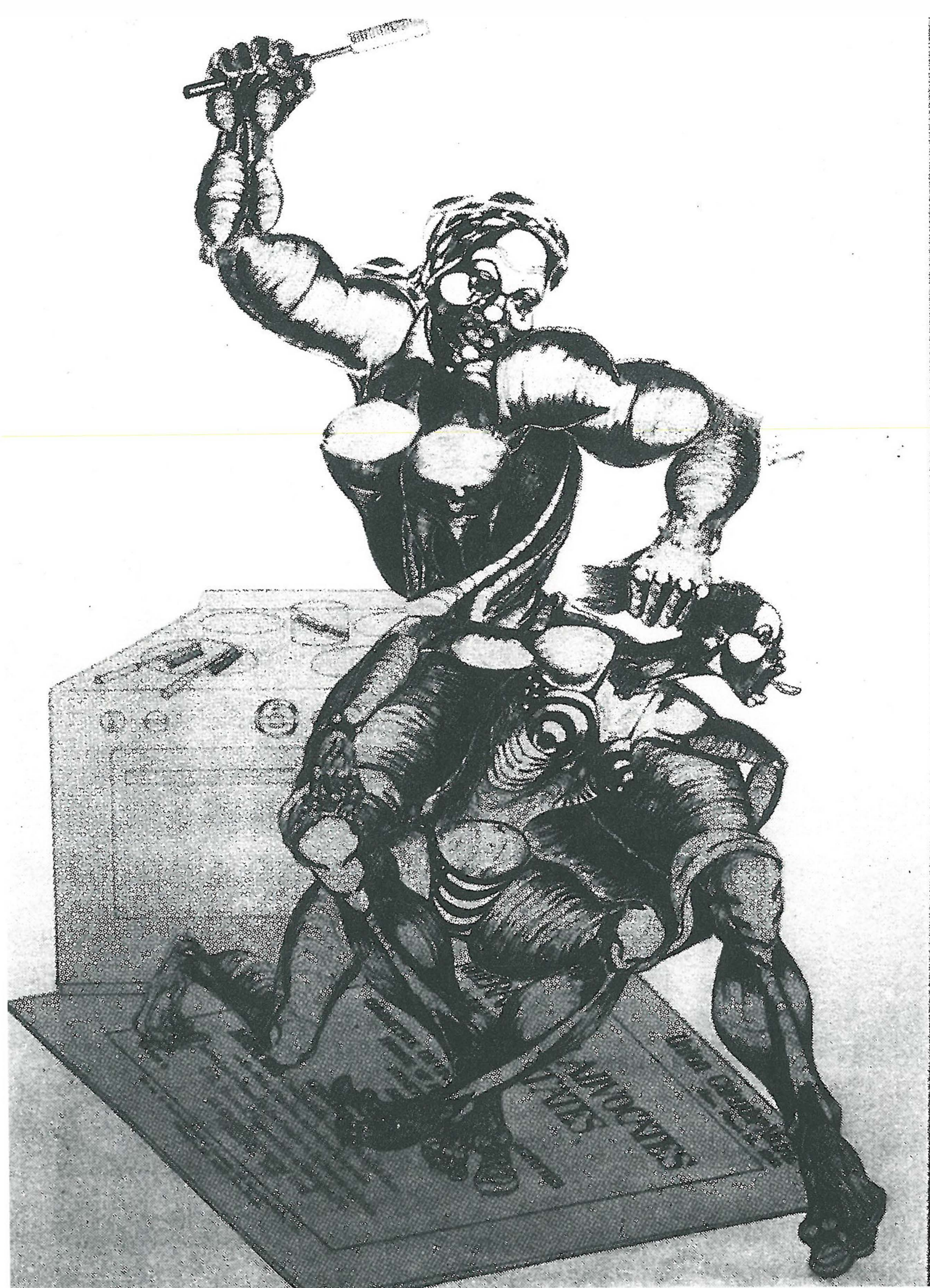




Figure 4



Figure 5