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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Who Cares?: Dependency and Domestic Labor in 20th- and 21st-Century US Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Sally Marie Giles

Committee in charge:

Professor Michael Davidson, Co-Chair
Professor Rosaura Sánchez, Co-Chair
Professor Camille Forbes
Professor Natalia Molina
Professor Meg Wesling

2013

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Co-Chair

Co-Chair

University of California, San Diego

2013

DEDICATION

To my immigrant grandmother, Lois Hess Giles, who spoke with an accent, walked with a limp, sighed often, but loved much.

And to my late father, Stephen Michael Giles, who always said I would be a doctor....
Although, I don't think this is what he meant.

EPIGRAPH

“Those first years in America were not very happy years. I missed my friends in Holland. I looked in the paper and found a job as a nursemaid to a little girl who was eight months old. She was the only consolation in the first lonely year in America. She didn’t care how I talked or that I was a stranger, she only cared that I loved her and took good care of her. I made thirty-five dollars a month plus room and board. I could never go out, only on Wednesday afternoon and Sunday afternoon, every other week.

“I found another job working for an older couple. This paid seven dollars a week along with room and board. The older woman acted as if she begrudged me every bite I ate. She was the most ornery woman I have ever met. There wasn’t a thing I could do that was good enough. She had a habit of sneaking up on you to see if you were doing something wrong. Besides it was very hard to be treated like a maid, someone so inferior to their social standards. The only time they talked to me was to give me orders.

“She told me ahead of time I would have to stay Christmas Day, as she had company coming for Christmas dinner. Getting ready for that dinner at five o’clock in the evening started at seven in the morning. With dinner over there were dinner dishes. At two o’clock in the morning I finally fell into bed exhausted. No sooner had I dozed off when she started pounding on my door. She was missing a silver spoon. Where is it, she exclaimed. I said I didn’t know, I didn’t have it. She sent her poor old husband down to the garbage cans to look for it. An hour later she woke me up again. She found it. She didn’t count right. I said, oh goody.

“It was then that I decided to quit. I couldn’t take this any longer. I had been there three months. I still sometimes dream of that woman. I made up my mind that no matter what job I would have to take, I would never again be somebody’s maid.”

Lois Hess Giles, personal history

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I am grateful to the other professors on my committee, Meg Wesling, Camille Forbes, and Natalia Molina. Meg Wesling has endured my changing timelines as I have dealt with personal matters of immigration and marriage. From being on the committee, to off, to back on, she has been patient, kind, and always brilliant. I have been able to work as a teaching assistant for Camille Forbes, who amazes me with her passion for African American literature and culture. Her continued support and insights have shaped this dissertation and helped me evolve as a scholar and a teacher. Natalia Molina has gone above and beyond the duties of what is called an outside committee member. Not only did she graciously accept serving on my committee at our first meeting, she has

willingly and actively contributed her knowledge at every stage in this process. I could not have completed this dissertation without their generous gifts of time and talents.

This dissertation would have never gotten past the first chapter without the care work, paid and unpaid, of so many women who have cared for my child. I am grateful for Melissa Folkerts, Lucynthia Rockwood, Melanie Hales, Emma Gardner, Sara Huggins, Monica Salazar, and many others for their labor and love. My sisters, Amy Giles Froerer, Katie Giles Kleven, and Miranda Giles have earned extra gold stars for taking their nephew James for days in a row so that I could be a full-time academic. And why not thank my one brother, Jeff Giles, too, while I'm at it? He's a good guy. My mother, Diana Giles, deserves accolades and standing ovations for her long years of unpaid care work, raising this dependent child (although she always said I was too independent). She taught me to love books. She has given her full physical, financial, and emotional support of my work and my family. She is now teaching my son to love books, too. And iPads. My almost-two-year-old, James Benjamín, reminds me of what this is all for and changes everything with his smile. Finally, I recognize my biggest supporter and fan, Eter Rodríguez Hernández. He not only left behind his *patria* for me and endured the gauntlet of DHS paperwork, he teaches me what love is everyday.

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“Steinbeck’s Many Languages: Foodways, *Curanderismo*, Femininity, and Heteroglossia in *Zapata*.” In *Mediating Chicana/o Culture: Multicultural American Vernacular*. Ed. Scott L. Baugh. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006. 89–99.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Who Cares?: Dependency and Domestic Labor in 20th- and 21st-Century US Literature

by

Sally Marie Giles

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego, 2013

Professor Michael Davidson, Co-Chair

Professor Rosaura Sánchez, Co-Chair

This dissertation studies the representation of domestic and care work and the women of color and immigrant women who perform it in American Literature from the 20th and 21st centuries, specifically from 1940s to the present. I study literary and film texts by Ann Petry, Toni Morrison, Lorraine Hansberry, Douglas Sirk, John Rechy, Patricia Riggen, Esmeralda Santiago, and Angie Cruz to cover the shift in this labor force from African American women historically to Chicana and Latina women today. I argue that in addition to the intersectional oppressions of race, class, gender, and citizenship that disenfranchise domestic and care workers, their association with dependency contributes to their social and economic marginalization. Because the discourse of individual liberal rights, founded upon Enlightenment principles, fails to acknowledge

disabled and dependent persons as equal participants in the social contract, the necessary work of caring for dependents has also gone unrecognized historically. The US cultural obsession with independence, embodied by myths of the self-made man, do not recognize human interdependence. My research analyzes multiethnic US cultural texts, mostly written by people of color, about the labor conditions of maids, cooks, nannies, and caregivers during this period of history. I examine these texts through the lens of dependency and disability studies and a care ethic to reveal the limitations of independence-based models of care and to explore the alternative models of interdependence these texts present.

Introduction:

Who Cares?: Dependency and Domestic Labor in 20th- and 21st-Century US Literature



Image 1: from *Imitation of Life*, Douglas Sirk, 1959

“I told you in the course of this paper that Shakespeare had a sister.... She died young—alas, she never wrote a word.... She lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here to-night, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed.”

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

The preceding still from Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959) and the epigraph from Virginia Woolf's acclaimed feminist treatise *A Room of One's Own* foreground the central issues regarding the representation of care work in US literature and film.¹

Women performing domestic and care labor are everywhere in 20th- and 21st-century cultural texts, and nowhere at the same time. While Sirk's *mise-en-scène* highlights the whole figure of the white, professional, and mobile Lora Meredith, even using the

¹ Although Virginia Woolf is not an American author, the centrality of this piece to the canon of feminist literature accounts for my inclusion of her work here.

mirror's reflection to place her on full display, Annie Johnson—who works as Lora's live-in cook, housekeeper, and nanny—is eclipsed and encumbered by the dependents in her care. Lora's grasp on her actor's script signals her access to wealth and a professional life; she is an autonomous and independent person. Annie's position holding the white child on her lap, while her own daughter looks on from an isolated position behind her, renders Annie immobile; she is contained by the dependency that surrounds her, despite her agency as an individual worker. Similarly, Woolf's incantation of a female literary genius thwarted by gendered domestic duties speaks to the ghostly social and literary presence of care workers, whose labor is critical, yet so often invisible.

A similar mixture of absent and present domestic figures populate American literature and film. Characters like Henry James's perhaps delusional governess in *The Turn of the Screw* and William Carlos Williams's titular reference to his own housekeeper in his poem "To Elsie" can be found in canonical literature. Several African American authors, like Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks, wrote about their own communities where paid domestic work saturated women's lives. Yet, what of the obvious absences of domestic and care workers in texts by both white authors and writers of color? Where is the enormous household staff of Gatsby's lavish mansion? If the Daltons in Richard Wright's *Native Son* hired Bigger Thomas as a driver, they almost certainly had an unnamed housekeeper, too. The focus of US literature has reflected our national cultural bias toward the self-made, independent man to the exclusion of women and the dependents for whom they have been historically assigned to care. Underlying Woolf's lament for the lost Judith Shakespeare lurks the patriarchal foundation of individual liberal rights discourse that fails to consider the inevitability of dependence

and the essential nature of care work. After all, who does Woolf expect will wash the dishes and tend to the children if all of us are writing with abandon in our own rooms?

The answer, historically, in the Western world at large has been to shift the care burden to the next most vulnerable group—from white women, to poorer white women, to women of color and immigrant women.

As feminist scholarship developed in the latter half of the 20th century, sociologists and historians began to examine the history of women's labor. In the 70s and 80s, several scholars, such as Phyllis Palmer, David Katzman, and Faye Dudden, documented the history of women's domestic labor from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Their work laid a foundation for further inquiry, particularly by third wave feminists who understood that this work had historically been and was increasingly becoming the province of women of color and immigrants in the United States. In the 80s and 90s, sociologists like Bonnie Dill, Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Mary Romero, and Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo began to chart the specific histories of domestic work performed by women of color and immigrant women. Their work on labor conditions, class divisions, racialization, and exclusion by citizenship status in domestic and care work has been invaluable to my study of the manifestations of these issues in US literature. Yet, while championing the cause of labor rights, these scholars have been operating under historical modes of liberal rights discourse that other feminists like Eva Kittay and Martha Nussbaum have decried as patriarchal and ableist. They, in contrast, promote an ethics of care. While feminist literary production and scholarship has flourished and evolved in past decades, little attention has been paid to the dependent care relationships that continue to saturate women's lives in society and in literature.

In this dissertation, I read American literature and film texts through the lens of dependency studies, which has emerged from a feminist ethics of care combined with disability studies. My analysis reveals that undergirding the exploitation of domestic and care labor lies a deep-seated cultural aversion to dependency (and the converse, a championing of independence) in the US that is inextricably bound up in intersectional identities of oppression such as gender, race, class, and citizenship status. When read from the perspective of dependency and care concerns, US literature and film—particularly African American and Latina/o texts from the 20th and 21st centuries—proffer alternative models of care based in interdependence (such as othermothering, kinship care, co-operative care, and labor coalition movements). These models value dependent persons and the care labor and relationships that sustain them; they also work toward the revision of the masculinist notions of justice and possessive individualism that date back to the foundation of liberal rights discourse in order to include a feminist ethics of care for dependents—namely, children, the elderly, the disabled, and the ill or injured. Until the care burden is examined at the level of discourse, it will be unsustainably passed to, and shouldered unequally by, the most disenfranchised paid and unpaid workers—today, immigrant women and women of color.

Why is the work of caring—what many have called the work that makes all other work possible—not culturally, socially, or economically valued in the US? Why are these underpaid jobs limited to the most marginalized societal groups even as they provide the most essential, life-sustaining services and care for those whom we claim to love most? Domestic service has been considered such a low-status job that women have historically abandoned it in droves as soon as other opportunities have arisen, even leaving domestic

work for jobs with less pay and more dangerous working conditions. As far back as 1897, Lucy Maynard Salmon states that “not only are social advantages of every kind denied the domestic employee, but the badge of social inferiority is put upon her in characters as unchangeable as are the spots of a leopard” (154-55).² There are many theories used to explain care work’s low status, most of which take up individual aspects of the complex network of oppressions facing domestic and care workers. One common yet accurate line of thought is that the historical classification of domestic and care work as women’s work accounts for its demeaned status in a patriarchal society. Its association with domesticity lands it squarely in the purview of the sacrosanct private home, a legacy of 19th-century gendered labor divisions; even paid domestic and care work “is not recognized or treated as a ‘real job’” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 114). Some argue that class distinctions reinforced within the private space of the home mark domestic labor as lesser.³ Barbara Ehrenreich attributes society’s justification of this inequality to a view of “‘lower’ kinds of people for a ‘lower’ kind of work” (91). I agree that low wages and poor labor conditions—documented most recently by the National Domestic Workers Alliance’s 2012 report—are central to the denigration of care labor and need to be addressed by political and legislative changes. Others scholars focus on racism as the primary barrier that not only results in labor exploitation but causes it. Jacqueline Jones links the stigma of domestic

² Lucy Maynard Salmon was a history professor at Vassar College, who recorded responses from a set of questionnaires she created and distributed to domestic workers and their employers in her book *Domestic Service*, which is considered the first academic study of domestic labor. This volume is cited by a multitude of contemporary scholars of domestic and care work. I am particularly drawn to her suggestion of profit-sharing strategies as a way to reform the industry and social stigma surrounding it, “in which all the various talents, services, and desires of the component individuals are fused into a community of purpose and endeavor” (240).

³ Salmon (1897), Katzman (1978), and Sutherland (1981) discuss the use of uniforms as a physical reminder of class difference. Sutherland’s 1981 study of the use of spaces—back entrances, segregated eating areas, rooms forbidden for use by the employee—has been recently affirmed by Ligaya Lindio-McGovern’s 2011 book chapter on the experiences of Filipina domestic workers in Chicago.

service for African American women to the reverberations of slave labor, a point taken up by sociologists and historians like Mignon Duffy, Susan Tucker, and Judith Rollins, as well as literary scholars like Barbara Ryan and Trudier Harris. The lack of other employment opportunities for women of color compounds as social stereotypes calcify; domestic and care labor has become racialized such that African American women and, more recently, Latinas, are seen as particularly suited or somehow essentially good at domestic and care work.⁴ Mary Romero, Grace Chang, and Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo extend the race-based argument to those immigrants whose citizenship status increases their vulnerability to exploitation.

Several of the aforementioned scholars consider the intersectional identities of care workers in their studies even as they may focus on class, race, or gender as a primary barrier to labor rights and social equality. In a 2012 report called *Home Economics: The Invisible and Unregulated World of Domestic Work*, The National Domestic Workers Alliance sums up the multiple histories of oppression that contribute to the stigma of domestic and care work as they have been studied to date:

Domestic workers' vulnerability to exploitation and abuse is deeply rooted in historical, social, and economic trends. Domestic work is largely women's work. It carries the long legacy of the devaluation of women's labor in the household. Domestic work in the US also carries the legacy of slavery with its divisions of labor along lines of both race and gender. The women who perform domestic work today are, in substantial measure, immigrant workers, many of whom are undocumented, and women of racial and ethnic minorities. These workers enter the labor force bearing multiple disadvantages. (ix)

⁴ Katzman, Nakano Glenn, and Hondagneu-Sotelo all discuss the racialization of care labor as part of what bars women of color from getting other jobs.

Their study clearly takes into account the intersectionality of oppression experienced by today's domestic and care workers; however, the purpose of this document and the organization behind it is to galvanize political support to pass legislation to protect these workers. This is a necessary step, but this argument does not recognize that the very rights discourse it employs is riddled with shortcomings. It is based in patriarchal and ableist notions that privilege independence and despise dependency, consequentially undervaluing the labor of those who care for those generally considered physically dependent as well as the work of the basic domestic care necessary for human life to thrive.

In this dissertation, I analyze US literature and film to argue that there is more than labor exploitation, more than racism, sexism, or xenophobia behind the widespread disavowal of domestic and care work. I offer an interdisciplinary approach to examine a set of problems that demands an intersectional analysis—a fusion of disability studies and a feminist care ethics (primarily based in sociological study) that locates dependency at the center of this oppression. The legacy of slavery, the gendered division of labor, the oppression of the working class, the marginalization of immigrants, as well as the history of discrimination against disabled persons (which has not heretofore been included in the scholarship of care labor) all contribute to the social stigma, low wages, and lack of labor protections of domestic and care work. My study is the first to consider that each of these marginalized groups share a history of association with dependency—be it physical, economic, or social—in US history.⁵ Examining US literature and film from a feminist

⁵ Susan Tucker and Judith Rollins examine the relationships between mistresses and servants as maternalistic and patronizing as well as the overall culture of the post-emancipation South as justifying the exploitation of African American domestic labor through the belief that they were dependents who needed

perspective that has not to my knowledge been extended to literary studies—namely, a feminist ethics concerned with care and dependency rather than a patriarchal and individualistic definition of equality—helps to redefine rights at the foundational level of discourse.

The study of dependency interrogates the very foundations of liberal humanism, a discourse primarily concerned with individual rights. Upon these ideals rest modern notions of equality, freedom, and justice, all of which are saturated with individualism rather than communal concerns of care. In her book *Frontiers of Justice*, Martha Nussbaum—a philosopher highly invested in questions of equality, disability, and gender—locates the underpinnings of our current notions of justice in the idea of the social contract.⁶ She opens with a telling quote from John Locke that describes those who forge social contracts as, “Men being, as has been said, by Nature, all free, equal, and independent” (qtd. in Nussbaum 9).⁷ The obvious enshrinement of independence in this statement has gone unquestioned historically as an intrinsic building block of human rights discourse—that all should be equal actors and participants in social and political life. Nussbaum and others interrogate the failure to consider the rights of dependent

the guiding hand of a white employer, or master/mistress. The demonization of the poor as social dependents has been manifest throughout US history, with the vindictiveness of “welfare queen” rhetoric in the last two decades of the 20th century, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Three, as one of the most poignant examples. In her book *Unequal Freedom*, Evelyn Nakano Glenn links the historical denial of citizenship rights to immigrants of color to the US view of “non-European ‘others’ as *dependent* and lacking the capacity for self-governance” (18, italics mine). Mary Romero similarly recalls the post-WWI, middle-class view of “Chicanas and Mexican immigrant women as *dependent*, inferior females who would be improved by exposure to ‘American’ standards of housekeeping and parenting” (113, italics mine).

⁶ Nussbaum clearly states in the introduction to her book that her argument is a focused response to social contract theory according to John Rawls, “who to [her] mind expresses the classical idea of the social contract in its strongest form and makes the strongest case for its superiority to other theories” (3).

⁷ Suzanne Gordon, who studies caregiving, also pinpoints John Locke as a key “influence on American liberalism” and gives the name “Lockean feminists” to those whose agenda is based on patriarchal ideals of “individual rights and property,” “success and power in the marketplace,” and “disengagement from others and radical self-reliance and autonomy” (258).

members of society—the young, the elderly, the ill, and those with physical and mental disabilities—into the configuration of social justice.⁸ While governments may have made some legislative concessions or attempted to rectify the original social contract to include these groups, the non-participation of dependent persons in setting the terms of the contract persists with lasting effects. Little has been done for the care workers who fall under the penumbra of exclusion surrounding dependency concerns. Although able-bodied and often economically independent, domestic and care workers throughout the 20th century and even today have worked without the labor protections allotted to other forms of labor, even when that labor is also largely performed by immigrants and other marginalized groups. Nussbaum argues that “issues that seem extremely important for social justice—issues about the allocation of care, the labor involved in caring, and the social costs of promoting the fuller inclusion of disabled citizens—fail to come into focus or are explicitly deferred for later consideration” (33). Because those in need of care have been historically overlooked in rights discourse and political representation, the value of the labor required at the hands of women—who have always been the primary caretakers of dependents—has also been lowly esteemed. Therefore, while the workers themselves are not physically dependent persons, the work they perform is underpaid and unprotected; when paid, this labor has historically fallen to the women with the fewest economic options, often women of color and immigrants.

As other dependency scholars such as Eva Feder Kittay and Ellen K. Feder have asserted in recent years, the important work of caring for others has been undervalued for

⁸ For a more thorough reading of dependency studies, see the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, Joan Tronto, Martha Fineman, the aforementioned Eva Kittay as well as her co-editor Ellen K. Feder and several other contributors to their collection, *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency* (2002).

its societal contributions and elided in Western philosophy in the overriding preoccupation with independence and individual rights. While recognizing the centrality of equal subjectivity, dependency studies reexamines equality in light of the material and universal need to be cared for during certain periods of every human life (and for some, all their lives). A particular focus on gender equality arises because, historically and currently, dependency work overwhelmingly falls to women and, therefore, exists outside the bounds of political and social discourse in a patriarchal society. As such, Kittay has argued for the seemingly obvious centrality of care, noting that “no society will continue beyond one generation if there are not persons who care for the young. No society—save those enduring the harshest economic, geographic, or climatic conditions—can remain decent if some do not attend to the needs of the ill or disabled and the frail elderly as well as the young” (28). Liberal individualism fails to account for these large parts of life in which all are dependent and considers only the able-bodied, independent person. Value is placed first and foremost on equality between able individuals and—at the time of the Enlightenment’s formation of most of the West’s current notions of justice—between male subjects. The major feminist movements have problematically tapped into a patriarchal rights discourse that contradictorily attempts to include women without considering that the real responsibilities of dependency work still fall disproportionately to women. Kittay and Feder “identify the source of the dilemma in the very impossibility of a project of independence that both relies on and masks the inevitability of human dependency and the work of giving care to dependents” (2). With great strides having been made in feminist struggles, women have gained a greater degree of autonomy, mobility, and choice—essentially, independence. However, these rights have not been

distributed equally, even among women, a fact often manifest in “the inequality between those who are not caregivers and those who are” (Kittay and Feder 2). White middle- and upper-class women tend to shift the burden of care to their less fortunate sisters, usually poor women of color who are hired for domestic and dependency work.⁹ Without dependency workers, paid or unpaid, men and middle- and upper-class women would be hard-pressed to continue thriving as independent and equal subjects. Ironically, the ability of most independent persons to remain as such *depends* on care workers and their undervalued labor.

Theories of dependency have emerged not only from feminism but from disability studies, a field that necessarily discusses caregiving not only as physical work but affective labor. It follows that scholars working on issues of dependency are often also invested in disability studies. Some of the most prominent among this group, such as Susan Wendell, Eva Kittay, and Barbara Hillyer, have disclosed a personal attachment to questions of dependency and independence, as well as the physical and emotional intimacies of care, that stems from their own experiences as disabled persons or mothers of disabled children. For example, in her essay “Not *My* Way, Sesha. *Your* Way. Slowly,” Kittay traces the history of finding out her daughter was mentally retarded and includes intimate details about her daughter’s care. The care of children differs from elder care, which both differ from the care of an individual with cognitive disabilities or extreme physical impairment. In her essay, “Invisible Labors: Caring for the Independent Person,” Lynn May Rivas explores the layered meanings behind independence and dependency.

⁹ The term “dependency work” was first used by Eva Kittay. I detail my use of terminology at a later point in this introduction.

While interviewing a man named Bill, who did not have the use of his hands, about his relationship with his caregiver who had stepped outside, the interviewee began to experience dehydration and difficulty speaking. Although a glass of water with a straw sat on the table next to him, Bill refused help from Rivas and repeatedly and unsuccessfully called out for his caregiver. Rivas argues that beyond the intimate labor of caring for bodily needs—whether thirst or even bathroom hygiene—that expose human vulnerability and dependency, the affective labor required of care workers is to help create “an illusion of independence for the disabled individuals they serve. . . . This is a collaborative process, through which not one but two identities are constructed: care receivers are constructed as independent, and caregivers are constructed as invisible” (76). This cultural obsession with independence in the US has negative consequences for domestic and care workers, whose labor serves as evidence of human frailty and the reality of interdependence, especially for those who cannot survive without the care of others, but also for those whose social or economic success is made possible by another’s paid or unpaid domestic and care labor.

Although the Enlightenment thinkers who established the centrality of free individuals as independent in social contract theory predate the existence of the United States, their influence on US national culture cannot be underestimated.¹⁰ The narrative of the self-made man dominates American culture and letters, from Benjamin Franklin’s

¹⁰ I borrow the term, “US national culture” from Lisa Lowe’s book *Immigrant Acts*, which has influenced my thinking on citizenship and the exclusion of immigrants and people of color. In her first chapter, she positions independence as a principle characteristic of the imagined ideal of US citizenry.

didactic autobiography,¹¹ in which he ignores his own privilege in a tale of how he rose to wealth and success all on his own to Emerson's and Thoreau's writings on self-reliance. These principles are espoused by white, middle-aged, able-bodied men who enjoy the full-fledged citizenship rights granted to landowners; they fail to see the widespread exclusion that results from tying the definition of equality and justice to independence. Not only are the physically dependent persons of society excluded from full political and economic participation, those who perform the domestic and care labor of society are in what Kittay calls "a state of *secondary dependency*" (*Love's Labor* 46). Yet, those who would promote independence and self-reliance are only able to maintain an illusion of independence because another's labor frees them from the care burden.¹² In her essay on the labor of caregivers, Lynn May Rivas includes a quote from a personal attendant from Mexico who said, "I think that American society values independence. . . . If an elderly person [lives alone] . . . I think that's when they say, 'She's independent, she's strong'" (75). Rivas extends this obsession with independence beyond those who require physical care, stating that "when we think of all the objects, beliefs, and interactions that make our lives possible, it is difficult to sustain the notion that anyone is self-made. Nevertheless, the idea of the self-reliant, independent man occupies the center of the American imagination" (74-75). The widespread abhorrence of dependency crops up every election cycle when politicians use welfare reform and social entitlements to manipulate public opinion. As I discuss in Chapter Three, Ronald Reagan concocted a

¹¹ I will revisit this point in more detail in Chapter 1, drawing upon the work of Meg Wesling in my analysis of Ann Petry's *The Street* to show the ubiquity and ideological harm of Franklin's narrative in hegemonic US culture.

¹² For example, Emerson writes about his Irish domestic servant, Kate, in his essay titled *Eloquence* while Benjamin Franklin was rumored to have fathered a child with his housemaid, Barbara (see Robert Middlekauff's *Benjamin Franklin and His Enemies* 97).

story of an African American “welfare queen” who was getting rich by cheating the welfare system. This image has been consistently resurrected, and its power lies in the cultural disgust for dependency, social or otherwise, in the US.¹³ Conservatives on the right defend the stay-at-home motherwork of their own wives while simultaneously lambasting single mothers (always depicted as women of color) who receive government aid for their supposed indolence. Politicians from both camps buttress their platforms by promising increases in the already established “workfare” policies that require women who receive welfare assistance to perform waged labor.¹⁴

The myth of the self-made man is an appendage of liberal rights discourse and particularly the vein of social contract theory, which is steeped in possessive individualism. Canadian political scientist, C.B. MacPherson, introduced and expounded upon this concept as a resistance against the conflation of democratic thought and the values of market capitalism in the 20th century. In his argument against the liberalism of Enlightenment thinkers like Hobbes and Locke, MacPherson writes, “The individual, it was thought, is free inasmuch as he is proprietor of his person and capacities. The human essence is freedom from dependence on the wills of others, and freedom is a function of possession. Society becomes a lot of free individuals related to each other as proprietors of their own capacities and of what they have acquired by their exercise” (3). From a disability studies standpoint, the notion of being the proprietor of ones capacities becomes problematic; when ability depends on the labor of the caregiver, who is the “individual” that is “free”? The troublesome conception of equality here is magnified for

¹³ See *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (2004) by Ange-Marie Hancock.

¹⁴ In 1996, the Bill Clinton administration introduced the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which fulfilled his 1992 campaign promises to overhaul the welfare system.

those whose “capacities” are seen as less than “normal,” but here MacPherson’s point is that none of us truly own our abilities, opportunities, or what we have come to “possess” because we all owe a debt to the society from which we have benefitted. Those whose lives are encumbered by their paid or unpaid care of others are not “free” under this definition because their life choices and circumstances are influenced by their dependent relationships rather than their own “independent” wills. US national culture is rife with possessive individualism, particularly on the conservative right,¹⁵ which espouses the values of market capitalism, and this failure to recognize interdependence contributes to the stigmatization of dependency and dependents as well as the exploitation of domestic and care workers.

Those who promote a care ethic argue for the recognition that we are all interdependent, which is to say we are all dependent on others to help us survive and thrive. We are, in fact, physically dependent at some point in our lives as children and in old age, in addition to being one accident or illness away from being dependent on the full-time care labor of another at any given moment. Joan Tronto has said, “An ethic of care is an approach to personal, social, moral, and political life that starts from the reality that all human beings need and receive care and give care to others. The care relationships among humans are part of what mark us as human beings. We are always interdependent beings.” The concept of “reciprocity” as discussed by disability scholar Barbara Hillyer in her discussion of independence and dependency between a disabled person and her caregiver helps to explain the alternative models of interdependence that I

¹⁵ For example, the right gave a vitriolic response to President Barack Obama’s 2012 campaign speech assertion, “If you’ve been successful, you didn’t get there on your own.”

analyze in US literature and film. She states: “Reciprocity involves the difficulty of recognizing each other’s needs, relying on the other, asking and receiving help, delegating responsibility, giving and receiving empathy, respecting boundaries” (18). This kind of negotiation of the care burden acknowledges interdependence and rejects the myth of any of us as truly independent. Whether or not we are classified as able-bodied, all of us have received help and care to get where we are and most of us consistently depend on the affective, or emotional, labor as well as the physical care work of others.

In my dissertation, I define care work more broadly than most dependency scholars, like Kittay,¹⁶ but more narrowly than other care scholars like Mignon Duffy, whose sociological study includes professional occupations like nurses, teachers, and therapists or the domestic work performed in hospitals, restaurants, and hotels. In this project, I am primarily focused on labor that is traditionally categorized as women’s domestic work and performed within the site of the private home. I do, however, find Duffy’s categories of “nurturant” and “non-nurturant” care work to be useful.¹⁷ Nurturant care brings the worker in direct contact with the dependent person (Duffy 6); in my study, this includes eldercare workers, caregivers, childcare workers, mothers, and anyone caring for a physically dependent person in the space of a private home. Non-nurturant care workers may or may not have direct contact with those for whom they labor (Duffy 6). In my dissertation, this includes housecleaners, live-in cooks or maids, or anyone who

¹⁶ Eva Kittay uses the terms “dependency work(er)” in her writings, which she restricts to the work of caring for someone who has what she calls “inevitable dependencies” (76). She admits that this can extend to caring for people who are capable of caring for themselves, like adolescent children or even the work traditionally performed by many women for their husbands, but her work is concerned primarily with the physical and affective labor involved when caring for children, the elderly, and disabled persons.

¹⁷ Mignon Duffy separates care work into the hierarchical categories of “nurturant” and “non-nurturant” and traces this history back to 19th century ideals of domesticity. She explains that Victorian femininity and motherhood prescriptions kept nurturant work within the upper and middle-class notions of womanhood, while the non-nurturant care work was done by working class hired servants in households of means.

performs cleaning, cooking, or even sewing work within the unprotected domestic space of home. I consider care work the larger category that includes both nurturant and non-nurturant labor.

I find it important to include domestic workers—generally, women who cook and clean—in this dissertation because the boundaries between these tasks and the work of caring for dependents are so often blurred. I follow the lead of the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) and their inclusion of “nannies, housecleaners, and caregivers” (Ehrenreich, “Foreword” vii) in their 2012 report, *Home Economics: The Invisible and Unregulated World of Domestic Work*. I consider even the domestic work of cleaning and cooking to be care work because of the intimacy that can accompany working within the domestic space of another’s home and cleaning up after them, even in a hotel as I discuss in Chapter 4. Often in this dissertation I use the phrase “domestic and care work” in order to maintain some level of distinction between nurturant and non-nurturant work. At times, I borrow the term “dependency work(er)” from Eva Kittay to maintain the centrality of dependency and the connection to disability studies in my dissertation. I use the term “reproductive labor” far less frequently, again, to emphasize the ethic of care that is central to my work. I refer most often to those who perform this labor as domestic/(child)(elder)care/dependency *workers* rather than maids, nannies, or babysitters to emphasize their rights to fair labor practices and cultural respect like all other workers that power our economy and social well-being.

Scholars of dependency work as well as domestic work talk about the affective or emotional labor, respectively, that accompanies the intimate nature of working (and often living) within the private space of another’s home. Arlie Hochschild first discussed

emotional labor in her book *The Managed Heart*, in relation to jobs that require specific and sometimes contrived emotional responses from a worker, but Mary Romero expands this concept to include the labor of domestic workers. According to Romero, “Within discussions of employee-employer interactions are embedded descriptions of domestics being expected to perform the emotional labor attached to mothering and other homemaking activities” (135). This can apply even to housecleaners; although they have the least direct contact with their employers, many have complained about a one-sided relationship in which they are expected to listen to the problems of the women for whom they work.¹⁸ Barbara Ehrenreich and Evelyn Nakano Glenn have both argued that what sets domestic work within private homes apart from other types of low-wage labor is the intimacy of the relationship between employer and employee, who are usually divided by privilege in class, race or ethnicity, or citizenship. In many cases of caring for a disabled person, what is more often called affective (rather than emotional) labor by dependency scholars is not merely an added benefit but an intrinsic part of the work. Kittay explains that only when her daughter’s caregiver, Peggy, learned how to see the world through Sesha’s eyes could she truly perform the care work required of her. This kind of empathy and the intimacy required to develop it sets care work apart from other types of labor, while also rendering it more vulnerable to exploitation; workers who form personal attachments to the people for whom they care tend to stay at jobs despite poor pay, increases in workloads and hours, lack of benefits, or health hazards.

Poor labor conditions have remained largely unchanged throughout the history of domestic and care work in the US, even as different groups of women have constituted

¹⁸ See Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Mary Romero.

this labor force. Another constant has been the marginalized status of each group, whether because of age, class, race or ethnicity, immigration status, always gender,¹⁹ and most often a combination of some of these identity markers. In New England during the colonial period of the US, before the onset of industrialization and widespread urbanization in the later 19th century, “hired girls”—often the teenage daughters of neighbors—were brought in to help with domestic and care work as needed. Home management was labor intensive, and this practice was viewed as a type of apprenticeship whereby young women would gain valuable domestic skills in preparation for marriage (Duffy 21). In the South, slave labor was predominant; the failure of Reconstruction would lock African American women into domestic work in the South for at least a hundred years after the Civil War ended.²⁰ As the 19th century progressed, urbanization and large-scale European immigration to industrial Northern cities offered genteel white women—members of the “cult of domesticity”²¹—the chance to hire Irish,²² Scandinavian, and German immigrant labor to primarily take up the cooking and cleaning labor in their homes. Women from these countries continued to dominate domestic work in major cities well into the 1900’s; however, their phenotypical whiteness granted them

¹⁹ The domestic labor of Chinese and some Japanese men, particularly in the late 19th century, mostly in California stands out as one notable exception. In his book *America Is in the Heart*, Carlos Bulosan refers to his own periods of employment in domestic work and that of other Filipino immigrants.

²⁰ Mignon Duffy writes, “Almost 75 percent of Black U.S.-born women in the labor force were employed in either domestic service or agriculture, reflecting severe occupational constraints that persisted fifty years after Emancipation.

²¹ Mary Romero uses this phrase in reference to Barbara Welter’s renowned essay titled, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” in which she expounds upon the 19-th century history of middle-class women’s roles in a society divided by gender into the public sphere of business and the private sphere of home. Women were culturally reified as the moral compass for their husbands and children, and their identity was defined by the titles of wife and mother. This ideology is distilled in Coventry Patmore’s 1862 poem “The Angel in the House,” dedicated to his wife, Emily.

²² See Margaret Lynch-Brennan’s book, *The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930* for an in-depth study of various social facets of life for Irish domestic and care workers.

the privilege of using this low-wage work as a temporary occupational stop for one, perhaps two, generations of women. In his foundational history of women's domestic work from 1870-1920, David Katzman compiles census data to show that in 1900, 60% of Irish-born women worked in domestic service, while Scandinavian-born and German-born women worked at rates of roughly 62% and 42%, respectively (49). Changes in immigration laws during World War I and the Great Migration of African Americans to northern cities resulted in the domestic workforce shift from European immigrant women to native-born black women.²³ Phyllis Palmer reports that while the ability of households to hire help declined from 1920 into the 1940s, the concentration of African American women in domestic and care labor increased such that by 1940, 60% of domestic workers in the US were African American women (13).

For this dissertation, I limit the scope of my analysis to literature and film about domestic and care workers from the 1940s to the present time, which covers the period in which the predominance of African Americans in domestic and care work shifted to the concentration of Latinas in this work from the last few decades of the 20th and into the 21st centuries. Chapters One and Two examine works about the 1940s and 1950s, respectively. During the early years of the 1940s, African American women also took wartime industry jobs as often as they were available, but they were given far fewer opportunities to work at these higher-paying government jobs than white women were.²⁴

²³ With this shift, scholars such as Jacqueline Jones, Mary Romero, and Mignon Duffy, among many others have charted the transition from live-in work as the predominant arrangement to the live-out work preferred by more African American women, who, as Mignon Duffy writes, "were more likely to be balancing paid care with unpaid care work in their own families" (24).

²⁴ Jacqueline Jones uncovers the disenfranchisement of black women's labor during World War II and the practice of bringing African American women into defense industry plants as "scrubwomen or janitors" (201). See her detailed discussion from pages 201-208 of *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*.

The overall percentages of domestic and care workers within the female labor force decreased during the post-war period, as women's employment rates rose steadily throughout the 1950s.²⁵ The Civil Rights movement that peaked during the 1960s and was formalized legally by the 1965 Civil Rights Act began to open up opportunities outside of household work for African American women. The stigma of domestic and care work with its connection to the legacy of slavery for black women caused the younger generation to abandon the work of their mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and generations beyond. By the 1970s, domestic and care work as a paid industry was in decline, but changes in immigration law again caused a shift in the demographic and availability of workers, resulting in the high number of Latinas performing care work today. Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo writes, "In Los Angeles...the percentage of African Americans working as domestics in private households fell from 35 percent to 4 percent from 1970 to 1990, while foreign-born Latinas increased their representation from 9 percent to 68 percent" (16-17). The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 effectively ended the quota system and opened up immigration to people of color by basing eligibility mainly on family reunification and work visas. Mary Romero reports that "nearly half of the 120,000 visas granted to Latin American women in 1968 were for prospective live-in maids" (117). The shift from African American workers to Latinas is most drastic in large urban centers, a fact that has defined the geographical scope of my research. In cities like Chicago,²⁶ New York, and Los Angeles, with high rates of

²⁵ See my discussion in Chapter Two of these labor trends that contradict the nostalgic picture of universal stay-at-home-mothers in the popular imagination of the 1950s.

²⁶ Although the late Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes's short story "Las amigas" falls outside the purview of my dissertation on US cultural texts, it offers a unique glance (from someone seeing mass outmigration of women workers from his country) into this labor shift as an irritable elderly woman's caregiver and

domestic and care labor and large Latina/o immigrant populations, the care work industry has been on the rise for the past two decades after many predictions that these jobs would continue to decline and eventually disappear altogether. As women have continued to join the paid workforce, they have experienced what Arlie Hochschild termed “the second shift”: coming home to perform unpaid care work after a day of formal employment. As privileged women throughout the history of care work have done, these overstretched women hire women of color and immigrant women—who have fewer employment options—to take up a larger share of the care burden. As evidenced by the recent NDWA report, these jobs still pay poorly, lack security, are largely unprotected, and continue to carry a social stigma.

In this dissertation, I focus on the representation of African American and Latina care work in US literature and film because these groups make up the largest demographic and cultural presences; however, this focus of necessity excludes the significant contribution of Filipina domestic and care labor in the 20th and 21st centuries. Those who study the global care crisis point to the mass migration of Filipinas who travel mostly to wealthy nations in East Asia and the Middle East, and to a lesser degree to Europe, the United States, and Canada to perform domestic and care labor. In the US, Filipinas are especially overrepresented in the home health industry. The Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) oversees state-run programs to train workers and connect them with overseas agencies and markets; much of this labor is in domestic and care work. Because of these programs and the large amount of money sent

housekeeper of many years quits. She is forced to hire a Mexican woman, who cannot quit no matter how insulting her employer becomes because of the vulnerabilities of being undocumented.

back to the Philippines in remittances, Robyn Magalit Rodríguez calls the country a labor brokerage state and reveals that “nearly 10 percent of the Philippine population is working abroad” (xii). Global care scholar Rhacel Parreñas calls attention to the “care deficit” created in the Philippines by the emigration of Filipina domestic and care workers across the globe, which leaves children and other dependents without adequate support while these women are caring for first-world families. This social phenomenon repeats on a global scale what has long been the case for domestic and care workers in the US: their own children are often forced to go without adequate care while they perform paid care work for white, privileged families. These women of color and immigrant women are excluded from the bourgeois pattern of private care that follows the independence model of liberalism; they have been forced to recognize their interdependence and forge networks and coalitions of care.

This dissertation is not an attempt to present a fixed solution to labor abuses, nor do I intend to rewrite individual rights discourse here. Rather, my dissertation examines the dependent relationships of care in US literary and film texts and analyzes interstices of interdependent alternatives to the perpetual inequalities produced by the independence-focused individual rights discourse that dominates even the most progressive social justice movements today. These texts, most of which are written or directed by women of color, fall into the category of multiethnic US literature. They hail from communities in which the care of dependents can only be carried out by forming care networks and other coalitions. The ability to ignore care concerns demands a level of social and economic privilege (such as the choice to be a stay-at-home mother or the means to hire a care worker) that most people in communities of color do not have. In the texts I analyze,

alternative modes of interdependence are sometimes modeled, but at other times they are negatively defined by moments when the characters are unable to get outside the binary of independent/dependent in their struggles. Recognizing that dependency is universal and examining the interdependent modes seen in literature can help begin the discursive work of revising current notions of equality to include all persons, including those considered dependents and those who care for them.

The first chapter of my dissertation focuses on African American women's domestic and care labor in the 1940s, as represented by Lutie Johnson in Ann Petry's *The Street* and Pauline Breedlove in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. The overrepresentation of African American women in this industry peaked in the 1940s, as I discussed previously. As white women entered the workforce in record numbers during the period of defense-related industrialization brought on by World War II, they shifted the burden of their unpaid domestic and care labor to African American women. Although this labor became waged, it remained unprotected despite the onslaught of labor reform movements connected with the New Deal during this period, largely due to the political maneuvering of Southern lawmakers. Without minimum wage laws, white women could hire African American women—who were locked into what Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo has called an “occupational ghetto” (15)—for deplorably low sums. African American women could be required to work as long as twelve and fourteen hours without labor laws to protect them. These women toiled at housework and childcare in white homes, only to go to their own homes and face a “second shift” of the same work with little time or energy left to give to their own houses and dependent children. These children of color, like Bub Johnson and Pecola Breedlove, are already particularly vulnerable and in need of a

specific type of nurturing that will help them resist the racist attitudes of the society in which they live.

Despite the challenges of being present in their homes while spending so much time laboring in white houses, black women and mothers in particular have historically held a crucial position within African American culture. Bell hooks has praised these mothers who prepared a generation to lead the Civil Rights movement by providing what she calls a “homeplace”—a site of social and cultural resistance. Independence-based models of care that rely on the economic privilege of a mother who stays home to perform unpaid care labor, or is able to hire someone else to perform it, were not available to the majority of African American women of this period. They developed alternative strategies to care for children that recognize dependency and use interdependent networks of care. Patricia Hill Collins discusses the history of interdependent modes of mothering in African American communities, where “othermothers” (usually female relatives like grandmothers or aunts) or “fictive kin” (female friends or neighbors who become like family) take on childcare responsibilities in a way that defies the hegemonic myths of individual care within the private domestic sphere. However, Petry’s and Morrison’s novels explore the social forces constantly working against black motherhood.

Lutie Johnson and Pauline Breedlove are not only taken out of their homes by the exploitation of their care labor, they are also seduced by hegemonic myths of commodity culture that were especially prevalent in the burgeoning consumer goods market that was building in the early 40s and would explode after the end of the war. Advertisements, films, and magazines present these characters with ideals of a bourgeois domestic life

beyond the economic reaches of their class and racial status. While the Depression of the 1930s and wartime rationing in the early 40s restricted consumer spending, popular media and advertisements presented the picture of the ideal home in domestic consumer goods, the consumption of which would explode as soon as the war was over and continuing into the 1950s. Even while in the clutches of poverty, Lutie and Pauline are seduced into thinking they must have these goods. Lutie continues to believe social uplift myths modeled on Benjamin Franklin's supposed social rise,²⁷ without recognizing the systemic forces pitted against her that make her tireless efforts to leave the streets of Harlem and achieve what I call the "white kitchen" for herself and her son, Bub, futile. In her efforts, she leaves Bub a victim to the streets, where he gets swept up into the criminal justice system, like so many young black males, at a very young age. Pauline Breedlove altogether abandons any illusions of achieving the "white kitchen" for her own family, and places most of her time and all of her affections on the child and home of the white family for whom she works. At home, Pecola Breedlove suffers incestual rape by her father in her mother's absence; rather than supporting and loving her daughter after the abuse, Pauline gets angry and blames Pecola for what has happened to her, showing how far removed she has become from her role as caretaker and protector of her own daughter.

The elision of dependency concerns from rights discourse in US politics and cultural ideologies enables the exploitation of black women's domestic and care labor. The lack of labor protections for domestic and care work in the 1930s and 40s

²⁷ See Meg Wesling's 2006 article "The Opacity of Everyday Life: Segregation and the Iconicity of Uplift in *The Street*."

demonstrates the perpetuation of the exclusion of care concerns as private matters to be arranged by individual families within the sanctity of private homes. Without these protections and surrounded by the consumerist media images of bourgeois domesticity, Lutie's and Pauline's time and attention are diverted from their own homes, where they could have been providing a "homeplace" for their children. Rather than making use of interdependent networks of childcare, Lutie and Pauline reject their chance at the powerful cultural position of black mothers, and seek after white independence-based, domestic ideals. Bub Johnson and Pecola Breedlove suffer the tragic consequences of the unprotected labor performed by their mothers, showing that the care burden gets passed not only to the dependency workers but also to their children.

In the second chapter of my dissertation, I continue to trace the position of African American domestic and care workers into the often misrepresented postwar decade of the 1950s, focusing specifically on the problematic relationship between white mistresses and black servants as represented in Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* and the Douglas Sirk film *Imitation of Life*. Both of these works debuted in 1959, on the cusp of the Civil Rights and feminist movements that would come to full fruition in the revolutionary 1960s. Perhaps no other decade is so nostalgically remembered in scholarship and the American popular imagination as the 1950s. However, revisionist historical and sociological studies of the postwar era insist that it was not all bubble gum and hula hoops. In fact, this was a time fraught with social turmoil and unrest, from the nuclear anxieties of the Cold War, McCarthyism, the undeclared Korean War, as well as Brown vs. The Board of Education and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Although Betty Friedan's landmark 1961 bestseller *The Feminine Mystique* began to stir up the

unexamined discontent of startlingly unhappy housewives and their nameless problem, this line of feminist thinking (that was integral to second-wave feminism) was so narrow in its focus on a certain sector of white women that it has also eclipsed the reality that female employment rates—among both married and single women—continued to rise throughout the 1950s (Hartmann 93; Meyerowitz 4). While large numbers of white women certainly did return from the factory to the kitchen at the close of WWII, many of them did not stay there long because they were able to find employment in clerical and other non-service sector jobs. By 1950, only 16% of white women labored in service positions compared to 60% of black working women (Jones 198). In sum, there was not a mass takeover of household domestic labor by white women in the 1950s. Black women still bore a disproportionate amount of the care burden, and wages were so low that even those with moderate middle-class incomes could afford to hire domestic help. African American women, many domestic and care workers among them, were actively involved in 1950s civil rights actions and had much at stake in both the fight for racial equality as well as the women's movement. However, the white feminist agenda was based on a rights paradigm that left out concerns of care, reaching a degree of independence by passing domestic and care work on to women at the margins of society.

In Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, both Lena and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, work in the homes of white families, although all of the domestic labor actually shown in the play takes place within the family's cramped Chicago apartment quarters in what Ruth exclaims, "ain't now and never was no kitchen" (93). Tellingly, as the members of the family who work in the domestic spaces of white families, Ruth and Lena are the ones who want more than anything to move into Clybourne Park—a fictional stand-in for

the Leavittown type of postwar suburban communities that constitute the hallmark of the 1950s dream of domesticity: homeownership. The barriers that the Younger family comes up against in their pursuit to leave urban Chicago and follow the hordes of white families relocating to the suburbs represent the very real obstacles of redlining and housing segregation among other manipulative schemes that kept the material realities of 1950s domesticity segregated along color lines. The restriction of African American women to care work with its low wages and lack of labor protections, while white women increasingly worked in professional settings, contributes to keeping the Youngers from the independence-based dream of private home ownership and a kitchen like the ones in which Ruth and Lena labor.

In *Imitation of Life*, Annie Johnson and her daughter, Sarah Jane, never have a home of their own, and in almost every scene in which she appears, Annie is performing some kind of care labor in the home of her white employer, Lora Meredith. The relationship between the two women in Sirk's film (an adaptation of Fannie Hurst's 1933 novel) provides a rich context through which to examine the separate but unequal histories of white and black women who inhabited the same white domestic spaces during the rising social movements of the 1950s. The personal mistress-servant relationship between Annie and Lora, in which Lora's occupational success as an actress and her ability to resist entering into a heteronormative family structure are contingent upon Annie taking up the traditionally female-assigned labor of childcare, cooking, cleaning, and entertaining guests. Without Annie shouldering the care burden for her, Lora could never have achieved the kind of independent lifestyle and female autonomy that white feminist movements of the day were working toward. Annie and Lora's

relationship goes beyond the personal to reveal larger systemic problems that allowed white women to climb to social and economic success on the backs of the black women scrubbing their floors. When white women in the post-war period began to attain the patriarchally-defined equality of financial independence and individual autonomy, African American women consequently became further burdened with the domestic and dependency work that keeps society moving.

Chapter Three rejoins the historical timeline of domestic and care work in the US at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries as the industry, which some had predicted would disappear entirely after a slump during the 1960s and 70s, makes a resurgence in metropolitan areas like Los Angeles and New York. In these metropolises, which Saskia Sassen has called “global cities” (255), large numbers of affluent professionals live alongside even larger populations of people of color and immigrants who make up the new “serving class” (Sassen 262). Particularly, the burgeoning Latina/o population in the US has taken up much of the labor of caring for children (or other dependents) and maintaining households in working order while the women who traditionally performed this unpaid labor have joined the formal workforce. In this chapter, I focus on the exploitation of Chicana and Latina domestic and care workers in John Rechy’s novel *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez* (1991) and Patricia Riggen’s film *Under the Same Moon* (2008), both of which take place in Los Angeles. Representations of space in each of these texts reflect the geographical class and racial divisions in LA, which exacerbate the invisibility of care work and promote the myth of the independent, self-made man. This denial and outright vituperation of dependency clearly emerges in new Nativist movements and their anti-immigrant legislation such

California's Proposition 187 of 1994, which specifically attacked poor, undocumented Latinas—many working in the care industry—by denying education and healthcare to their dependent children. Californians benefitting from their cheap labor simultaneously painted Latina domestic and care workers as social dependents, drains on the system of public funds and resources, by drawing upon longstanding racial stereotypes of welfare recipients. The care labor of Chicana and Latina domestic and care workers is exploited and commodified, rendering those without legal citizenship status particularly vulnerable, while their own care needs are completely ignored. Many immigrant women are forced into “transnational motherhood,” leaving their own children in the care of others in their home country while they care for privileged, white children and homes in the US.

As a native-born Chicana, Rechy's Amalia carries an extra share of the care burden from an early age, which compounds her poverty and contributes to the crises in her own and her children's lives. Although she works in a more flexible and secure line of care work as a housecleaner with many employers, Amalia cannot financially support her now teenage children and aging mother or provide a home for them in a safe area of LA solely with her own meager earnings; in order to pay the rent for even a run-down bungalow in a now-decrepit area of Hollywood, she moves in with a man she convinces herself she loves while denying evidence that he is sexually threatening her daughter. One of her sons has died in prison while the other cannot tell Amalia that he is gay and currently prostituting himself for extra money. In the opulent city of Los Angeles, care workers like Amalia make up an impoverished class rivaling what Jacob Riis termed “the other half” at the turn of the 20th century. The state has failed to recognize the value of her unpaid work as a mother, using invasive tactics of the welfare system to question her

care needs. Years later, though no longer on public assistance, she is still plagued by the racist “welfare queen” rhetoric of the 80s and 90s that vilifies dependency and the material realities of care needs. Although she is a citizen, her papers can be and are demanded in random searches because she is profiled as an undocumented immigrant. Her only access inside the mansions she can see up on the hills from her bedroom window is as the maid who cleans them. Geographical boundaries that separate poor Latinas/os from the wealthy white citizenry in LA are felt and enforced as Amalia goes and comes from work. Only upon her transgression of these boundaries while shopping in an upscale Beverly Hills mall does Amalia come to a new understanding of her outsider position and is able to accept the tragic realities of her life.

As an undocumented housecleaner and nanny who has left her son in the care of her mother in Mexico, Rosario in *Under the Same Moon* not only struggles with the low wages and long hours historically connected to care work, she also lives with the lack of protections for undocumented workers in the US. Although Rikken’s unrealistic depiction of crossing the border and the precariousness of life for the undocumented is deeply flawed, her film examines the daily lives of domestic and care workers and their unequal power relationships with employers. Like Rechy, Rikken also uses representations of spatial boundaries in the city of Los Angeles to unmask the social segregation of affluent white employers and poor Latina care laborers. Rosario’s shared garage apartment in LA resembles the Mexican home, shown in parallel jump cuts, where her mother and son reside much more closely than it does the extravagant mansions of her employers. The power and privilege that one employer holds over Rosario, threatening to call the authorities about her undocumented status when Rosario protests

being fired unfairly, are visible in the spatial positioning of the two women in the palatial, white marble home. Using parallel scenes of Rosario putting the child she cares for to bed while her son, Carlitos, recites the Lord's prayer to himself as darkness falls in Mexico, Riggen shows the injustices of the US state that capitalizes on the care work of undocumented immigrants with no consideration for the care needs of the children of these workers. While transnational motherhood arrangements provide a non-traditional caring model that utilizes extended family or other networks to meet dependent care needs, the independence-based, single-family model of care held up as the ideal in the US is not offered as an option to women like Rosario. Her care needs are excised with the commodification of her labor.

While Chapter Four also examines texts that show the entrance of Latinas as a major presence in the care industry during the 1990s and 2000s, I shift my focus to New York and the Caribbean diasporic populations of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic through the novels *América's Dream* by Esmeralda Santiago and *Let It Rain Coffee* by Angie Cruz. Puerto Ricans and Dominicans together constitute the majority of Latinas/os in New York, which has the second highest Latina/o population in the US after Los Angeles. The strong Caribbean presence in New York, despite the thousands of sea miles that separate the two geographic areas, stems from the history of US colonialism and imperialism in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic that dates back to at least the 19th century. The global care crisis responsible for large-scale migrations of women workers worldwide draws upon these historic colonial ties between the Caribbean and the US; whereas the US once sought a strategic military presence there and control of sugar production, it now seeks Caribbean women to meet the increasing demand for childcare

and eldercare workers. In global cities like New York, an aging population and families in which both parents have lucrative careers with demanding schedules create a booming care industry. However, the women of color and immigrant women—like América and Esperanza—who fill these jobs are still underpaid and overworked as their labor is undervalued and stigmatized by its association to dependency. As the independence-based model of care persists, the care burden is perpetually and unsustainably shifted to the most socially vulnerable groups of women rather than being redistributed in a more egalitarian way. Santiago and Cruz present alternative models of coalition building and cooperative work that circumvent the inequalities that accompany the excision of care from liberal rights discourse today; the fact that each of their protagonists reject these interdependent models reinforces the degree to which independence is entrenched in the narrative of achieving success in US society and culture.

The first half of *América's Dream*, prior to América's migration to the US, takes place in Vieques, an island municipality off of the main island with a particular history of US military colonization. About 75 percent of the island was occupied by the US military for most of the 20th century and used for training exercises and weapons testing, leaving only a narrow middle-section of the island for native residence. América works at a resort hotel as a maid and sometimes as a babysitter for foreign hotel guests. When the Leveretts, an affluent family from New York, invite her to work for them as a live-in nanny and housekeeper, she bravely accepts the offer in an attempt to escape a life-threatening relationship with her longtime boyfriend, Correa. Santiago sets up this abusive relationship as a type of allegory of US military domination in Vieques. The history of colonization has created a market exchange in care between Puerto Rico and

the US, wherein women of color fill the care needs of the privileged for low wages. When América arrives in New York, she is frustrated not only by the wage gap between herself and her employers but also the individualistic and independence-minded culture of this prototypical, two-child (boy and girl), rich suburban family. She reaches out to form an interdependent relationship with them, especially through food, but to no avail. Santiago explores the isolation felt by live-in care workers, and presents the possibility of connection and community with the other Latina nannies that América meets at the neighborhood park. These workers have formed an informal labor coalition that helps combat some of the job insecurity of care work, lets the workers compare salaries and workload, and provides a sense of belonging and acceptance. Unfortunately, América does not fully integrate herself with these women, and after the dramatic events of the novel unfold—she kills her boyfriend in self-defense after he tracks her down and invades the Leverett home—she attempts to live the immigrant uplift narrative suggested by the novel's title. Having brought her daughter to the US, América will find herself in the overburdened position of the second shift of care labor that is common to Latina immigrant women; they struggle for economic and social equality in a culture that detests the dependency that saturates their lives.

Esperanza of *Let It Rain Coffee* grows up in the Dominican Republic, where the imperialist presence left by two US military invasions also floods the island nation with US media and consumer culture. Fervently watching the 1980s television drama *Dallas*, ripe with the individualistic ideologies of US capitalism, has convinced her that extreme wealth is accessible to everyone in the United States. She wants no part in the life of her husband's cooperative farming community called Los Llanos and migrates, first to Puerto

Rico where she works as a housekeeper, and then to New York after her husband begrudgingly secures them visas and employment there. Esperanza works as a home health aide for the elderly while her husband, Santo, drives a taxi; still, after ten years they are barely scraping by in a crumbling apartment in Washington Heights. While Esperanza is employed caring for the elderly, dependent family members of others, she has her aging father-in-law who suffers from dementia and two teenage children to care for and support financially on her own after Santo is killed in his cab. The ability to pay another person to care for one's dependent kin marks class status, and even stratifies various Latino groups who entered the country under unequal immigration laws backed by political motivations. Esperanza cares for Mr. Hernández, a Cuban refugee of Castro's revolution, whose exceptional immigration status allows Mrs. Hernández to access public resources to pay for the intimate care work she prefers not to perform for her husband. Meanwhile, Esperanza's investment in the myth of the self-made man has seduced her into the world of consumer credit and looming debt that she will be paying for the rest of her life—the ideal customer of multinational finance entities that prey upon the working class. Toward the end of the novel, the family takes a trip back to the Dominican Republic where a longtime family friend (but rival of Esperanza), Miraluz, has organized a cooperative company called El Secreto de la Victoria made up of women sewing undergarments such as those made in the sweatshops of the free trade zones used by global corporations. The women who jointly own and operate this company understand the realities of the dependency and assure that the care needs of each are met within their business model. Esperanza flatly rejects everything about the Dominican Republic, stating that she could never live there again; she anxiously awaits her return to the US

despite the hardships she has faced there because she still holds on to the myth of meritocracy that is steeped in the patriarchal model of independence-based liberal rights discourse.

I conclude this dissertation with a discussion of the current public discourse surrounding the burgeoning domestic and care workers' rights movement. I take up an analysis of the contentious debate that ensued after the publication of Kate Stockett's 2009 New York Times bestseller, *The Help*, and again ignited with the debut of the film adaptation with the same title in 2011. The representation of African American domestic workers in the dangerous racial climate of Jackson, Mississippi in the early 1960s in both the novel and the film prove problematic. Critics and scholars lambasted both the novel and the film for using the overly familiar trope of a white liberator—here, an aspiring young college graduate named Skeeter, who mourns the loss of the maid who raised her and seeks to right the wrongs of Jim Crow by interviewing black domestic workers and publishing their stories. *The Help* reduces the life-threatening racism of the period down to one vindictive white woman whose mission is to pass a bill requiring all white homes to build a separate bathroom for their African American employees. At one point the domestic workers plead with Skeeter, the white writer, saying, “You stop this,” (*The Help*) as if she had the power to end segregation and racial violence in one of the most treacherous areas of the South. Despite these failings, the book and film raise long-neglected issues of domestic and care work to the level of public discourse, such that the National Domestic Workers Alliance has embraced the book and film in a politically strategic move to disseminate its message. Encouraging its members to host *The Help* Oscar parties where they could discuss the inequalities faced by domestic workers

historically and today, the NDWA has demonstrated how literature and film can intersect with social justice movements. While a recent landmark report on current labor conditions published by the NDWA evidences an informed understanding of care concerns, its focus is exclusively to enact policy changes that will legislate the expansion of legal rights for domestic and care workers. These legislative changes are vital; however, until the transformation reaches down to the level of social rights discourse, one of the main causes of these inequalities will remain. Examining US literature and films through the lens of dependency studies allows for arguments to be made at the discursive level of language. Until the connections are established between the exclusion of dependency from the foundational principles of individual liberal rights discourse and the disenfranchisement of those who perform the labor of caring for the dependent persons in society, domestic and care work will continue to be stigmatized, underpaid, and cast off to some of the most vulnerable members of society—today, women of color and immigrant women.

Chapter 1:

In the “White Kitchen”: 1940s African American Domestic Labor and Motherhood

in Petry’s *The Street* and Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*

“It’s quite a kitchen, isn’t it?” Maud Martha observed. “I mean, big.” Mrs. Burns-Cooper’s brows raced up in amazement. “Really? I hadn’t thought so. I’ll bet”—she twinkled indulgently—“you’re comparing it to your *own* little kitchen.” And why do that, her light eyes laughed. Why talk of beautiful mountains and grains of alley sand in the same breath?

Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha*

Nostalgic recollections of Rosie the Riveter and the World War II years when women “went to work” largely fail to recognize that the defense industry hired white women almost exclusively and that African American women were already working, very often in the kitchens of Rosie and her compatriots.¹ In her book *Domesticity and Dirt*, Phyllis Palmer charts the early 20th century rise of black women’s domestic labor in white homes, which peaked in 1940 as African American women made up 60% of all domestic workers in the US (13). White women’s workforce participation rose significantly from 1940 to 1950 while African American women’s labor levels remained constant, reflecting the increase in opportunities for white women and labor stagnation for black women. Despite marginal employment and wage gains in the secondary industries created by the war, “for all of them, the end of the war meant a return to age-old battles within white households” (Jones 213). Popular historical narratives recount a large-scale return of women from war plants to the home, in the surge of domesticity that engendered the baby boom. Despite many women being forced out of industrial jobs

¹ Jacqueline Jones writes in her history of African American women’s labor, “For the first two and a half years of the war, if and when defense plants hired any black women at all, they usually used them as scrubwomen or janitors and kept them in these jobs for the duration of the conflict” (201).

when the soldiers came home, women's employment rates continued to rise through the 40s and 50s. Large numbers of privileged white women were opting out of housework and the care of children in pursuit of formal employment or other positions in public life that may have been more individually fulfilling and that rendered higher financial and social rewards. These women paid African American women low wages to perform the unpaid care work that had simply been expected of them as wives and mothers. African American women, many of whom on top of being "thrice oppressed" by race, class, and gender had relocated outside of familial and community networks in search of work during the Great Migration to Northern industrial cities,² had few other employment options during this period. Despite its being shifted into the market economy, care work continued to be politically disenfranchised and undervalued—evidenced by its extremely long hours and abysmal wages—as the care burden passed from white middle-class women into the hands of women on the margins of society, with some of the most pernicious consequences falling to their children. Domestic and care work, essentially life-sustaining labor that is essential to the continuance of a functioning society, has historically been divested of value because Western conceptions of justice and equality myopically focus on independent and able-bodied persons while turning a blind eye to dependency and the persons and labor associated with it.

² Claudia Jones, a communist party member and activist in the 40s and 50s, used the phrase "thrice oppressed" in reference to the over one million African American women being exploited as domestic workers in an article called "300 Years of an Uphill Fight," published in *The Worker*, 11 February 1951 (qtd. in Peterson).

The commodity culture grounded in domesticity that would saturate the post-war, baby boom period was already ramping up in the early 1940s,³ selling bourgeois ideologies of the single-family, middle-class private home in which dependency and the work it requires were unacknowledged. The assumption that children and other dependents would be cared for by the gendered, unpaid labor of a stay-at-home mother escaped scrutiny. Just as her care work was taken for granted, so was the poorly-waged labor of African American women hired to take it over when economic privilege allowed. Because dependency in all forms has historically been shunned, dependent care is not valued. Consumer capitalism emphasizes individual success based in myths of meritocracy and possessive individualism. Commodity culture of the 1940s glamorized domestic and care work—which is often isolating, tedious, and unrecognized—through glossy images of domestic consumer goods and smiling, happy nuclear families in order to profit from the sale of what Roland Marchand has called “consumer citizenship.” However, if this advertised domestic fulfillment remained illusory for white women caring for their own homes, the pervasive promises of ‘the good life’ for African American women working in white kitchens that matched those 1940s media images were completely hollow. As Gwendolyn Brooks illustrates in my epigraph from her novel, *Maud Martha*, what I call the “white kitchen”—invoking the racially white, privileged homes in which black women worked as well as the gleaming domestic images of mass media commodity culture—contrasts sharply with the apartment

³ In his book *Advertising at War: Business, Consumers, and Government in the 1940s*, Inger Stole argues that to keep the advertising advantages that the government had deemed necessary to boost consumer spending during the Depression, corporations maintained market shares despite wartime rationing and the controlled consumption of goods by branding their names onto news media reports of the war effort and nationalistic propaganda. Thus, using their brands became synonymous with identifying oneself as American.

kitchenettes to which African American women were restricted by racist economic and social barriers. Being relegated to the work least valued by society—that of meeting human dependency needs—meant low wages and long hours that kept African American women workers from attaining the successes of personal autonomy and independence in domestic life that were held up as the ideal.

Though written in different time periods, Ann Petry's novel *The Street* (1946) and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) both focus attention on African American women working in affluent, white suburban homes during the unique cultural moment of the 1940s in the US. The First Great Migration that boomed up until the onset of the Depression would have brought Petry's Lutie Johnson to Harlem and Morrison's Pauline Breedlove to the outlying, industrial area surrounding Cleveland. World War II brought on the Second Great Migration of Southern African Americans to Northern cities, overcrowding the race-restricted housing available and flooding the labor market. The demand for African American men's labor did not meet the abundant supply, leading to the role of many black women as the main breadwinners. Major changes to immigration law in the 1920s created a shortage of foreign female domestic and care laborers in Northern cities and a new demand for African American women's domestic and care work, thus pigeonholing them into the same limited labor options they had had in the South. Ideologies of family and home handed down from the 19th century, and disseminated by mass media culture, sanctioned only the private home as the proper place for childcare.⁴ This notion stymied the widespread development of group care centers or

⁴ In her book that details the labor struggle of household workers in New York from 1870-1940, Vanessa May examines the struggles of working class women in New York to define the middle-class homes they

the realization of social experiments that went beyond the strictures of single-family domesticity suggested by some around the turn of the century.⁵ When white women rejected the stigma of care work in pursuit of something more highly regarded or profitable, they hired individual African American women like Pauline and Lutie to enter the legally private space of their homes, thereby maintaining an independence-based model of care that obscures the labor it requires.

Meanwhile, the vast majority of African American women were excluded from the privilege of this nuclear family care model and the luxury of ignoring the care burden. In these novels by Petry and Morrison, Lutie Johnson and Pauline Breedlove each toil under the weight of ‘the second shift,’ which Arlie Hochschild’s book of the same name discusses as a plight ubiquitous for working women, who labor all day in paid jobs only to return home and perform the unpaid dependency labor of housework and childcare. For Lutie and Pauline, fictional portrayals of a massive group of 1940s African American women doing double domestic duty, the second shift occurs after an unprotected workday spent caring for white families. Poor women of color have always worked, and black motherhood has been built on models outside of those prescribed by bourgeois, independence-based models of care; Patricia Hill Collins discusses “othermothering” and “fictive kin” as longstanding modes of communal care in African American family life. The long workday and lack of minimum wage for domestic and care laborers, who were

worked in as a workplace, even while middle-class women clearly wanted their homes set aside as an exceptional, private space.

⁵ For example, see Edward Bellamy’s 1888 novel *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s lesser known work *What Diantha Did*, both of which imagine a social reorganization of domestic work and gender divisions of labor that reject the individualist models of the private domestic sphere that erase the reality of dependency and care needs.

strategically excluded from New Deal reform laws by Southern politicians who refused to pass labor legislation unless agricultural and private household work were specifically excepted, forced African American women to find interdependent modes that called upon family and community to care for their own children and elderly, even as they devoted their days to the private care of white dependent persons. The failure of Reconstruction to improve economic conditions for African Americans in the South also forced the disruption of kinship and community networks of care as industry surrounding both World Wars drew people North.

Many literary scholars have written about the race, class, and gender inequalities manifest in *The Street* and *The Bluest Eye*; however, previous readings of these novels have overlooked the crucial role that the stigma of dependency and the burden of care work play in the social injustices suffered by Petry's and Morrison's characters. The omission of dependent persons and care concerns from rights discourse helps explain the lack of social value assigned to dependent persons and the labor of those who care for them; dependency and care work becomes something to hide since it removes the illusion of individual independence. This, of course, intersects with the feminization and racialization of this labor, further resulting in its low compensation and unprotected legal status. Traditional readings of *The Street* characterize it as a naturalist novel for the modern era, wherein the forces that determine Lutie's fate are the social and environmental influences of the city, namely the streets of Harlem. She and her son are forced to live within the so-called corrupting influences of poverty; her race, class, and gender within this space dictate the outcome of her life such that in spite of her steely determination to work hard and improve her and her son's standard of living, she fails.

Many Petry scholars have ignored the ideological messages that Lutie hears and sees as a live-in worker for the Chandlers (prior to the time in which the novel takes place, but recollected in detail) and thereafter in the barrage of 1940s mass media such as movies, magazines, public advertisements, and newspaper stories. These messages are steeped in a possessive individualism that does not acknowledge dependency. The conditions of Lutie's prior care labor also took her away from the care of her own family, and eventually result in her status as a financially-struggling single mother, who yet clings to the nuclear family model of care that has become and likely always was an impossibility for her.

Standard readings of *The Bluest Eye* home in on the issue of racist standards of beauty, which certainly need to be factored into the central tragedy experienced by Pecola, Pauline's daughter, as told by the child narrator, Claudia. Her wish, as an African American girl, for blue eyes not only reflects her exposure to the white beauty standards of the time, but the degree to which her mother has also internalized ideologies of white privilege, including the 1940s commodity culture of lavish domestic independence in a single-family care unit. The same individualistic philosophical underpinnings that omit dependency from the ideal of domesticity also contribute to the exploitation of domestic and care workers like Pauline, who spends the bulk of her days cooking and caring for children in the Fisher home. The physical and ideological removal of these mothers—Lutie and Pauline—from their own homes stymies black motherhood, which African American feminists including Toni Morrison herself, have discussed as a politically crucial role in empowering African American communities. The eradication of this domestic site of political resistance that bell hooks calls a “homeplace” exposes the

children, Bub Johnson and Pecola Breedlove respectively, to the dangers of systemic and physical violence such as unintentional criminal behavior and incestuous rape. Reading these novels through the lens of dependency studies reveals that Lutie and Pauline fail to draw upon the interdependent modes of communal mothering and dependent care available in African American culture, instead seeking after the independence-based domestic ideologies from which they are excluded. The reverberations of excluding dependency from Western constructions of justice continue to disenfranchise and imperil the women and children of color who shoulder the largest burden of care work.

Because motherhood and mothering hold a centralized, powerful position in African American culture and communities, which tend to be more matrifocal than the traditionally patriarchal nuclear families held up as the ideal in US national culture,⁶ Pauline's and Lutie's enervated abilities to mother their own children have political implications about dependency and care. In her book *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins writes, "The centrality of women in African-American extended families reflects both a continuation of African-derived cultural sensibilities and functional adaptations to intersecting oppressions of race, gender, class, and nation" (178). Collins's argument about matriarchal figures and the self-sacrifice of black women is carefully positioned in "a feminist analysis of motherhood that debunks the image of 'happy slave,' whether the White-male-created 'Matriarch' or the Black-male-perpetuated 'superstrong Black mother'" (176). Twentieth-century sociologists and psychologists pathologized

⁶ Prominent African American studies texts such as Saiyida Hartmann's *Lose Your Mother* (2007) and Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), focus on the mother figure as an empowering figure to be recuperated. Even Frederick Douglass in his autobiography begins his life story talking about how the minimal contact he had with his enslaved mother affected the rest of his journey of self-realization.

black motherhood,⁷ another sign of the eschewing of dependency from accepted Western models of family organization and care. Andrea O'Reilly's book *Toni Morrison and Motherhood* analyzes the dominant presence of mothers in most of Morrison's novels. She says, "Motherhood, for Morrison, is a site of liberation and self-realization, because her standpoint on motherhood is developed from black women's everyday practices and meaning of motherhood wherein motherhood is a site of power for black women" (20). O'Reilly picks up black feminist arguments previously made by Collins and bell hooks, among others. While her book specifically concentrates on Morrison's writings, the theoretical groundwork that undergirds her analysis applies equally to Petry's writings and historical moment. Lutie and Pauline are fictional characters who represent the large group of black women who did the political work of mothering their own families while formally employed to care for white families by negative contrast; their failures in protecting their children testify to the enormity of the structural and ideological forces of the care burden working against African American women. These narratives negatively define the real political achievements of those domestic and care workers who did perform double duty. June Jordan comments on the long-standing contributions of the previous generation of women working "the second shift" as she reflects upon seeing such women at a bus stop. She writes, "These were Black women still cleaning somebody else's house or Black women caring for somebody else's sick or elderly, before they came back to the frequently thankless chores of their own loneliness, their own families"

⁷ In 1965, Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan released the Moynihan Report—officially titled *The Negro Family: the Case for National Action*—in which he traces the increasing dependence of African American families on welfare programs back to black motherhood. Collins states that in the Moynihan Report, "Black mothers were accused of failing to discipline their children, of emasculating their sons, of defeminizing their daughters, and of retarding their children's academic achievements" (173).

(Jordan 105). While working women of all races and backgrounds have historically carried the weight of “the second shift,” domestic and care workers have faced the particular struggle of blurred boundaries as they perform the same work in two spaces. The agency exerted in returning home after an unlegislated and unprotected number of hours to then carry out the work of mothering and one’s own domestic chores is classified by bell hooks as a political act.

In her essay “Homeplace (a site of resistance),” bell hooks recognizes the unsung contributions of African-American women to the race struggle. She writes, “Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects,” and this “radically subversive political gesture” she calls the “task of making a homeplace” (449). Making a homeplace requires subversive action, since it creates a site of resistance rather than of confinement. Many white feminists have seen mothering and domesticity as oppressive to women because of patriarchal domination in the institution of the traditional nuclear family; black feminists celebrate the power position of the mother because African American culture tends towards a matrifocal domestic structure, which some scholars trace back to Western African societies. Bell hooks specifically focuses on domestic and dependency workers like Lutie and Pauline, referencing her own mother as an example. She writes, “Their lives were not easy. Their lives were hard. They were black women who for the most part worked outside the home serving white folks, cleaning their houses, washing their clothes, tending their children. . . . Then they returned to their homes to make life happen there” (448). Speaking of her own experience when her mother went to work as a maid for white families, bell hooks recalls, “Looking back as an adult woman, I think of the effort it must have taken for her to transcend her

own tiredness. . . . Working to create a homeplace that affirmed our beings, our blackness, our love for one another was necessary resistance. We learned degrees of critical consciousness from her” (452). Nurturance functioned to instill race consciousness in the upcoming generation that would carry out the Civil Rights movement. While hooks, a radical feminist of color, is forcefully critical of prescriptive gender roles in the home, she clearly honors black women’s political work in the making of a homeplace. The interconnectivity of race and economic possibility renders that kernel of the American Dream, owning or even just controlling one’s own private space in a home,⁸ an everyday struggle against the overpowering forces of capitalism, especially in the overtly commodified historical moment of the 1940s.

Ann Petry and Toni Morrison both document the historical conditions of labor for African American families in the 1940s, which affirm dependency scholars Ellen K. Feder and Eva Kittay’s observation that the brunt of both unpaid and waged dependency work is borne by women and “not infrequently by women (and sometimes men) who are marginalized by virtue of race and class” (2). Following the push and pull of poverty in the South and the promise of jobs in the industrializing North, Pauline and Cholly Breedlove decide to “go ‘way up north, where Cholly said steel mills were begging for workers” (116), thereby joining the Great Migration of the millions of African Americans who relocated great distances in the early 20th century, seeking work and a new future. The Breedloves arrive in Lorain, Ohio, and initially Cholly does work in the steel mills,

⁸ See Wesling’s discussion of Harriet Jacobs’s slave narrative as it pertains to *The Street*.

the predominant industry for male labor in the Cleveland region.⁹ However, like many of their historical counterparts, the Breedloves find that the promises of work had been exaggerated, and the available jobs could not absorb the huge influx of recent Southern migrants seeking them. Such is the case in both Petry's and Morrison's novels, where Pauline's and Lutie's husbands struggle to find sufficient work to support their young families. Within a few years, Cholly finds himself underemployed in Ohio.

Although Petry's Lutie and Jim have roots in Harlem that likely place them or their parents arriving during the First Great Migration,¹⁰ another wave of African American migrants attracted by the industry of WWII have aggravated the already rampant unemployment as well as the housing shortages largely caused by racist segregation laws that restricted the areas of the city available to black residents. Jim Johnson's employment opportunities are hampered by the labor surplus in New York City, and Petry writes that he "couldn't get a job, though he hunted for one—desperately, eagerly, anxiously. Walking from one employment agency to another. . . Waiting, waiting, waiting to be called up for a job" (30). The same systemic racism that forces the Johnsons to live in segregated neighborhoods also thwarts Jim's likelihood of finding work. In frustration he exclaims, "God damn white people anyway. I don't want favors. All I want is a job. Just a job. Don't they know if I knew how I'd change the color of my skin" (30). The desperation that prompts Jim's willingness to alter his racial identity for better life chances points to the widespread disenfranchisement of black males that has

⁹ Laurie Lanzen Harris documents the sharp rise in the African American population of Cleveland "from 8,500 in 1910 to 72,000 in 1930," (33) likely the era during which the Breedloves would have migrated there, in her book *Defining Moments: The Great Migration North, 1910-1970*.

¹⁰ Harris states that the black population of New York City tripled from 1910-1930, bringing it to 328,000 (33) a demographic shift concurrent with the Harlem Renaissance.

rendered traditional gender divisions of labor generally unfeasible for African American families. Middle class ideologies of domesticity, dependent care, and motherhood do not apply to poor women of color who have always needed to work for wages.

Given the obstacles stacked against African American men finding work, and with children to feed, Pauline assumes “the full responsibility and recognition of breadwinner” (Petry 126), as does Lutie; both look for employment in the unprotected labor market of domestic and care work. As Mary Romero writes in *Maid in the U.S.A.*, “Despite their hope of avoiding oppressive social conditions and low wages, African American women who migrated to the North again found few employment opportunities except for domestic work” (108). Because the same racial prejudice would apply to any African American woman seeking work, recent migrant or not, Lutie and Pauline face the same slim prospects of employment. One study of labor statistics by Martha J. Bailey and William J. Collins lauds the 1940s as a decade during which the wage gap between black and white women narrowed as some African American women moved from domestic work into more formalized jobs in the defense sector and its subsidiary markets ignited by the war. Due to her own persistence in attending night school to pass a civil service exam, Lutie follows this pattern, feeling fortunate to have found clerical work in the mid-forties moment in which *The Street* takes place, but she worked in Connecticut as a live-in for a white family, the Chandlers, just a few years prior. Even as she attempts to launch a singing career while working her day job, Lutie worries about the looming threat of having to return to paid domestic work. Observing women getting off the train, she recognizes, “She had no way of knowing that at fifty she wouldn’t be misshapen, walking on the sides of her shoes because her feet hurt so badly; getting dressed up for church on

Sunday and spending the rest of the week slaving in somebody's kitchen" (186). Lutie traces her current difficulty in caring for her son as a single mother back to the time she spent as a live-in worker in the Chandler home; it is always present. Moreover, the ideologies of domesticity and meritocracy that she absorbed in their home consistently influence her goals to enter middle-class life and her decision not to draw upon interdependent mothering strategies in the care of her son.

While any improvement in wage earnings, even if only temporarily attached to wartime industry, marks some gains in equality and merits celebration, the lack of societal value placed on care work remained constant. In order to earn more, African American women had to change occupations—not an easy task. Moreover, Bailey and Collins' statistical reports state that by 1950 the percentage of domestic workers in the female African American labor force had dropped from 58% in 1940 to 41.7% (751) still reveal the uneven employment opportunities open to women like Pauline and Lutie, especially in comparison to the corresponding decline of the percentage of white female laborers working in domestic service from 10% to 3% (751). While 1940s wartime industry opened up some manufacturing jobs for both black and white women, according to Bailey and Collins' findings, black women disproportionately carried the load of domestic work with only a small percentage finding other types of work during the decade. As previously noted, Jacqueline Jones traces the widespread return of African American women like Lutie to domestic and care work after the war.

Although some attempts were made at organizing domestic workers during the 1930s and 40s, Petry scholar Rachel Peterson comments on domestic workers' "general dislocation from larger unions, and their segregation within private homes" (72). During

this period of African American labor surplus in the North, disenfranchised women seeking domestic work of any kind formed what were hauntingly called “slave markets,” groups of women congregating on corners, usually near subway stations. Brenda Clegg Gray documents this practice (strikingly similar to today’s exploitation of primarily Latino construction workers who also stand on corners devoid of labor protections) in her book *Black Female Domestic Workers During the Depression in New York City, 1930-1940*. She writes, “Black women would be on corners waiting for work as early as six o’clock in the morning and could still be found there as late as eight or nine at night” (58). Her research sets the stage for the ongoing poor conditions of labor for these dependency workers in the 1940s, as “New Deal legislation, laws established to standardize work conditions and protect the rights of workers, did little to alleviate the economic depravity under[which] (*sic*) domestics, and black female domestics in particular, suffered” (5). Gray also documents a full-time domestic servant’s workweek as being anywhere from 43-110 hours, with no regulations or compensation for overtime pay. As a live-in dependency worker in the suburbs of Connecticut, essentially working around the clock, Lutie “began going home [to Harlem] only once in two months” (44). Though Pauline does not live with the Fishers—the affluent white family she works for in Lorain, Ohio—the extended hours she spends in their service reduce the hours she spends with her own family at home to “the early-morning and late-evening edges of her day” (127). Taking over the previously unpaid dependency labor of housework and childcare for Mrs. Fisher only reassigned the exclusion of this work—which had been considered a natural part of women’s existence and, therefore, outside the political and legal protections of the market—to Pauline Breedlove and the millions of domestic workers like her.

The isolated nature of working and often living within a private middle-class home engenders particular forms of exploitation and invisibility. Just as care work has gone unnoticed by the individualistic discourse of liberalism on a grand scale, this traditional “women’s work” has been taken for granted regardless of the worker being white or black, paid or unpaid. It has been depoliticized, written off as a matter of the private sphere to be taken care of by individual families. Barbara Ehrenreich takes up the issue of invisibility in domestic labor in her book chapter “Maid to Order,” part of a collection she co-edited with Arlie Hochschild called *Global Women: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. Ehrenreich documents her personal experience working as a Merry Maid for three weeks, being ignored by her employers as she scrubbed their floors on her hands and knees. She charts the history of invisibility of this “women’s work” from women performing it in their own homes without reward or compensation to its continued unrecognized status when performed as wage labor by another, reporting that even today “household workers remain, in large part, uncounted and invisible to the larger economy” (91). This labor disenfranchisement stems not merely from the historic exploitation of the working poor, particularly of working people of color; much of the unskilled labor performed by immigrants and people of color in the US was protected by New Deal legislation and union organizers, at least in the North. The echoes of the economy of slavery—that “peculiar institution”—in the South, where the majority of employed black women still worked in the marked categories of agriculture and domestic work in the early 20th century, relegated African Americans to unprotected labor conditions. It is hard to overestimate the influence of slavery on the stigma for African American domestic and care workers; the longstanding exclusion of

dependency that tainted care work as undesirable rendered it labor to be given to enslaved persons. The location of domestic labor inside private homes, as well as the historical dismissal of care work as not market-worthy excluded the dependency labor of African American women in the 1930s and 40s from public discussion. “Slaving” away inside the homes of white families, Lutie and Pauline essentially became invisible.

Domestic and care work of all kinds tends to be kept in the shadows, silenced and hidden so as not to shatter the illusion of independence for those in the affluent upper- or middle-class family who rely on dependency labor for their everyday living but want to consider themselves self-reliant. US culture tends to equate dependency with weakness. In domestic and care work, therefore, the ideal servant is a non-presence; she speaks only when spoken to, and essentially exists only in the background to anticipate her employers’ needs and ensure that mundane concerns do not inconvenience them. This alienates the worker and takes away her subjectivity. As Ehrenreich and Hochschild point out, “The Western culture of individualism, which finds extreme expression in the United States, militates against acknowledging help or human interdependency of nearly any kind,” so that domestic workers “often remain in the background, or disappear when company comes” (4). Immediately upon entering the Chandlers’ home, Lutie surprises herself in her ability “to say ‘yes, ma’am’ so neatly and so patly,” a demureness she takes as a sign of the behavior required by “the perfect maid. Patient and good-tempered and hard-working and more than usually bright” (Petty 37). She serves meals to Mrs. Chandler’s friends, who talk about her rather than to her. In a way reminiscent of W.E.B. Dubois’s veil of double-consciousness, Lutie speaks of the wall that rises up between herself and her upper-class, white employers and their friends:

It was, she discovered, a very strange world that she had entered. With an entirely different set of values. It made her feel that she was looking through a hole in a wall at some enchanted garden. She could see, she could hear, she spoke the language of the people in the garden, but she couldn't get past the wall. The figures on the other side of it loomed up life-size and they could see her, but there was this wall between which prevented them from mingling on equal footing. The people on the other side of the wall knew less about her than she knew about them. (41)

While the white world can see Lutie, it denies her subjectivity. Her employers and their friends make no effort to understand her perspective or circumstances. In Duboisian fashion, her comprehension of their hegemonic values and culture goes unreciprocated in an imbalanced, one-sided power relationship; thus dependency remains shrouded and independence maintains its illusion, particularly as it involves racial hierarchy and interdependence. Lutie particularly feels the inequality of her relationship to Mrs. Chandler when they take the train to the city together on weekends, talking “about some story being played up in the newspapers, about clothes or some moving picture” (51), but then on departing from one another, Mrs. Chandler publicly dismisses Lutie in a “voice that unmistakably established the relation between the blond young woman and the brown young woman” (51). Mrs. Chandler wedges race and class differences between them publicly so that Lutie is kept in her place as the dependency worker. She is not an equal but a subordinate, and one that should accept her role just as she should accept Mrs. Chandler's barely used hand-me-downs, “gravely and properly grateful” (50). The 1940s African American domestic worker existed only behind the scenes, not as John Locke's “free, equal, and independent” individual deserving of natural rights.

In moving to Connecticut to become the invisible labor force of the Chandler household, Lutie also disappears from the subject position she holds in her established

life and home in Harlem. The distance from the city to the affluent suburbs where work is available to Lutie eliminates the possibility of her doing day labor for the Chandlers while living at home. Then, as now, the employers of domestic servants thought little of their employees' home life and children; they were maids, not mothers. Ehrenreich and Hochschild describe the impossible position of a migrant domestic worker today, saying, "Unlike her affluent First World employers, she cannot both live with her family and support it" (2). Although Lutie does not make a global migration, she finds herself in the same predicament, facing the looming impossibility of providing food and shelter for her son and being physically present to care for him at the same time. Despite the isolation and alienation often experienced by women performing unpaid care labor in their own homes, the privilege that would enable her to do so appeals to Lutie; it would mark her family as independent, middle-class US citizens. She blames the failure of her marriage on the socioeconomic forces that left Jim unemployed and took her away from her own life. While she dreamed of replicating the traditional gender roles modeled by the Chandlers and mass media images of domesticity, "Instead she'd cleaned another woman's house and looked after another woman's child while her own marriage went to pot" (Petry 30). While Jim's life choice to have another woman move in during Lutie's absence certainly enacts the fundamental change in the constitution of their marriage, Lutie herself is more incensed by the racially-charged lack of labor protections and economic opportunities for African American families than by his infidelity. Lutie loses on both ends. She relinquishes her own subjectivity among her loved ones, disappearing from her own home only to be rendered figuratively invisible as a dependency worker in white, affluent suburbia.

Pauline Breedlove, on the other hand, seems to have the advantage of working within walking distance of her employers, the Fishers, so that she can live in her own home—what is called live-out work. Ostensibly, her subjectivity should be less fractured as she balances her invisibility in domestic labor with her presence in her own household and community. Although the unpaid labor of motherhood offers few social rewards, it plays a crucial role in African American culture, as previously discussed. Unlike Lutie, Pauline should not have to disappear in both locations. However, her experience proves equally if not more injurious to her sense of self and her family, particularly to her children. Having been born and raised in rural Alabama at a time when the abolishment of slavery in the South had little effect on the material reality for African Americans, Pauline’s chances at being “independent”—and therefore, deserving of rights—fall short even of Lutie’s as a city-dweller in the North. The long, and even Constitutional, history of African Americans not counting as whole and individual persons in the US could be classified as an issue of dependency, and the beginning of a larger national condemnation of African Americans as a dependent group that persists today. Indeed, if one counts as three-fifths of a person, not even a whole individual, what rights can she claim in a philosophy centered on agreements between free agents? Pauline’s entrenched dependent position as a young African American female in the outlying regions of the impoverished South places her outside the bounds of protection by social contract, despite her nominal legal status as a full person having been established by the Civil War Amendments. As “the ninth of eleven children” (110), Pauline inherited household and childcare responsibilities at a young age when her mother “got a job cleaning and cooking for a white minister on the other side of town” (112). From her youth she is taken out of school

and isolated in the private domestic environment, closed off from the realm of public life. Like so many African Americans historically, particularly women, Pauline is kept within the sphere of dependency work. Speaking cynically of the disproportionate number of women of color employed in domestic service jobs, which persists today, Ehrenreich attributes society's justification of this inequality to a view of "'lower' kinds of people for a 'lower' kind of work" (91). Pauline's consignment to dependency work from childhood on relegates her to the fringes of democratic society and its promised freedoms for all. Her physical disability in the form of "a crooked, archless foot that flopped when she walked" (Petty 110) marks her body as disabled, a further sign of her dependency in Morrison's novel.

Pauline Breedlove's disability could be seen as what David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder call a narrative prosthesis. In their collaboratively written book, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, they stake a claim for disability studies alongside other identity discourses and argue that the study of disability in literature and film sheds light on the social construction of so-called normal and disabled bodies. Amongst other functions that disability in literature may perform, they posit that disability can mark non-normativity and abjectness, essentially the outsider position that serves in contrast to strengthen an imagined ideal of the able-bodied. Mitchell and Snyder argue that "*narrative prosthesis* is meant to indicate that disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight" (49). As such, Morrison's use of Pauline Breedlove's limp as a narrative prosthesis works metaphorically to reinforce her abjectness and exclusion from equal and independent

citizenry. Though her marginalized social position as part of an unprotected and racialized labor force has already been established, Morrison pushes her further outside the bounds of a society of free and equal persons by physically marking her as disabled. In fact, Mitchell and Snyder briefly mention *The Bluest Eye* in their book, asserting that Pauline's disability "keeps her permanently disenfranchised from mythologies of racial beauty and belonging" (166). She comes to interpret her disability in a way that conflates the other combined circumstances of her abject position in society with the mark of her injured foot, so that "this deformity explained for her many things that would have been otherwise incomprehensible: why she alone of all the children had no nickname; . . . why she never felt at home anywhere, or that she belonged anyplace. Her general feeling of separateness and unworthiness she blamed on her foot" (110-111). In the character of Pauline Breedlove, the overlap in disability studies and dependency studies comes into view; her disability not only directly leads her into the isolated and private domestic labor in her own home—from which the shift to working in someone else's home would be a short step—but symbolizes her self-concept as an outsider in the novel, compounding the multiple oppressions historically present for poor black women.

In a novel that Morrison describes as an undertaking against "racial self-loathing" (210) and the "concept of the beautiful" (211), the representation of disability in Pauline only aggravates her acceptance of dominant norms as well as her excluded position outside of them. The concept of "ugliness" in *The Bluest Eye* functions as a signifier for the Breedloves' espousal of hegemonic standards and subsequent condemnation of themselves as inferior. While the whole family is described as ugly, the manifestation goes beyond physical traits. Morrison writes, "You looked at them and wondered why

they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question” (39). Ugliness, then, is a signifier of the outsider, of an abject position. Disability scholar Rosemary Garland Thomson analyzes Toni Morrison’s work specifically in regard to the representation of disability in female characters. Thomson defines the label of disability as “the attribution of corporeal deviance” (6); she introduces the term “extraordinary” to refer to a body that is socially constructed as disabled. In general, her discussion of Morrison’s “extraordinary women” argues that they are endowed with “authority, dignity, or quasi-supernatural powers” but recognizes Pauline’s character as an exception to Morrison’s literary pattern (122). Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* predates Morrison’s later portrayal of “extraordinary” female figures. Here, Pauline’s injured foot has abetted her “complicity with oppression” so that by “internalizing the judgment of inferiority handed down to her, Pauline betrays her own flesh and consequently that of her children, husband, and racial community” (Thomson 122). Her adoration of white beauty, a topic I will revisit in greater depth, leads to self-hatred and the neglect of her children. By the time she begins to work in domestic service for the Fishers in Ohio, Pauline has been marginalized by her race and gender, poverty, an uprooting from family and community caused by migration to the North, and finally the internalization of her disability and “ugliness.” She is perfectly situated to adopt the submissive role as “ideal domestic servant” in the Fisher’s white, affluent home; she accepts her abject rather than subject position, even relinquishing her culturally significant role as mother in her own home.

While Petry's Lutie consciously recognizes and resents the wall between herself and her white employers and her own invisibility as a domestic worker, Pauline wholeheartedly accepts her servant's role in the home of the Fishers, relishing in the illusion of power and respect as well as the temporary domestic pleasures she gains by middle-class association. She trades her presence in the center of her own home for one on the margins of dominant culture. Morrison writes, "Power, praise, and luxury were hers in this household. They even gave her what she had never had—a nickname—Polly" (128). After a life of never feeling she belonged anywhere, she embraces the chance to fulfill a role—albeit a second-class one—in domestic and care work. Here she feels needed and in control; she gains a sense of ownership of commodity goods. She thinks of the domestic space in the Fisher home as "her kitchen," with "her shiny pots and pans and polished floors" (128). Because the family relies on her work, and treats her with familiarity and a condescending type of warmth, Pauline does not recognize the ways in which they are exploiting her labor. The Fishers fail to see her as an equal subject with her own family to care for and life to live. Instead, they view her one-dimensionally as a laborer, assuming her only concerns revolve around serving them. And, in fact, Pauline does adapt to this model so that "All the meaningfulness of her life was in her work," where she "worked twelve to sixteen hour days" (128-29). While she does not technically take up residence with the Fishers, she essentially does all her living in that space. There she devotes her time, talents, and affection. Her employers brag, "We'll never let her go. We could never find anybody like Polly. She will *not* leave the kitchen until everything in is order. Really, she is the ideal servant" (128). The Fishers may appear and even attempt to be congenial and caring employers who value Pauline, but in actuality they

value her labor, not her humanity.¹¹ Like Lutie, she remains invisible to her wealthy, white employers.

In giving Pauline a nickname, which she treasures and mistakes for acceptance as an equal into the family, the Fishers rename her and thereby claim her as their own. She becomes a new entity, a mere extension of the Fishers, whose position signifies only a subordinate role as attached to them. Her power is illusory and superficial, since it only functions as she gleans their privileged position by association. Pauline contents herself with the fact that the “creditors and service people who humiliated her when she went to them on her own behalf respected her, were even intimidated by her, when she spoke for the Fishers” (128). For this reason among others, she detests her own home life.

Ironically, her position as mother to Sammy and Pecola could provide her an opportunity to take up the position of a mother who provides a homeplace, while her cherished role in the Fisher’s kitchen is a non-presence based on her labor rather than her person. As Valerie Sweeney Prince writes in her book on home in African American literature, “Mrs. Breedlove is invested in whiteness and defends her place in it without realizing that she has internalized the terms of her own oppression” (78). Failing to recognize the reality of her position, she rejects her own husband and children as reminders of her poverty and social marginalization. While the physical pleasures of domesticity are real—Pauline certainly can appreciate a fluffy, white towel as much as her employers, if not more so because of the contrast with her own towels—much of the illusion of her power in the Fisher home emerges from the smoke and mirrors of commodity culture; the

¹¹ In *Like One of the Family*, Alice Childress expresses the opposing viewpoint of Mildred, an African American domestic worker who understands that her white employers do not see her or treat her as an equal despite their professions of inclusion, as she speaks in dramatic monologue to her friend Madge, who also works in private household labor.

excess of shiny, new consumer goods that surround her at work render her own storefront home more impoverished and “ugly.” As previously discussed, the word “ugly” in *The Bluest Eye* goes beyond physical traits and points to a self-loathing based on class consciousness and the awareness of being the other, apart from the independence-based picture of racially and economically privileged domesticity.

Pauline Breedlove’s fictional adulation of household goods as the marker of the ideal family life in which dependency is obscured follows historical economic and cultural trends of consumption in the 1940s. As the Depression ended and wartime industry fueled the US economy, a particular brand of consumer culture cautiously but forcefully took shape. Though a prudent shift at first, the new consumerism escalated throughout two decades to its peak when household consumption was wielded as a Cold War political weapon by then Vice President Richard Nixon in his “kitchen debate” with Soviet Premiere Nikita Khrushchev in 1959. Elaine Tyler May, in her book *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, deconstructs that pinnacle of the Cold War conflict and charts the trajectory of the post-War focus on domesticity and household products back to its roots in the 1940s. While imposed rationing quelled some individual consumer spending during World War II, May notes that “a 1946 Gallup poll indicated that in spite of persistent pockets of poverty and fears of another depression, the desire to spend was much stronger than the desire to save” (165). She reports more specific data such that, “In the five years after World War II, consumer spending increased 60 percent, but the amount spent on household furnishings and appliances rose 240 percent” (165). While both *The Street* and *The Bluest Eye* take place in the earlier war years of the 40s, the seductive quality of household appliances and products for Lutie

and Pauline speaks to the growing desires for domestic goods, somewhat tempered with wartime restrictions, that would explode when the holds were removed with the war's end. Writings by economists in the early 40s also point to the rise in consumer desire, particularly in the domain of appliances and other purchases for the home, accompanied by modest but steady rises in spending. A report titled "Aspects of Wartime Consumption," written by J.P. Cavin and presented at the 1945 Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association details the overall rise in consumption despite wartime restrictions. While Cavin charts a slight decline in some durable goods from 1942 to 1944, he reports that from 1939 to 1944, "Total consumer expenditures rose steadily from 61.7 to 96.5 billion dollars, a rise of 56 per cent" (17). Spending on the war did take the lion's share of the GDP for those years, yet the underlying desire for new consumer goods persisted behind the scenes of worldwide political turmoil. Indeed, in 1943, Murray Banks wrote an article called "Educating the Consumer for Wartime Living," in which he promotes "educating against 'scare-buying' and hoarding" (456); the desires to buy more in the wake of Depression scarcity and with the newly powered economic resources had to be controlled.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline exhibits this post-Depression desire to accumulate goods. In the Fisher home, "She reigned over cupboards stacked high with food that would not be eaten for weeks, even months; she was queen of canned vegetables bought by the case" (127-28). The retreat into the domestic space, and the stockpiling of food, consumer goods, and single-family appliances prior to and during the onset of the Cold War period signal the ever-present obsession with independence. Each family would be self-sufficient, not depending on extended family or neighbors, not even using a

communal space to wash clothes. Even if the actual dollars spent on household goods did not skyrocket until the war was over, the cultural yearnings to buy more and newer household goods for the individual family unit took hold in the early 1940s, the years during which Pauline and Lutie are working as domestic servants for middle-class consumers, all the while feeling the stark contrast of their own poverty and lack of resources to care for the children in their own homes. Depending on others, essentially building communal networks of care, was not the picture of middle-class, white domesticity they observed at work and in the media.

Lutie's tragic end—fleeing to Chicago without her son in order to escape the murder she has committed¹²—follows as the inevitable result of her unrelenting adherence to the myth of meritocracy, and the consumerism and object-worship with which it is inextricably tied; she cannot relinquish her vision of what I call the 'white kitchen'—white signifying the dominant racial ideologies of equality and independent subjects as well as the shiny, new commodities that advertise middle-class wealth as happiness itself. As consumption is an intrinsic part of modern everyday life, modern subjects—regardless of race or class—all face the constant barrage of ideological images and messages; however, equal exposure does not mean equal opportunity to buy into consumer culture. The domestic myths undergirding the ideologies of consumption operate under strict white, middle class prescriptions, typically unreachable for black domestic workers but always present in their daily living space. For Lutie, the image of the 'white kitchen' coalesces from a cliché advertisement that she faces on the train, as

¹² In an act of self-defense, Lutie kills Boots Smith, the man who had promised her a chance at a music career, after he threatens to beat and rape her. She had refused to sleep with him or his boss, Mr. Junto, who had sent Boots to set up a sexual liason with Lutie.

well as the actual (although no less ephemeral) Connecticut suburban home of her previous employers, the Chandlers. While Bill Mullen reads the object fetishization in *The Street* as an American literary “test case for the influences of Marxist cultural production” (37), the compounded oppression of class with race and gender for black women renders his observations relevant here. Mullen introduces his study with Marx’s well-known explanation of a table as a fetishized object (perhaps the intentional predecessor of Petry’s choice of a table as the prized possession of Min—another black, female domestic worker in *The Street*), the creation of a commodity out of material goods and labor. Mullen notes that Lutie “enters ‘blind’ into a dangerous set of unseen social relationships particular to her status as a working-class African-American woman of the 1930s and 1940s” (36). During the course of the novel, Lutie becomes increasingly focused on the power of material goods and their promise of access to the American Dream, but it begins with her adulation of the ‘white kitchen.’

For Lutie, the advertised “kitchen sink—a sink whose white porcelain surface gleamed under the train lights” (28) transcends its material and functional value and becomes the icon of the yet unfulfilled promises of middle-class autonomy and independence to which she holds fast. The process of product commodification and its enticement of consumers occurs at its most basic level as Lutie stares at the ad on the train. Directly confronted with the image of “a girl with incredible blond hair” and “a dark-haired smiling man in a navy uniform . . . standing in front of a kitchen sink,” Lutie “entered a small private world which shut out the people tightly packed around her” (28). As it obliterates the reality surrounding her, the ad assumes ideological control. It supplants actual material conditions with spectacle and gloss. The latent promise of

middle-class, domestic bliss overextends the bounds of the basic porcelain being sold while erasing the labor that made the tub shine. The two-dimensional fantasy reminds Lutie of the “miracle of a kitchen” she worked in at the Chandlers. She superimposes the ad onto her memory such that in her mind “it might have been the same kitchen where she had washed dishes, scrubbed the linoleum floor and waxed it afterward” (28). Despite her acknowledgement that “that kitchen sink in the advertisement or one just like it was what had wrecked her and Jim” (30), the ideological force used to sell the product infiltrates Lutie’s consciousness, affecting her everyday thoughts and decisions. Even though she has seen firsthand the suburban nightmare behind the chintzy façade of the Chandlers’ home, the paradigm of the white nuclear family home looms large in Lutie’s dreams for herself and her son, Bub. Triggered by the ad on the train, Lutie realizes, “That kitchen in Connecticut had changed her whole life—that kitchen all tricks and white enamel like this one in the advertisement” (56). Yet, the power of the white, middle-class myths transmitted by mass media successfully deceive her to the end, destroying her chance at subjectivity in her own family life.

The allure of a sparkling, “white kitchen” also entices Pauline Breedlove, (“Polly” to her white employers, the Fishers) to believe herself a part of the privileged white world and its promises of domestic happiness. Morrison’s language implies a racialized cultural alignment with the obvious, double-pronged meaning of whiteness in the following passage describing her work in the Fisher home:

She looked at their houses, smelled their linen, touched their silk draperies, and loved all of it. The child’s pink nightie, the stacks of white pillow slips edged with embroidery, the sheets with top hems picked out with blue cornflowers. . . . When she bathed the little Fisher girl, it was in a porcelain tub with silver taps running infinite quantities of hot, clear

water. She dried her in fluffy, white towels and put her in cuddly nightclothes. (127)

The literal whiteness of the linens and the porcelain bathtub, and even the clear water, conflates with abundance and newness for Pauline. She imagines herself as a participant in this world of commodity consumption, and can temporarily relish in the lavish fabrics and dainty décor that contrast so sharply with her own home with its “zinc tub,” “stove-heated water,” “grayish towels washed in a kitchen sink, dried in a dusty backyard” (127). Because she uses the same household items in her care work for the Fishers, Pauline imagines herself a consumer, a part of this middle-class culture of domestic independence that makes her labor invisible even as it is defined by it. She identifies not only with these objects, but the racialized ideologies associated with them. As she internalizes this world, she rejects her own working-class, black domestic reality. Indeed, the highly contested racial marker of hair emerges as a polarizing force in this same passage, clearly merging economic inequalities with race. After bathing the Fisher child, Pauline “brushed the yellow hair, enjoying the slip of it between her fingers” and revels in the absence of “tangled black puffs of rough wool to comb” (127). Her identification with the “white kitchen,” her physical and ideological workspace, is also a rejection of her own racial identity, and therefore of her family. While she “became what is known as an ideal servant, for such a role filled practically all of her needs,” (127) she simultaneously “stopped trying to keep her own house” (127).

Constant exposure to 1940s consumer culture through mass media and the domestic space of their labor distracts both Lutie and Pauline from their material reality as working-class, African American women whose primary role in the 1940s US

economy and culture is not consumer but commodity. Their employers buy their labor as part and parcel of the ideal domestic scene, along with the linens, furniture, and appliances. Lutie and Pauline are not Locke's "free, equal, and independent" subjects, the philosophical descendants of which become "all men" in Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. The notion of equality is tied directly to independence in the US; therefore, dependents and those tied up in dependency work are always already excluded from the so-called American Dream. No matter how hard they work, equality as defined by independence eludes them. Meg Wesling argues in her article "The Opacity of Everyday Life: Segregation and the Iconicity of Uplift in *The Street*," that the narrative of Benjamin Franklin as the quintessential self-made man, which Lutie Johnson specifically recalls and adheres to as a viable model, unfairly obscures "the invisible social networks on which Franklin relied to create the illusion of his 'individual' self-development" (118). The privilege, including freedom from the care burden as a white man, that allows him to climb the social and economic ladder remains unattainable for those without the same advantages of race and gender, people such as working-class women of color like Petry's and Morrison's protagonists. Blinded by the whiteness of the towels, Pauline fails to recognize her role as the producer rather than the consumer of domestic goods. Lutie similarly errs in envisioning herself one day in her own "white kitchen," without realizing that her predetermined role in the capitalist economy that enshrines independence and fails to recognize the work of dependent care necessarily keeps her at the bottom.

Lutie and Pauline face material realities of poverty that refute notions of fluid class mobility, yet they accept and live by the myths of meritocracy because of the widespread saturation of middle-class domestic ideology into the 1940s social fabric, in

large part transmitted through mass media. While movies, magazines, newspapers, and advertising may be democratic in their accessibility, the values and narratives they disseminate apply only to a particular sector of society. Those who are not white, middle-class, and thus able to relinquish care work to others, receive the same messages but without the real possibilities of participation in such. In addition to the Ben Franklin narrative and the advertisements for household goods that promise domestic bliss, Lutie ingests the false American ideologies of upward mobility through mass-produced magazines and newspapers. Mrs. Chandler, portrayed as a hyperactive yet unfulfilled consumer, gives Lutie all her barely-worn clothes and other commodities. Lutie's indoctrination in suburban life comes in part "from the pages of the fat sleek magazines Mrs. Chandler subscribed for and never read. *Vogue, Town and Country, Harper's Bazaar, House and Garden, House Beautiful*" (Petty 50). The obvious focus of these publications on home and family life paired with their advertisements for the things that make such a life possible envelope Lutie in a world that, despite its glossy immediacy on the page, eludes her in reality. The only way that she can participate in this suburban dream is as a commodified labor force, but the persuasions of hegemonic cultural norms invade every space in her life, both in the real workspace of the suburban Chandler home as well as the imaginary space of mass media culture.

Toni Morrison explains in the subsequently added afterword to *The Bluest Eye* that this book points to the racist implications of hegemonic standards of beauty, in that it centers around a little black girl, Pecola, whose greatest desire is to have blue eyes. Her mother, Pauline, not surprisingly suffers from a similar complex, brought on in its most concentrated form by watching movies. She frequents the movie theater to escape her

loneliness after moving to the North with Cholly; she has trouble making friends with Ohio women with “their goading glances and private snickers at her way of talking and dressing” (118). Her outsider position is reinforced by the white ethnocentrism of the silver screen. Pauline, as if in interview in the novel, recounts, “*White men taking such good care of they women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses with the bathtubs right in the same room with the toilet. Them pictures gave me a lot of pleasure, but it made coming home hard*” (123). These films never show the labor that produces the gleaming tubs and clean houses. Rather, the domestic settings of these films and the affluence of white middle-class characters repeatedly coming at Pauline in larger-than-life form cannot but instill in her the sense that what she sees on screen is the norm, and that her own life pales in comparison. Like the magazines for Lutie, these films replay the familiar scene of her workplace with its modern kitchen and bathroom settings. Mass cultural forms spread an imaginary dominant culture to such a wide extent that what is shown may actually represent only a small sector of its audience’s population. Indicative of her internalization of these films, Pauline goes to the movies one day, dressed with her hair and makeup styled like a movie star. The impossibility of someone from her class and racial background realizing this Hollywood dream becomes real in the same moment that Pauline bites into a piece of candy and it pulls out her front tooth. Pauline recollects, “*There I was. . . trying to look like Jean Harlow and a front tooth gone. Everything went then. Look like I just didn’t care no more after that. I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly*” (123). Her attempt at consumption, concretized both in eating the candy and watching mass-produced film, results only in a harsh reminder that she does not fit into the dominant white culture. She is an outsider, or “ugly,” as a

poor, black woman who only cleans houses like the ones on the screen. The featured movie stars who act independently and with great social mobility have little in common with dependency workers like Pauline. Meritocracy is by and large a myth for 1940s black domestic workers, but more bitter because of its seeming proximity in their suburban work environment and the rising tide of commodified mass media products.

The depth of cultural internalization for Pauline and Lutie manifests itself in their acceptance of the white, middle-class ideology as the norm and subsequent dissatisfaction with their own personal, familial, and cultural realities. Lutie continues to strive for upward class mobility by taking night classes in clerical skills as well as spending nights away from Bub, her son, pursuing whimsical promises of a singing career. She continually compares her surroundings and possessions with what she has seen in the Chandler home and in the women's magazines. Enraged and frightened at finding Bub one day working on the street shining shoes, she scolds him for disobeying her, but admits to herself, "It's also that Little Henry Chandler is the same age as Bub, and you know Little Henry is wearing gray flannel suits and dark blue caps and long blue socks and fine dark brown leather shoes. He's doing his homework in that big warm library in front of the fireplace. And your kid is out in the street with a shoeshine box" (67). In reaction to this disparity, Lutie strives even harder to replicate Ben Franklin's rags-to-riches success by sacrificing more money and more time in hopes of a break that will be her ticket to the "white kitchen." She at least partly realizes that her current labor situation keeps her from caring for her son the way she has cared for the Chandler boy. She imagines the dire possibilities of Bub's future, telling herself it is "because you can't be home to look out for him because you have to work" (67). Lutie does not imagine care

possibilities outside of the independence-based, nuclear family model. Had group care centers been available, it seems Lutie would reject them outright the same way she fails to consider the interdependent care options used by other women of color. In the independence-based domestic paradigm that Lutie has adopted, the burden of care work in 1940s society stopped with African American women, who had no one lower than them on the social strata to care for their children while they labored in white homes. Lutie feels the inequality but blindly persists in her belief that the promises of the American Dream include her. However, as an African American woman already socially labeled a dependent person, with additional ties to dependency as someone who has done dependency work and very well could do it again, Lutie lives outside of the independence-based system of justice of which she longs to be a part.

Pauline also falls into the trap of accepting the hegemonic cultural economic norms that bombard her in the Fisher home and the mass media, and like Lutie, sees that her own home and family fall short of that unrealistic standard. While she does not ignorantly continue to believe the meritocracy myths that a Franklinesque success story is possible for her family, as Lutie does, Pauline's reaction to the discrepancy in wealth and opportunity perhaps takes an even more distressing path. Comparing her own home and belongings with the Fishers', Pauline sadly realizes, "The things she could afford to buy did not last, had no beauty or style, and were absorbed by the dingy storefront" (127). While this kind of stark economic inequality drives Lutie to work harder in her pursuit of the ever-elusive American Dream for herself and Bub, Pauline simply gives up on her own life and family and lives vicariously as an extension of the Fishers. Essentially cutting family ties, "More and more she neglected her house, her children, her man"

(127). She keeps her life with the Fishers, even her adopted identity as “Polly,” private from her home life and children. When Pecola comes to retrieve the Fishers’ laundry to be washed later at the Breedlove home, she must wait outside the kitchen door. Giving up on her own children, Pauline redirects her love and affection to the Fishers’ “little pink-and-yellow girl,” (109) as the novel’s narrator, a child named Claudia, labels the younger child. Pauline consoles the white girl and calls her “baby” right after calling Pecola a “crazy fool” for entering the kitchen and spilling a hot pie, despite her own child being hurt in the accident. Claudia also becomes enraged when she notices that the Fisher girl “call[s] Mrs. Breedlove Polly, when even Pecola called her mother Mrs. Breedlove” (108). Naming signifies ownership as well as identification, such that the Fishers’ renaming of Pauline indicates a power hierarchy that recalls a white/black, master/slave relationship of the antebellum South. Pauline’s formality with her own children marks the emotional distance and disruption in the Breedlove household, which also echoes the natal alienation produced by US slavery.¹³ Much of the labor dynamic between the master and the socially dependent house slave persists in the racialized and disenfranchised domestic service of the 1940s. In her alliance with the Fishers and the dominant white culture in general, Pauline relinquishes any possible subjectivity in her position as black mother and settles into the role of care worker that facilitates the illusion of independence for the Fishers.

As Lutie’s and Pauline’s lives show, the independence-based, patriarchal family structure that is predicated upon the unrecognized, unpaid domestic and care work, which

¹³ See Orlando Patterson’s *Slavery and Social Death* (1982) for a discussion of the disruption of family and genealogical ties during American slavery.

white feminists would later rebel against, was rendered an economic impossibility for most black families. Because people of color in the US have less often enjoyed the middle-class privileges of a one-income household, mothering in these communities has long been more of a communal effort. Here again, US national culture embraces independence; ideally, the mother in each nuclear family cares for her own children in individual, isolated homes. Though perhaps not always by choice, black motherhood has developed along interdependent models. Patricia Hill Collins writes about African American women and motherhood, outlining the deeply rooted practices of communal childcare and nurturance at work in primarily black neighborhoods with high percentages of single, working mothers. Collins carefully details the care work traditions of “othermothering,” “fictive kin,” and other forms of “cooperative child care” such as neighbors caring for one another’s children without being paid as a cultural community norm.

Interdependent models of mothering extend the work of caring for children beyond the nuclear family; these models function in societies that recognize human dependency and forge communal ties that are essential for survival. Collins states, “African and African-American communities have also recognized that vesting one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible. As a result, othermothers—women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities—traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood” (178). Normally, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, and other female kin share some childrearing responsibilities with the biological mother, forming “organized, resilient, women-centered networks” (179). The institution of slavery demanded this kind of

interdependency between women as slave owners actively sought to keep women from forming strong bonds to their children and sent young mothers into the fields to work, perhaps buttressing the matrifocality and extended family structure of West African cultures. Just a few generations removed from institutionalized slavery, it is probable that black families in the 1940s would have inherited these domestic models of interdependence. Collins also writes, “In many African-American communities these women-centered networks of community-based childcare have extended beyond the boundaries of biologically related individuals to include ‘fictive kin,’” (179) or people who are not blood-related but nonetheless form bonds as intimate as extended family. In the absence of genetic ties, women connected by other types of communities, such as neighborhoods, form networks of care that are much less common in US national culture.

Lutie and Pauline both fail to create a homeplace, a site of resistance that will protect their children from the violence and systemic oppression of a racist dominant culture, largely because they do not or cannot avail themselves of interdependent networks of mothering. Moving with the tides of the Great Migration, which uprooted longstanding kinship and communal networks in the rural South, Pauline and Cholly settle in Ohio without knowing anyone there. The failure of Reconstruction to foster economic growth in the Southern states left black families jobless and impoverished. With no other recourse and the possibility of employment in the industrializing North, the Breedloves disconnect themselves from possible othermothers who could have shared the burden of childcare. Despite the lack of a mothering network, “When Sammy and Pecola were still young Pauline had to go back to work” (126). Real economic conditions for working-class people of color negate the possibility of bourgeois gender divisions of

labor; both parents must work to provide even basic necessities. Then too, the systemic racism that disenfranchises African American males from the labor force adds to the financial difficulty and often makes women, Pauline for example, the sole breadwinners. As I discussed in relation to Hochschild's book *The Second Shift*, men even today and across racial lines have mostly failed to overcome traditional gender norms and take on the primary care work in their homes. The fathers of working mothers' children in the 1940s did not take over primary care for the children as a general rule. Pauline's difficulty in establishing new friends in the Northern black community also rules out the possibility of fictive kin coming to assistance. Claudia's family takes Pecola in for a time, but these are temporary arrangements that Pauline does not attempt to develop. The geographic disconnection caused by meager work opportunities for African American families contributes to the breakdown of dependency-based mothering, weakening the possibility of a politically-empowering homeplace for Pecola Breedlove.

Similarly, though she lives in New York City, Lutie Johnson faces racist segregation laws that geographically restrict her and hinder her attempts to create a homeplace for Bub. The city was carved up in the wake of the Great Migration; after the 'white flight' from Harlem, which involved whites taking business and the economic base with them, these less-desirable parts of the city were zoned as areas in which it was legal for African Americans to live. While travelling through another part of the city, Lutie thinks, "This world was one of great contrasts. . . and if the richest part of it was to be fenced off so that people like herself could only look at it with no expectation of ever being able to get inside it, it would be better . . . to never know there were places that were filled with sunlight and good food and where children were safe" (155). Her options

are limited when she is searching for an apartment, not only by segregation laws but also by the de facto segregation caused by what she can afford on working-class wages. Like Cholly Breedlove, Jim Johnson cannot find employment, rendering the independence-based nuclear family model an impossibility for the Johnsons as well. Lutie's job options are reduced at that point to domestic and care work in the suburbs. To provide for her family, she has to move to Connecticut. The individualistic mothering norms by which the Chandlers operate dictate a single-family household, thus the possibility of her bringing Bub with her and caring for both children is foreclosed. During this period, Lutie's marriage falls apart, evidencing how systemic oppression quietly has a hand in disrupting family life and creating single mothers who must shoulder the whole childcare burden. Lutie appears to have only an alcoholic father and his girlfriend, neither of whom she trusts, as possible othermothers. Her transiency between apartments also precludes the establishment of fictive kin, besides Mrs. Hedges—the local brothel madam—whom Lutie also, perhaps erroneously, rules out. Without the support of women-centered networks, Lutie and Pauline are left to care for their children alone without the time, resources, or in Pauline's case the will, to do so adequately.

Compounding the problems of racist geographic and economic inequalities, Lutie and Pauline's alignment with the burgeoning consumer culture of domesticity inhibits the formation of interdependent mothering practices that would keep their children safe. While living at the Chandlers, Lutie fails to understand that affluence did not prevent crisis or make the family happy; instead she learned that the Chandlers "could always find somebody to solve their [problems] if they paid enough" (55). She blindly believes the myths of meritocracy—that with enough money, she can raise their social status and

partake in the American Dream, which for her is the “white kitchen,” the domestic picture of the independent single-family care model. Her preoccupation with money drives her to leave Bub alone in the apartment without lights, even though he is afraid of the dark, because they need to save money. Even toward the end of the novel, she subscribes to the conversations she overheard at the Chandler home. She thinks, “They were right about people being able to make money, but it took hard, grinding work to do it—hard work and self-sacrifice. She was capable of both, she concluded” (315).

Subsequently, she neglects Bub in her frantic efforts to make money and fails to provide othermothers or fictive kin to care for him in her absence. As a result, he falls accidentally into criminal behavior in his meager attempt to help earn money. Lutie’s adherence to the cultural norms that she adopts from the Chandlers and in mass media, her aspiration for an independence that is unavailable to her as a commodified laborer who does not make a living wage, lead to Bub’s entrance into the criminal justice system.

Pauline Breedlove’s choice to separate herself from her family and identify with the illusion of power that she finds in her connection to the Fishers leaves her children vulnerable to the violent forces that a history of systemic racism has created. Unfortunately for Pecola, this societal oppression culminates in her father incestually raping her. While Cholly’s behavior is abhorrent, Morrison pointedly provides a backstory for him that depicts the constant societal beating he has taken in a lifetime of racism. In the afterword to *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison describes her thought process, “connecting Cholly’s ‘rape’ by the whitemen to his own of his daughter” (215). At a young age, white men catch him in a consensual sexual act with a young black girl and force him to “get on wid it” while they watch and ridicule him (148). This story shows

Cholly as a victim and humanizes his character, making it necessary to consider the forces that make a father capable of raping his own daughter. The powerlessness that plagues black men in the US indirectly contributes to a perpetuation of violence that affects the most innocent and helpless members of society. The long hours Pauline must work to support the family, combined with her ideological detachment from her children and possible othermothers in the African American community, render her incapable of protecting her own child. When she finds out about the rape, she punishes Pecola rather than comforting her. In her book *Toni Morrison and Motherhood*, O'Reilly argues, "While we may fault Pauline for the way she mothered her children, her ineffectual mothering (for lack of a better word) originates not from a will to power . . . but from a despair and resignation that she is not able, as a black woman in a racist culture, to mother her children well. Pauline is ultimately a victim" (54-55). Pauline has accepted her secondary role in society. Having recognized the insurmountable disparity between her life and what she sees in the movies, she copes by accepting what she perceives as a degree of subjectivity as the Fishers' servant. She begins to neglect and despise her own children because they remind her of her own abject social status. Situating herself within the "white kitchen" of the independent nuclear family strips her of a viable means of subjectivity as a black mother who could front a resistance to racist dominant culture by providing a homeplace for her children. By cutting herself off from interdependent care networks, she also leaves Pecola defenseless.

Ann Petry's *The Street* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* expose the vulnerability of 1940s African American families to the violence of systemic racism and oppression that are the material manifestations of inequalities rooted in the Western

constructs of justice. The exclusion of dependency and care concerns from the foundations of liberal rights discourse marginalizes not only children, the poor, the disabled, and the aged, but also causes a disregard for the rights and concerns of the dependency workers who care for these dependent members of society. The labor of African American women working as domestic servants in the 1940s, such as Lutie Johnson and Pauline Breedlove, was exploited and rendered invisible. Living in the post-Depression historical moment of commodity culture laden with independence-based domestic ideologies, the two women succumb to hegemonic notions that conflate consumerism with domestic happiness. By rejecting their own potential subject positions as mothers, a centralized and powerful role in matrifocal African American cultures, and seeking after the inaccessible dream of the “white kitchen,” Pauline and Lutie align themselves with the Western veneration of individuality and independence. They sever themselves and their children from interdependent models of motherhood that could foster their abilities to empower their children with a racial political consciousness in constructing a homeplace. The failure to include dependency and communal concerns in the foundational definitions of social justice endangers the most vulnerable and innocent members of society, often women and children of color.

Chapter 2:

“Something Always Told Me I Wasn’t No Rich White Woman”: Postwar (In)Equality and the Care Burden in Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* and Sirk’s *Imitation of Life*

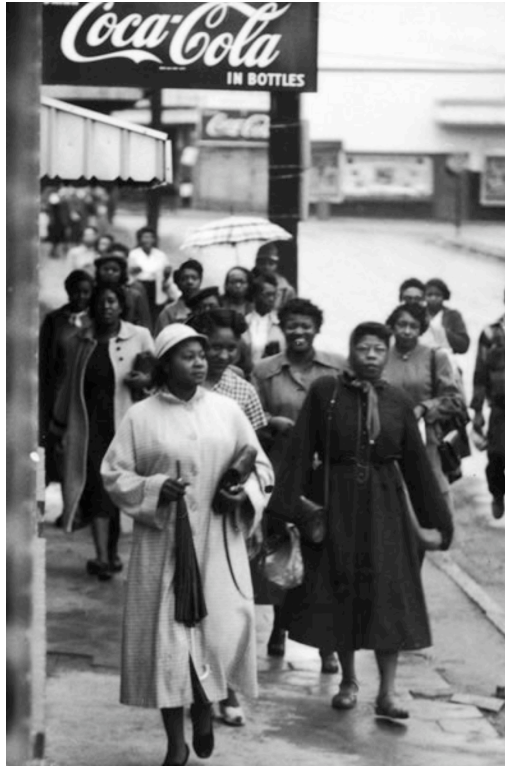


Image 2: Walking During Bus Boycott, 1 Feb 1956

This photograph, taken a few months into the 1955-56 Montgomery Bus Boycott,¹ captures everyday women doing real political work at the height of the so-called conformist post-WWII years. For over a year, rather than riding the bus to their jobs in white homes, which would have been a good distance from the neighborhoods in which they lived, African American domestic workers joined the fight against

¹ The NAACP strategically planned this boycott against segregated public transportation as a first step toward desegregation in the South and as a direct challenge of the “separate but equal” doctrine established in 1896 by *Plessy v. Ferguson*, a Supreme Court decision regarding the segregation of public train cars. Rosa Parks, a secretary for the NAACP, was chosen as the individual who would challenge the constitutionality of segregation laws as they stood in the 1950s by refusing to give up her seat on the bus. Contrary to popular belief, this was not a spontaneous act but a planned political strategy that sparked the citywide boycott. Civil Rights leaders called upon all African Americans in Montgomery to boycott the buses and thereby cripple the bus system economically to bring about political change.

segregation by walking to work. This protest would launch Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights movement into the national spotlight, fomenting the already active but often overlooked race struggle of the postwar era. Historical discourse tends to recall the 1960s, rather than the 50s, as the time of social revolution and as a departure from the previous era of postwar containment and conformity; however, as Jacqueline Jones states in her recently republished study of African American women's labor in the US, the postwar era marked the "seedtime years for the modern civil rights and women's liberation movements" (196), with women playing crucial roles on both fronts. Mary Fair Burks, the leader of Alabama's Women's Political Council (WPC), which was a driving force in organizing the bus boycott, concludes her account of women's involvement in the protest with a tribute to "the nameless cooks and maids who walked endless miles for a year to bring about the breach in the walls of segregation" (Burks 83). Accounts of the Civil Rights movement have generally overlooked the vital contributions of female leaders, but have particularly failed to recognize the everyday sacrifices and physical labor of the nameless masses of domestic workers as political work. And while the activist stance of these Montgomery women walking to and from their employment in white homes during the year-long protest—adding to the physical exhaustion of an unprotected workday—is laudable, it is merely an extension of the underrepresented role that African American domestic and care workers in the post-war era played in the burgeoning rights movements that would come to full fruition in the 1960s. Because liberal rights discourse tends to focus on individualism and independence at the expense of the material care concerns and dependent relationships that inform individual lives and

identities, the omission of dependency workers' contributions during the foundational years of both the race and gender struggles is not surprising.

The study of postwar US literature and cultural texts has similarly lacked a focus on women-centered themes of dependent relationships despite the omnipresence of domesticity in the 1950s—like the air around us, it is perhaps everywhere but still invisible. While literary studies do tend to emphasize non-conformity in an era that is often assumed to be the zenith of domestic tranquility and prosperity, anthologies gravitate toward the individual alienated male that permeates the writings of Jack Kerouac, J.D. Salinger, Arthur Miller and Saul Bellow. Their struggles are solitary rather than communal and engage the problems of the white male in the Cold War era of containment. Dependency studies opens up the body of literary and cultural texts to other social concerns, such as the emergent race and gender struggles, that have often been neglected in the study of this period. In 1959, two cultural texts debuted that prominently feature African American care workers and interrogate the racial and class segregation among working women. Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* and Douglas Sirk's film *Imitation of Life* call attention to the race and gender struggles of the 1950s and the social and political impacts of the marginalization of dependency concerns. These texts in particular highlight the lives of working class women like Lena and Ruth Younger as well as Annie Johnson, respectively, women who bear the care burden that abets their exclusion from partaking in the white, domestic ideal of the 50s.

African American dependency workers of the postwar era not only deserve recognition for their work as activists in the struggle for racial equality but also as key players in making the women's rights movement possible. The (white) feminists'

successes came as these more privileged women were able to leave the work of domestic duties and childcare behind. Although individual circumstances differed such that clearly not all white women had a housekeeper or nanny, African American women collectively continued to shoulder an inordinate share of the care burden of the 1950s. Contrary to popular representations of 1950s womanhood and some scholarship on the period, white women entered the workforce in increasing numbers throughout the decade, particularly married women.² Jones notes, however, that “black women’s daily work and family lives bore little resemblance to those of the privileged white women who would later attempt to define national ‘feminist’ priorities” (196). Continued employment discrimination, segregated housing and education, redlining, and other social practices all systemically merged to bar returning African American veterans from obtaining the advantages of the GI Bill that paved the way for white families into middle-class incomes and private, suburban homeownership. Black women’s salaries were necessary to the survival of their families, and work in private households was still the most readily available despite a slight increase in positions for black women in clerical work and manufacturing.³ As caretakers of children or other dependents, housecleaners, cooks, and laundresses—essentially in the role of performing the reproductive labor traditionally expected of a wife and mother—African American women performed dependency work as described by Eva Kittay: “labor that enhances the power and activity of another” (38). The stigma attached to dependency contributed to the low salaries and lack of labor protections that widened the economic and social gap between black and white women, a disparity I will

² See Meyerowitz; Kessler-Harris; Hartmann.

³ See Susan Hartmann’s “Women’s Work and the Female Labor Force” in *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s*, specifically page 94.

discuss in further detail below. White women were able to enter the workplace and make greater strides toward gender equality as defined by patriarchal, post-Enlightenment conceptions of justice in part because they could discard the care burden onto black women's shoulders. Mid-century cultural texts like Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* and Sirk's film *Imitation of Life* demonstrate that the continuance of African American women bearing an unequal share of the societal care burden during the 1950s not only contributed to their exclusion from postwar domestic prosperity and homeownership, but also helped make the second-wave feminist movement possible as white women were able to leave their traditional dependency work behind and seek after a class- and race-exclusive gender equality.

The two primary texts I will be analyzing in this study, Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and Sirk's *Imitation of Life*, have more in common than the fact that the Youngers and Annie Johnson are African American domestic workers. They share a common historical context, having debuted at the same time that boycotts, sit-ins, and court battles over segregation gained momentum. While these texts still met with opposition, the preceding decade or so of civil rights action set the stage for them to come forth at a time when questions of race and gender were increasingly debated in the public sphere. Though securing the financial backing to produce *A Raisin in the Sun* was difficult and at first "not a single theater owner on the Great White Way would rent to the new production" (Nemiroff, "Introduction" 7), Hansberry's play did eventually make it to Broadway—a fact even more significant when considering it was the first play of a female African American author. Some of the initial reviews were negative but the following year, *A Raisin in the Sun* was nominated for four Tony Awards. Then, in 1961,

it was adapted into the now well-known major motion picture, starring Sidney Poitier. The play spoke to rising social concerns, and as Robert Nemiroff states, it “presaged the revolution in black and women’s consciousness” (5). Similarly, Douglas Sirk’s 1959 version of the 1933 Fannie Hurst novel *Imitation of Life* depicted gender and race in ways that, while not unproblematic, critiqued and tested the bounds of the social norms of its day.⁴ In Sam Stagg’s 2009 book, *Born to Be Hurt: The Untold Story of Imitation of Life*, he argues, “It seems more than coincidence that Douglas Sirk filmed his masterpiece in late summer of 1958, less than three years after Rosa Parks sat down in that bus in Montgomery and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. led the boycott. Only a few years earlier, neither Hollywood nor the American public would have accepted this picture” (23). By 1959 *de jure*, if not *de facto*, racial segregation had been overturned in schools and public places, and still the film met opposition in the South because it ostensibly featured a black woman and a white woman with their respective daughters, living together on so-called equal terms in the same house. Sirk’s film also stars a woman who chooses career over family and forms a woman-centered household that allows her to live outside of the patriarchal family structure purported to be the 1950s domestic ideal, at least up until the end of the picture. Without the previous postwar years of ongoing court battles and race protests as well as the rising tide of women choosing to work, these popular cultural texts perhaps could not have been produced at all.

Hansberry’s play and Sirk’s film both fit the genre of family melodrama that was popular on stage and screen throughout the 1940s and 50s. Both were written as affective

⁴ An earlier film adaptation of Hurst’s novel, also titled *Imitation of Life* (1934), was directed by John M. Stahl and follows the novel much more closely than Sirk’s 1959 version. It starred Claudette Colbert as Bea Pullman, and Louise Rivers as Delilah Johnson.

performance pieces that appeal to women because they forge what Lauren Berlant calls an “intimate public” (5). She claims that despite stark differences in class and race across the female characters and audiences, “women’s culture,” of which family melodramas are a part, “flourishes by circulating as an already felt need, a sense of emotional continuity among women who identify with the expectation that, as women, they will manage personal life and lubricate emotional worlds” (5). *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Imitation of Life* revolve around family relationships, self-sacrificing mothers, and domestic life and spaces, even as they address the widespread, public issues of race politics, gender roles, and labor struggles. In her book on Douglas Sirk films, *Melodrama and Meaning*, Barbara Klinger notes that critics and academia have often dismissed melodrama and other forms of sentimental women’s cultural texts as “camp” (154-55); however, she credits Sirk for the irony and aesthetic complexity through which he “realized the genre’s historical capability to act as a revolutionary form during times of cultural struggle” (xii). Both Hansberry and Sirk use melodramatic scenarios and conventions to engage political issues that particularly affect women, who historically and traditionally perform domestic work and bear the brunt of the societal care burden. These works problematize the 1950s hegemonic domestic ideal and call attention to questions about the social identity and position of those who perform domestic work and care for dependents, such as children. They dramatize the relationship between white and black women during the postwar era, during which middle-class white women were able to make some advances toward equality in an individual rights based system because African American women took on a larger share of women’s traditional care and domestic work. The study of postwar melodramas demands recognition of care concerns and domesticity as integral parts of

the 1950s political scene, disrupting the myth of domestic tranquility and prosperity as the happy backdrop to the troublesome Cold War.

Finally, in keeping with my overall project, *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Imitation of Life* are urban texts, one taking place in Chicago and the other in New York. My focus on domestic and care labor, to a large degree, determines this characteristic of the works I analyze. Since this type of work has historically been undervalued, those who can escape it tend to do so when other opportunities present themselves. The lack of labor protections, the ambiguous status of being somewhere between an employee and a family member, and the pure social stigma of being associated with dependents and dependency are among the reasons why this work is shunned. Consequently, dependency work—which has always been heavily gender-assigned to women—has fallen to those women in society that are least valued and have the fewest economic chances: immigrants and women of color. The concentration of these populations in urban centers parallels the concentration of capital. Though her ethnographic study *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadow of Affluence* centers on Latina workers in contemporary Los Angeles, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's reasoning as to why metropolitan centers employ the most dependency workers helps to explain the same dynamic in the postwar years. She writes, "Specific location is important to this analysis, for the income distribution in some cities is more inequitable than in others, and greater inequality. . . tends to generate greater concentrations of paid domestic work" (6). She goes on to explain that in a capitalist system of unequal wealth distribution, urban centers (like Los Angeles) become "home to many people with highly paid jobs" and, referencing Saskia Sassen's work, continues, "globalization's high-end jobs breed low-

paying jobs” (6). Although the large populations of African Americans in Chicago and New York in the postwar period were certainly not immigrants, a large percentage of them were migrants from the South, seeking work and better opportunities in the city. Like immigrants today, they were crammed into the slums and competing for a limited number of low-paying jobs amidst the large supply of other laborers. Strict segregation laws that were still in effect for much of this period worsened living conditions while raising rents. The lack of housing options in urban settings correlates to the Youngers’ and Annie Johnson’s social status as dependency workers with few other options, at a time when the national capitalist economy was booming and the middle class of white families was rapidly growing.

The American ideal of freedom and independence in the postwar era of Cold War tensions became increasingly associated with domestic space; obtaining a private, single-family home equipped with the latest modern appliances was the marker of peace and prosperity for a generation of returning WWII veterans. In her book *Homeward Bound*, Elaine Tyler May reports that marriage rates skyrocketed after the war, while the average marriage age dropped significantly (20). Housing shortages began even before the war’s end, as early as 1943 (May 160); in 1944, Congress passed the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act—more commonly known as the GI Bill—to provide sweeping government subsidies on housing and education that gave rise to a widely expanded middle class. May cites Nixon’s “kitchen debate” with Premier Khrushchev as the defining moment of the domestic American identity. She writes that Nixon “proclaimed that the ‘model’ home, with a male breadwinner and a full-time female homemaker, adorned with a wide array of commercial goods, represented the essence of American

freedom” (16). While historical hindsight allows us to see the exodus to “cookie-cutter” houses in the suburbs and the mad rush to buy the newest washing machine as signs of conformity and containment, the ideal of owning one’s own home and luxurious domestic space created the illusion of independence, the newest version of the American Dream of making one’s own way in the world. Edward Humes, in his book *Over Here: How the G.I. Bill Transformed the American Dream*, argues that this bill changed the entire landscape of the nation in ways that no one anticipated. The time was ripe for suburban developers to introduce mass-produced, planned communities like Leavittown, NY and Lakeshore, CA that have become commonplace nationwide (94-96). At the time, the veteran benefit was meant to jumpstart the decrepit homebuilding and sales economy that had languished since the Depression (Humes 92). Humes also explains, “Home ownership was said to be the best insurance policy against creeping socialism—even if it took an immense exercise in socialism to accomplish it” (93). Home loans to veterans were effectually co-signed by the government and offered with no down payment necessary. The benefits of this government subsidy continue to reverberate through three generations, as children and grandchildren inherit the wealth that is accumulated through home ownership.

Postwar prosperity, which is often marked by the rise in single-family homeownership as well as increased educational and employment opportunities bolstered by the GI Bill, predominantly benefitted the white mainstream and excluded people of color. While veterans were the primary recipients of the benefits, the boom in home construction that accompanied it made home ownership feasible for the first time for white working class families, even as veterans of color were systematically denied the

benefits legally promised to them. Hughes reports that there were high hopes for the G.I. Bill as “the first explicitly race-neutral piece of social legislation” and “the *only* race neutral social program at the time” (219) to advance the cause of civil rights as never before. However, such was not the case. While the race struggle and civil rights actions garnered national attention, racist practices did not disappear; rather, they transformed and were disguised as impartial or even benign systemic policies. Hughes explains that key members of Congress, mostly Southern supporters of segregation such as John Elliott Rankin of Mississippi, worked to make sure that administration of the federally declared benefits was “a matter of local control and states’ rights” (Hughes 222). In doing so, they annulled the racially-neutral language of the G.I. Bill and possibilities for real social change. While all veterans were candidates for the government subsidized home loans, individual banks still controlled approvals and denials. Redlining still occurred all over the nation. Individual loan officers could make houses in white areas unavailable for undisclosed reasons. Similarly, the official policy stated that any veteran with an acceptance letter to a university could obtain a government voucher for tuition at the Veteran’s Affairs office, but individual universities were not required to admit students of color. Particularly in the South, there were still colleges designated for black students, which were generally inferior schools compared to white institutions. If the financial or educational institutions did grant loans or admittance, there were still other individuals that could present obstacles. Hughes tells the story of Monte Posey, an African American veteran who brought an acceptance letter from Chicago’s newly-opened University of Illinois to the local VA office, only to be told by the officer there that getting a college degree would be a waste of his time since no one would offer him a job afterward; like so

many other young people of color, then and now, he was encouraged to seek vocational training. While Posey persisted and entered the university the following year, many in similar circumstances were victims of a system rife with barriers to equality.

The G.I. Bill essentially redistributed vast amounts of wealth in what could be considered a socialistic act; however, it was characterized as a capitalist policy intended to foster a system that espouses individualism and values independence. It is no coincidence that capitalism and liberal rights discourse as it persists today were both engendered by Enlightenment philosophies. Capitalism focuses on the economic rise of individuals, always at the expense of a labor force that will not see the same profits. As a system, it pays little attention to communal interdependency and ignores its own dependence on the working classes. The so-called ‘good life’ of the white upper and middle classes after WWII similarly strives toward and is marked by independence, which in this period increasingly takes the form of individual fulfillment in educational and employment opportunities as well as private home ownership. In contrast to the dependency associated with Roosevelt’s New Deal politics of previous decades, the recipients of the G.I Bill identified as hard-working capitalists, making their own way. They failed to recognize the enormous government subsidy that underwrote their imagined independence. They also neglected to see the masses of working class people whose exclusion from the same opportunities provided the cheap labor that would make the independence-centered ‘good life’ possible for them. Within those masses of excluded workers were many who do the care work of society that highlights dependent persons and relationships; this is the work that frees up the others to advance their own supposedly independent financial and social lives. The independence in American

identity that follows homeownership and the possession of one's own domestic space remained largely a white benefit that excluded peoples of color through legal and, later, extralegal practices of systemic racism.

Hansberry's account of the Younger family's struggle to escape their cramped apartment in Chicago's Southside ghetto and move into their own house in the suburbs of Clybourne Park, is based, at least in part, on personal experience. Although their story predates the postwar period of the G.I. Bill and suburban sprawl, Hansberry's family purposely moved into a house in what she calls "a hellishly hostile 'white neighborhood'" during the 1930s in order to fight what were called Chicago's race "restrictive covenants" (Hansberry, *To Be* 51). These segregation laws designated boundaries in the city in which African Americans could and could not live. Lorraine's father, Carl Hansberry, spent a good part of his life and means (and according to his daughter, his health), working in conjunction with the NAACP to combat these racist policies. In her article on the aesthetics of segregation in *A Raisin in the Sun*, Michelle Gordon notes that after "the neighborhood 'improvement association' sought an injunction against the Hansberrys," (121) as was to be expected, her father took the case all the way to the Supreme Court. At that time, about 15 years before the civil rights movement really began to gain some ground, the Court failed to take on the blatant racism of the segregation that was occurring rampantly even in the North. According to Gordon, "In its 1940 decision on *Hansberry v. Lee*, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Carl Hansberry on a technicality, while declining to address the constitutionality of the covenants themselves" (121). Not until the postwar period would this issue and the other hard-fought legal battles over segregation be taken up by the Court.

While Hansberry was sometimes criticized for writing about poverty in Chicago's Southside while she herself—the daughter of a lawyer—came from a middle-class African American background, she certainly understood the persecution that awaited those who dared to violate these segregation laws and the centrality of domestic space in the race struggle. In her memoir *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, she recalls “being spat at, cursed and pummeled in the daily trek to and from school” (51). She also remembers watching her mother walking around the house with a “loaded German luger while [her] father fought the respectable part of the battle in the Washington court” (51). Segregation was not only a battle over the right to use public spaces, but also over domestic space. The right to live in one's own home in the area of one's choice played a central role in the civil rights movement as well as in Hansberry's first play.

Despite the fact that the plot of *A Raisin in the Sun* revolves around the Younger family's fight to move out of their Southside apartment and into the white suburbs, Hansberry is not setting up post-war suburban domesticity, with its single-family private home ownership, as the solution to racial injustice. Rather, it is the right to define one's own space and break down the barriers of social as well as spatial exclusion, particularly here by escaping the squalor of the Chicago ghetto and refusing to be excluded from the social ideal of domesticity based on race and class status. More than just a geographical fight or a protest against the high rents and cramped space caused by the segregation laws, the struggle for equal housing rights was a move towards independence-based justice. The final scene of Lena Younger leaving her apartment for the last time marks a victory for the family's inner strength and personal liberty, but it cannot rightly be called a happy ending. They are not welcome in Clybourne Park. Hansberry would know better

than anyone that the fight against racial persecution in the new neighborhood had just begun. However, the act of moving is a protest against exclusion and a critique of, “in the midst of the Cold War, the capitalist systems from which segregation grew” (Gordon 121). It is the continuation of a struggle and the refusal to accept the terms of the improvement association—the systemic mechanisms of racism—that tried to keep them out. It had, in fact, attempted to buy them out, leveraging the inequalities of capitalism and their low wages against them. Since this tactic has not worked, the audience is left to wonder what strategies the neighbors will resort to next.

The open ending of the play mimics the ambiguity with which Langston Hughes discusses the dreams of African Americans in his poem “Harlem,” the poem from which Hansberry chose her play’s title. The first line of the poem asks the question, “What happens to a dream deferred?” (1). Hughes fills the remaining ten lines with ambivalent answers, which for the most part also take the form of questions. The first of these provides the title to Hansberry’s work: “Does it dry up/ like a raisin in the sun?” (2-3). After a series of metaphorical possibilities, Hughes ends the poem with the line, “Or does it explode?” (11). He provocatively answers his own question about the stifled dreams of African Americans with the suggestion of violence. The Youngers’ move from the oppressive living conditions of the Black Belt to the white Chicago suburbs could very well end in an explosion. As Michelle Gordon reports, “The most violently and residentially segregated metropolis in the nation, post-World War II Chicago rocked with more bombs in and around black homes and businesses than even Birmingham, Alabama” (123). In this Northern city where so many had fled from the South to escape

Jim Crow laws and the lack of economic opportunity, African Americans were violently told to stay in their place—economically, geographically, and socially.

A complex web of social forces and history come together to construct the intersectional identity of domestic workers like Lena and Ruth that is not based solely on race, class, or gender, but a combination of the three as well as other factors like the social privileging of individual rights over dependency and care concerns. Because domestic and dependency work have been historically undervalued, these jobs have fallen to women, and servants when the women were wealthy enough to have them. In the US, the racism that fomented slavery has continued to mark African Americans as members of a servant class so that even controlling for other factors, color has made obtaining jobs outside the service sector very difficult. Care work marks social status, which is directly reflected in its low wages and working conditions. Those who do dependency work are then rendered socially dependent, though physically able and independent, in a kind of “secondary dependency” as Eva Kittay calls the condition of those care workers that are “in a worse bargaining position” because of their position as dependency workers (46). In their 1945 study, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton report that 64% of African American women and 34% of African American men made a living as domestic workers (99). With few other jobs available and an influx of migrants from the South concentrated in the Black Belt of the city, unemployment was high and wages were low as a result of the large supply of labor. Because care work has continued to be undervalued, it has been poorly compensated. The lack of employment opportunities for African American women, and some men, outside of domestic work has impoverished black families. In an interview with Diane Fisher,

Hansberry argued, “We need legislation to guarantee any right a person can be denied. . . . The first thing that must be achieved is equal job opportunities for Negroes, then equal housing. When unemployment is six per cent nationally, it is as high as thirty per cent among Negroes. . . . Negroes are last chosen for any job, skilled or unskilled. Negroes are starving to death” (9). The same racism that restricted African Americans from living beyond the permissible regions delineated by the race covenants also restricted African American women to care work, in which the low wages also prevent them from affording living spaces with equal housing conditions.

The social status and labor conditions of domestic and care workers in post-war Chicago combine with the previously discussed systemic racial housing barriers to bar the Youngers from middle-class domestic life, a large part of which is private home ownership in the postwar period. With three adults in the home all working for white families—Lena and Ruth as domestics, and Walter Lee as a chauffeur—the Youngers are still living on top of each other in a cramped apartment where Travis sleeps on the living room couch for lack of space and in a building where they share bathroom facilities with their neighbors. Ruth reveals that over the years they have “put enough rent into this here rat trap to pay for four houses by now” (44). Their low wages force them into the cycle of paying rent, in contrast to those who display their purported independence through their ability to buy their own homes. The systemic racism enforced through capitalism and housing segregation, whether *de jure* or *de facto*, ensures that the Youngers can never make enough money to afford a private home. When by a windfall of insurance money gained only through Mr. Younger’s death they do have the money, they are barred on the basis of race. As Gordon points out, “Though the Youngers have worked hard all their

lives, and for two generations in Chicago, they cannot afford suitable housing” (124). Despite their tireless efforts in cleaning and maintaining the decency of their apartment, they are plagued with pests, namely rats and cockroaches. Ruth cringes when Travis informs her that he and his friends have been outside playing with rats. However, Travis is pushed outdoors when Beneatha routinely begins spraying insecticide behind the furniture. A new house in the suburbs would mean not only a rise in social status, but a real improvement in material living conditions and physical health for this family.

Lena and Ruth Younger are both aware of the spatial and social boundaries that mark them in their intersectional identities as poor, black, female domestic workers. While both women dream of having their own home with a kitchen like the ones they work in, Ruth, perhaps, as a member of the younger generation more adamantly expresses her desire for mobility and more space. She is desperate to get out of the apartment and the “cramped little closet that ain’t now or never was no kitchen” (97) where she stands cooking and ironing during much of the play. Despite her own desire for new housing, Ruth encourages her mother-in-law to spend the money from her husband’s death on herself, in a purchase that smacks of individuality and independence. She suggests a trip to Europe like “these here rich white women do” (43). Essentially, she is telling Lena to leave the care burden behind when she says, “Pack up and leave! Forget about the family and have yourself a ball for once in your life” (43). Spending her money on leisure travel, which means mobility and personal independence, lies beyond the range of Lena’s conception of herself. Her response, “Something always told me I wasn’t no rich white woman” (44) demonstrates her rejection of the notion of individual rights over communal good. As a domestic worker and a mother, she has spent her life working to

care for and nurture others. In recognizing the gap between herself and those “rich white women” Lena shows her awareness of the class, racial, and labor distinctions that separate her socially from the white women of the era who were forging the individual rights-based feminist movement. She still carries the care burden and lives within multi-generational interdependent family networks, while some more privileged women are able to leave it behind, seeking an individual rights-based equality. They leave their homes in the care of women like Lena and Ruth. African American domestic workers in the 1950s worked within the private homes of more affluent white women, making wages that would ensure that they could never afford a similar space of their own.

As the legal battles of segregation waged through the 1950s, racist housing laws disappeared but equally racist extralegal practices emerged, often under the guise of a benign spatial argument. In Hansberry’s play the Youngers’ battle against racism and poverty takes the form of a fight about domestic space and the segregation that would keep them in ghettoized conditions while preventing them from attaining the same independence that white families feel they have gained in owning their own homes in new neighborhoods like Clybourne Park. In his article, “Housing the Black Body: Value, Domestic Space, and Segregation Narratives,” GerShun Avilez discusses the emergence of “neighborhood associations, which were organized groups of property owners and their supporters who used legal strategies such as racial restrictive covenants and less formal (and more violent) forms of intimidation to exclude black families from neighborhoods. Chicago felt the presence of these associations particularly” (133). Avilez then points specifically to the character of Karl Lindner in *A Raisin in the Sun*, who

embodies the slick use of financial pressure in the white, suburban community's effort to uphold a socially-enforced segregation, since it had been formally outlawed.

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Mr. Lindner—the only white character in the play—knocks on the Youngers' apartment door, disguising his real purpose in good manners and euphemistic speeches about neighborliness. He says he represents the “Clybourne Park Improvement Association” which he then describes as “a sort of welcoming committee” (115) of which he is the chairman. Eventually he presents the prevalent kind of separate but equal argument that was used in *Brown v. Board* and other cases to state that peoples of differing racial backgrounds were better off in their own, separate spaces. Lindner argues, “But you've got to admit that a man, right or wrong, has the right to want to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way” (117), meaning exclusively white. This is also an individual rights-based argument that denies the Youngers and other African Americans the same individual rights to define their own living space and communities. The race restrictive covenants that once hedged them into the overpriced tenements of the Southside have been replaced by manipulative social strategies as well as threats and violence that also deny them the right to the very same, equal domestic spaces. Some audiences and critics have mistakenly heralded the end of the play as a happy ending for the Youngers; however, Lindner's parting remark, “I sure hope you people know what you're getting into” forebodes a grim and perhaps violent struggle awaiting them in the white Chicago suburbs.

Each member of the Younger family recognizes that theirs is a socioeconomic class struggle, as well as a fight against racism. Walter Lee seeks after a business opportunity, however uncertain, while his sister, Beneatha, sees education as the way out

and plans to enter medical school. However, Lena and Ruth—the domestic workers who spend their days laboring in the private spaces of white homes—feel more poignantly the importance of equality in domestic spaces and make obtaining a new home their priority. Both connect space to the wellbeing and care of the family in a way that considers networks of care rather than merely individual equality. Admittedly, Lena phrases her argument in patriarchal and individualistic terms when trying to convince her son that her decision to buy a house instead of investing in a liquor store was justified: “Walter Lee—it makes a difference in a man when he can walk on floors that belong to *him*” (92). She does in part share the hegemonic domestic ideal of individual property ownership as a step toward an independence-based justice. However, Lena explains her primary motivation in using her husband’s insurance money to purchase the house when she says, “I just seen my family falling apart today . . . just falling to pieces in front of my eyes” (94). Her first concern is always for the needs of her family members. She does recognize the importance of education and specifically sets aside enough money for Beneatha’s medical training, but she understands that access to a domestic space that will allow the family to care for each other is a central part of their struggle for racial and economic equality.

Ruth’s desire to care for her young son similarly foments her determination to leave the “rat trap” Southside apartment and move into their own home, but because of her proximity to white homes and kitchens she also recognizes that access to private domestic spaces and luxuries mark the gap between herself and the white women that employ her. Throughout the play she worries about the way the apartment determines her ability to care for her son, as well as the unborn child she has just learned she is carrying.

She chastises Walter Lee for having his friends over too late because it interferes with Travis getting enough sleep, since the living room sofa doubles as his bed. Before she learns of Lena's buying the house, she makes a down payment to an abortionist, sure she cannot care for another child under these circumstances. When she receives the news about the new house, Hansberry's stage directions indicate that the character "*flings her arms up and lets them come down happily, slowly, reflectively, over her abdomen, aware for the first time perhaps that the life within pulses with happiness and not despair*" (94). She understands how access to better living conditions will materially change the wellbeing of her family. Like Lena, she also has a stake in the postwar domestic ideal of private living space like the ones where she works and the household luxuries of which this new space will allow her to take part. She relishes in the thought of no longer sharing a communal bathroom with the neighbors. Sharing with Beneatha her dreams about the first thing she will do in the new house in Clybourne Park, Ruth says, "Honey—I'm going to run me a tub of water up to here . . . (*With her fingers practically up to her nostrils*) And I'm going to get in it—and I'm going to sit . . . and sit . . . and sit in that hot water" (111). She then makes a threat to the first person that knocks on the door to rush her out of that private space of domestic pleasure. While Ruth's, like Lena's, conception of equality prioritizes dependent relationships of care, largely for her children, she also rightly notes the unfair gap in privilege between her own living conditions and those of white families. In the postwar era in which even political leaders refer to the domestic ideal of a private home and goods as the sign of freedom, she seeks access to the same privileges for herself and her loved ones.

The Younger family's move to Clybourne Park will drastically improve their living conditions, but as long as African American women like Lena and Ruth continue to bear an unequal share of society's care burden, they will fall short of equality as framed by the individual rights based justice of which white women in this era were beginning to take part. When Walter Lee loses much of the money that is to pay for the house, Ruth ironically imagines that ramping up her workload in white women's homes will allow her to maintain a grasp on the domestic ideal she holds up as a token of social equality. Frantic to hold on to the plans for a house, she yells, "I'll work twenty hours a day in all the kitchens in Chicago . . . I'll strap my baby on my back if I have to scrub all the floors in America and wash all the sheets in America if I have to—but we got to MOVE! We got to get OUT OF HERE!!" (140). The reality of her position as a domestic worker comes through in her statement. In order to make ends meet, she would have to not only work extremely long hours but also bear the burden of the double shift of so many women of color who have been paid to care for other families and homes only to come home to perform the same unpaid jobs in their own homes. Because care work is undervalued and underpaid, as long as her employment options are restricted to domestic and care work she and her family will continue to struggle economically and socially as an underclass in the US. Particularly for African Americans, haunted by the history of service work in slavery, domestic labor carries a social stigma. Lena expresses this when she recalls the words of her late husband who declared that "being any kind of a servant wasn't a fit thing for a man to have to be" (103). Care work is an essential kind of labor in any society, but until it is recognized as such, the position of African American women in domestic and care labor contributes to their intersectional identity of

being socially oppressed by race, class, and gender. Ruth is never going to achieve the same social status as the white women in Clybourne Park while she is scrubbing their floors.

Precisely because they recognized the burden of domestic and care work in achieving an equal rights status with men, white women in the postwar years increasingly began to hire women like Ruth Younger and seek work outside of their homes. The domestic stereotype of the 1950s woman, like those populating the suburbs of Clybourne Park, is part and parcel of those historical narratives that would paint the postwar period as a time of peace and prosperity, glossing over the burgeoning rights movements in both race and gender. The women's rights movement that exploded in the early 1960s was actually building momentum throughout the previous decade. Joanne Meyerowitz and other feminist scholars have written revisionist historical accounts that complicate the overly simplistic narrative of the 1950s and its flattening of women's identities. In her edited collection, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America 1945-1960*, Meyerowitz critiques the hegemonic myths that represent women in the 1950s only as the white, middle-class "happy housewives" featured on television shows like *Leave It To Beaver*, referenced in her book title. She calls attention not only to the ethnic and cultural diversity of women in the 1950s but also disrupts the notion that all women left their jobs and contentedly returned to the kitchen when WWII ended. She argues that the historical record actually proves that "increasing numbers of women sought and found wage work, albeit in traditionally female jobs, in the postwar era" (4).

Surprisingly, leaders of the second wave feminist movement, most notably Betty Friedan in her now-famous book *The Feminine Mystique*, helped perpetuate a narrowly

classed and raced image of women's condition in the 1950s. This narrative erases the reality of the many white women finding outside employment as well as that of women like Ruth Younger, who would take over the care burden in many of these white homes. While Meyerowitz focuses on the white, working women in her chapter "Beyond the Feminine Mystique," she widens the limited view of 1950s women's experience that Friedan set forth. In her study, Meyerowitz takes the temperature of women's domestic containment by examining nearly 500 magazine articles geared toward women in the postwar period. She admits that Friedan's housewives with their unnamed problem represent "one piece of the postwar cultural puzzle" (231). However, she finds evidence that complicates the narrow scope of Friedan's thesis, which was also partially based on fictional women's articles from four magazines. Meyerowitz argues that in the wider sample of literature she examined, "domestic ideals coexisted in ongoing tension with an ethos of individual achievement that celebrated nondomestic activity, individual striving, public service, and public success" (231). She found numerous biographical sketches of individual women's achievements, and while these articles "often applauded housewives, they also supported women's wage work and urged greater participation in politics" (231). At the same time, as social and employment opportunities began to open up for white women, working conditions for black women became more entrenched in the domestic and service jobs these ambitious white women were no longer performing.

Many African American women had benefitted along with white women from the wartime call for female labor in factory and office work, though in much smaller numbers and often in secondary industries, as I discussed in Chapter One. A good number of both white and black women lost these jobs when the men came back at war's

end. However, the narrative of women's complacent return, *en masse*, to the unpaid domestic work of home is an exaggeration of the historical data. In her work on women's wartime and postwar employment, Susan Hartmann cites polls taken at war's end that report, "from 61 to 85 percent of women workers wanted to keep their jobs; among married women the positive responses ranged from 47 to 68 percent" (90). Hartmann also discloses that with some setbacks such as lower salaries and periods of unemployment, most white women were able to stay employed. Jacqueline Jones's research supports these claims but explains the discrepancy between the working lives of white and black women: "Although 38 percent of white women found jobs as secretaries and retail clerks after the war, only 5 percent of black women were similarly employed" (Jones 211). This led to an even larger percentage of service sector jobs, a sizable portion of which were domestic and care work in white homes, being left behind to black women. This informal employment sector still operated under a lack of labor protections, with no "minimum wage or hour laws, unemployment compensation, or Social Security" (211), not to mention the lack of respect and being "once again forced to enter the white households through the back door" (211). African American women were not included in the slowly rising women's rights movement although they helped foster it in their supporting roles as domestic and care workers.

Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* depicts the social inequality between white and black women on an intimate scale through the personal relationship of two single mothers: the white, aspiring actress, Lora Meredith; and the black Annie Johnson, who quickly becomes Lora's housekeeper and nanny. Despite admitting in his interviews with Jon Halliday, "I'm not a weepie man. I don't really like this kind of picture" (153), Sirk

has been championed as the director that elevated the 40s and 50s genre of Hollywood's "sophisticated family melodrama" from what were once considered trivial and overly sentimental women's films to an art form worthy of critical attention and academic analysis.⁵ In her book on Sirk's films, *Melodrama and Meaning*, Barbara Klinger goes so far as to name him "the 'father' of melodrama studies" (xiii). In *Imitation of Life*, Sirk continued to focus on bourgeois society and its inherent contradictions as a means of social criticism, indulging in irony as a filmic device in complex ways that challenge the status quo while inherently upholding it through the spectacle and commodification of the Hollywood form. Elizabeth Bronfen notes an example of this juxtaposition as early as the opening credits, during which "we hear Earl Grant's voice on the sound track, assuring us that 'without love you're only living a false creation, an imitation of life.' Yet at the same time we see diamonds falling down one by one from the upper part of the image until they have filled the entire screen" (202). The tragedy of the film lies in the contradictions that pull on each of the female characters; these internal conflicts, while still fulfilling the genre's reputation for pulling on the heartstrings, also reveal contemporary social problems of race and gender. The struggles that the four women—Lora, Annie, and their respective daughters, Susie and Sarah Jane—experience touch on postwar gendered expectations of domesticity and motherhood, racism and segregation, and the lack of equality in employment and education for women and African Americans. Sirk's film shows the postwar era as a time when white women were still hemmed in by, but beginning to break out of, traditional caretaking and domestic roles; however, the film

⁵ See Thomas Elsaesser's essay "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama" (1972). See Klinger as well as Laura Mulvey's "Repetition and Return: Douglas Sirk" for a discussion of the evolution of Sirkian melodrama studies.

challenges that progress as contingent upon the exclusion of African American women from the same freedoms because of their racialized relegation to the undervalued labor of domestic and care work. Lora Meredith chooses her acting career over motherhood and marriage, opting out of the patriarchal family structure and its economy. However, Lora's autonomy and financial independence hinges upon Annie taking up the domestic and care work she leaves behind, thus entrenching the unequal social positions between African American and white women.

Douglas Sirk called *Imitation of Life* "a piece of social criticism" (Halliday 148), and he accordingly adapted Fannie Hurst's 1933 novel and the John Stahl film of the following year in order to engage with the social climate of 1959. As a white male, his authenticity in engaging with issues of race and gender could (and perhaps should) be questioned in ways that Lorraine Hansberry's is not. However, Sirk's background as a European theater director and immigrant, working in the studio system of Hollywood, affords him an outsider's perspective of American ideology and culture. He also traces his interest in race back to the time he spent in Nazi Germany when he was barred from seeing his son because his second wife was Jewish (Halliday 123). Accounts of the filming of *Imitation of Life* as well as other biographical anecdotes show a race sensitivity and consciousness that sets him apart from mainstream attitudes of the era and of his peers.⁶ He seems to have understood the particular plight of African Americans being restricted to domestic work and specifically chose this context for Annie in his version of the film. He wanted to represent what he considered a "typical" position for an African

⁶ In interview with Halliday, Sirk admits to changing the racist language of a comment made by Howard Hughes when quoting him (93). Also see Sam Staggs's *Born to Be Hurt: The Untold Story of Imitation of Life* for more discussion of race consciousness during the making of the film.

American woman and reflected what he saw in American society in the form of Annie, “a servant, without much she could call her own but the friendship, love, and charity of a white mistress” (Halliday 148). From the beginning of the film, Sirk emphasizes the social inequalities that hinder an equal relationship between Annie and Lora. Annie’s desperate financial situation demands that she put herself in a subordinate position if she is to care for herself and her child. At a young age, Sarah Jane has already internalized the racism that has kept her and her mother in a second-class status.

An early scene in which Susie and Sarah Jane play with dolls speaks to the way Sirk positioned his film as a social commentary on race issues and particularly the raging segregation battles of the 1950s. Lora has reluctantly invited Annie and Sarah Jane to stay in her small New York flat, just for one night, after learning during their first meeting at Coney Island that they have nowhere to go. Susie opens a box with two dolls, one white and one black. She then tells Sarah Jane, “You can have Nancy,” (*Imitation*) the black doll. Sarah Jane refuses and grabs the white doll, inciting a physical struggle between the two girls over who gets to play with the white doll. This scene, along with Sarah Jane’s complaint about the sleeping arrangements—“I don’t wanna live in the back. Why do we always have to live in the back?” (*Imitation*)—sets up Sarah Jane’s rejection of her African American identity and insistence that she is white. Her desire to pass provides one of the central conflicts of the film. However, the doll scene is also one that poignantly alludes to the famous Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board* of just five years prior to the film. In her article “Black Children, White Preference: *Brown v. Board*, the Doll Tests, and the Politics of Self-Esteem,” Gwen Bergner recounts, “To support its finding of psychological damage, the Court cited in a footnote a number of social science

works, most notably a report by psychologist Kenneth Clark that summarized the results of ‘racial preference’ tests he and his wife, Mamie, had conducted to assess African American children’s racial identification” (299). Using these experiments as a key part of its reasoning, the Court overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine established by *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and the process of desegregation of schools and other public spaces began to unfold. The doll tests became well-known, along with *Brown v. Board*, and “the Clarks’ studies set the parameters for virtually all subsequent research on racial identity, self-esteem, and child development” (Bergner 300). As such, Sarah Jane’s emphatic rejection of the black doll, followed by a close-up shot of the discarded doll on the floor, alludes to the Clarks’ renowned doll tests and the persisting segregation that was a hot-button issue in 1959.⁷ Sirk uses the genre of melodrama, including this scene of childhood bickering in an intimate domestic space, to reveal the internal damage caused by a racist social system.

As in Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, Annie Johnson and Sarah Jane lack access to their own domestic space, not knowing where they will sleep that night when they meet Lora and Susie Meredith at Coney Island. Though the film does not specify the circumstances of their homelessness, conversations between Annie and her daughter indicate their having boarded in back rooms off the kitchens of homes where Annie has worked. Although both women are single mothers—Lora, a widow, while Sarah Jane’s father “left before she was born” (*Imitation*)—Lora has managed to acquire a “cold water flat” in New York after saving up money for years to pursue her acting dreams. Though

⁷ Lucy Fischer makes a reference to the allusion to *Brown v. Board* and the Clarks’ findings in “Three-Way Mirror: *Imitation of Life*” (1991).

certainly not an easy task even for a white woman in the postwar period, financial independence has been possible. Considering the Youngers have barely scraped by to afford an apartment in Chicago with three incomes, Annie's inability to secure a home for herself and her daughter in New York during the same period is not surprising. Her intersectional identity as an African American female domestic worker edges her to the margins of society and renders her economic situation desperate.

Though from the outset of *Imitation of Life* there is an obvious parallelism between struggling single mothers with their daughters, Lora and Annie are on unequal footing from the start. Several scholars have discussed the relationship between the two women as primarily a friendship that defies social norms of race relations for the era. Elisabeth Bronfen goes so far as to claim that "the friendship between these two women is the only conflict-free aspect of an otherwise strife-ridden plot" and attributes this largely to "Lora's blindness toward race difference" (202). I argue that the peaceable relationship owes itself almost exclusively to Annie's submissiveness that results from her drive to provide and care for her child. She acts the part of the ideal, smiling servant, offering herself as free domestic help for Lora, if Lora will only provide access to housing. In response to Lora's expressed desire for someone to care for Susie so that she can pursue her acting career in earnest, Annie cheerfully describes the position of a domestic worker in a manner that ironically discloses the insufferable labor conditions placed upon women like herself. She tacitly sells herself in the following description: "a maid to live-in, someone to take care of your little girl, a strong, healthy, settle-down woman, who eats like a bird, and doesn't care if she gets no time off, and will work real cheap? . . . Just let me come and do for you" (*Imitation*). Lora refuses on account of not

being able to afford to pay her but eventually agrees to let them stay one night upon realizing the desperation of their situation, when Sarah Jane begins to cry that she wants “to go home, too” (*Imitation*).

The arrangement that appears to be potentially between friends rapidly transforms into a classed relationship between employer and employee with all of the historical background of racial inequality between white mistresses and black servants. Annie gratefully accepts a small room off the back of the kitchen as living quarters for herself and her daughter; when Lora awakes in the morning, she finds that Annie has laundered her clothes, has fed the girls and made sure they played quietly as Lora slept, and has breakfast waiting on the table. Lora is at first a bit wary of Annie’s intentions to stay and her automatically donning the part of the housekeeper. However, when she receives a call about a modeling job the same morning, she realizes that she needs Annie to care for her child if she is really going to work. She also quickly takes advantage of Annie’s presence in her home to elevate her class standing;⁸ when a potential acting agent calls her home precisely to test her story, she explains, “That’ll be Annie, my maid” (*Imitation*). Annie plays along immediately, and these pretended roles shift into reality. For the rest of the film, Lora builds her economic and social privilege on the base of Annie’s cheap care labor, deluding herself that this is an arrangement between friends. Sirkian irony unmasks the false pretenses of an equal friendship between the women in a quick exchange near the end of the film. While Lora walks around her grandiose home dressed up to the nines, Annie talks about her lifelong dream of a luxurious funeral with all of her friends in

⁸ See Mary Romero’s discussion of class status and white women’s motivations to hire women of color as domestic servants in *Maid in the U.S.A.* (142-49).

attendance. Lora, caught off guard, interjects, “It never occurred to me that you had many friends.” To which Annie replies, “Miss Lora, you never asked” (*Imitation*). While Annie is personally involved in the details of Lora’s life, Lora has really never come to know Annie in any capacity beyond her work life within the household. Thus, Annie also performs emotional labor, which Mary Romero describes as the work that goes beyond the physical labor for which “private household workers” are hired, in which “[they] manipulate and manage their feelings to fulfill the psychological needs of their employers” (135). Much of the labor exploitation of domestic and care workers follows from the nebulous but very real expectation that they be more than employees that perform physical tasks. They are there precisely to care. Because this role has traditionally fallen to wives and mothers whose labor was unpaid, it historically resides outside the bounds of commodification. There is a tendency for employers like Lora to expect real caring relationships and to romanticize their relationships with domestic workers as friendship, or even kinship (Romero 153-56); Lora, and the privileged women like her, can then remain in denial that these are working relationships in which the social positions of power are vastly unequal.

With Annie taking up the domestic work that keeps daily life moving as well as the care work of tending to Susie, Lora achieves the supposed independence that the forthcoming second-wave feminists sought. She refuses marriage and the traditional patriarchal domestic economy even though she has fallen in love with Steve Archer, the man who offers financial security and social normativity. Lora defies the 1950s domestic ideal for women and asserts through her response to Steve’s marriage proposal—“I want more. Everything. Maybe too much” (*Imitation*)—that many women were not contented

with traditional roles. Sirk's film subverts the nostalgic 50s narratives of the domestic tranquility represented in shows like *Leave it to Beaver* and allows an alternative view of postwar gender relations. In this apartment hallway scene, the phone rings as Steve tries to kiss Lora. She chooses to take the phone call that leads to her first real acting job and her ultimate fame and fortune. As she is rushing down the stairs to the audition, Steve assumes patriarchal authority, saying, "I'm not asking you not to go down there, Lora. I'm telling you" (*Imitation*). Lora soundly refuses to recognize this patriarchal hierarchy. For the rest of the film she will choose her professional career over marriage and, though guiltily, over motherhood as well—insofar as motherhood is defined as intimate care and companionship with Susie. Through a montage sequence of Lora's acting career, the years pass from 1947 to 1958. She breaks normative gender barriers when she is able to buy her own luxurious home in the suburbs with all the modern appliances associated with the 1950s "good life." She maintains an unconventional, woman-centered home in which she takes on the traditionally male role of financial provider while Annie performs the domestic and care work of a traditional wife and mother. She travels, coming and going as she pleases, with the kind of mobility usually associated with men. Eventually, she even asserts her agency in choosing what she sees as more socially-critical roles in her acting, refusing to be typecast into the trivial, comic roles that her lover and director writes for her.⁹ Like the white feminists on the cusp of the 1960s women's rights movement, she seeks after and achieves a degree of autonomy that has been patriarchally

⁹ Richard Dyer points out her lack of consciousness in choosing a play for its "colored angle" and discussing her choice in front of Annie without involving her in the discussion of race and the social reality for African Americans in "Four Films of Lana Turner" (1991).

defined and that ignores care concerns in its definition of equality and justice. She fails to fully recognize her interdependent relationship with Annie.

Lora's public success, personal fulfillment, and individualistic freedoms are possible only because she has Annie, an African American woman excluded from the same opportunities, taking up the care burden that traditionally would keep her in the home. Annie almost always appears in the kitchen either cooking, preparing to entertain Lora's friends at their aftershow parties, or listening to Susie and giving her the motherly advice that Lora is not present to offer. She is behind the scenes while Lora is literally on stage. Laura Mulvey, in the most recent of her many articles on Sirk's films, calls attention to "Annie's invisibility as the worker on whom Lora's visibility depends" (238). She supports Lora's career in the way a stereotypical 1950s housewife would her husband's. In the same way that society has considered men independent because of their productive labor and women dependent because they perform unpaid reproductive labor, Lora receives public praise and economic benefit while Annie's labor goes unacknowledged and undercompensated. In Mary Romero's book *Maid in the U.S.A.* she describes the shifting of the care burden from one woman to another, which would increase throughout the 1960s and 70s in tandem with the so-called women's liberation movement. Romero writes, "Employed middle- and upper-middle class women escaped the double day syndrome by hiring poor women of color to perform household work and child care, and this was characterized as progress" (128). The achievements of some women, therefore, come at the expense of other women doing more than their share of society's domestic and care work.

The younger generation of African American women in Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and Sirk's *Imitation of Life* reject their mothers' societal roles as domestic workers with the attached stigma of racial and gender oppression that follows dependency work. As the civil rights movement gained momentum, the social consciousness of the younger generation took hold. In Hansberry's play, Lena's daughter, Beneatha, flouts racial barriers and gender norms with her plans to be a doctor while also seeking racial identification through African culture and heritage. Sirk's Sarah Jane, who looks white enough to pass, wholly rejects not only her mother's work but her person in an attempt to completely erase her African American background. She has understood the advantages of whiteness and the burden of blackness since she was a child. At two ends of the same spectrum, Beneatha and Sarah Jane engage in identity politics, no longer accepting the care burden of their mothers' intersectional identities as African American domestic workers. However, both women seek an individual rights-based equality that will continue to pass the necessary dependency work of society onto other women of color and ignore the material reality of societal dependency.

Beneatha Younger's rejection of domestic work coincides with her interest in the burgeoning gender and race consciousness movements that emphasize the individual expression of one's identity and rights. Predating the cultural revolution of the 1960s, Hansberry's play anticipates the rising generation's rejection of traditional modes and the social conformity of their parents. Lena repeatedly chastises Beneatha for her atheistic comments against the Christianity with which she has been raised. While Lena fully supports her daughter's study of medicine, both she and Ruth balk at the younger woman's rejection of traditional family gender roles when Beneatha states, "Listen, I'm

going to be a doctor. I'm not worried about who I'm going to marry yet—if I ever get married” (50). While Ruth and Lena function within networks of interdependence, Beneatha espouses the individualistic values that historically underwrite liberal rights movements. The two older women challenge her fleeting interests in guitar lessons and other hobbies that she defends as worthwhile means of self-expression. In response, Ruth comments, “You ask me, this child ain't sweet on nobody but herself—(*Underbreath*) Express herself!” (48). Beneatha adopts the sentiments of the growing feminist movement in her rejection of family and care responsibilities. She also seeks to redefine her racial identity, exhibiting early on some of the trends of later black empowerment movements. Rather than chemically straightening her hair, she cuts it short and begins to wear it naturally (80). She looks to African cultures as means of reconnecting with what she feels is a more authentic identity, unmarked by assimilationist modes. Her Nigerian love interest, Asagai, brings her traditional African robes that she gushes over but, significantly, puts on incorrectly. In many ways, her nonconformist intentions are laudable as they do break from the sexism and racism of her time; however, her independence-based strivings fail to consider existent dependent relationships. She takes for granted the care work that Ruth and Lena perform at home as well as their domestic work in white homes that has supported her and allowed her to study. In order to achieve the gender and race equality she is after, she passes the care burden onto other women of color.

Ironically, Sarah Jane's race and gender identity choices completely oppose Beneatha's but are motivated by the same impulse toward an individual rights-based equality. Having a father who, according to Annie, looked “almost white,” (*Imitation*)

Sarah Jane can racially pass and has done so since she was a child in school, understanding the assigned social value of whiteness. Her mother's race and employment have time and again disrupted her performance of whiteness and condemned her to a life of back doors and social exclusion from privilege. My previous analysis of Sarah Jane's childhood rejection of the black doll in favor of the white one carries through to her teenage years of the latter part of *Imitation of Life*. When her mother suggests she go to the local church functions to meet some young men, she bitterly rejects those associations she would make with those she calls "Busboys, cooks, chauffers!" (*Imitation*). Her rejection of blackness plays out most notably in her angry caricature of the smiling black servant, which she associates with her mother and, therefore, despises. When asked to help serve Lora's late night guests, she satirically enacts the role of a Southern mammy, carrying a tray on her head and putting on an accent. As Judith Butler writes, "Performing in excess, exaggerating the role of maid, indeed submitting it to the melodramatic requirement of hyperbole, Sara[h] Jane deploys imitation to expose the power differential of race and to refuse it" (9). Her performance shames her mother and angers Lora, but it also exposes the imitation of racial equality that defines the conditions under which the Meredith household runs. For Sarah Jane, African American identity is also conflated with servitude and an association with dependency that marks her as a member of a second class. Richard Dyer points out, "When [Lora] upbraids Sarah Jane for her Southern mammy impersonation when bringing in drinks for her (Lora's) guests, she says 'I've never treated you differently'—yet we have just seen Sarah Jane using the back stairs, going to the local school (Susie is at boarding school), expected to help out her black servant mother" (427). Unlike Beneatha's pursuit for equality through the

channels of the rising black power movements, Sarah Jane's strategy is a wholehearted rejection of African American identity, which necessarily includes her relationship to her mother. Instead, she adopts the model of white feminine success she has observed in Lora by putting her perceived whiteness on display. In contrast to her mother's invisibility as the cook and caretaker behind the scenes, Sarah Jane seeks out a hyper-visible career by becoming a vaudeville dancer in the night clubs of New York and then Hollywood. She sees the ultimate act of passing as proving that her body can pass as the white sexual feminine ideal. Through her acting career, placing her body in the public space of theater, Lora has achieved economic and social independence. Sarah Jane seeks the same access to privilege and equality in an "imitation" of this independence-based model that is realistically only available to white women.

Sarah Jane and Beneatha's rejection of the domestic work performed by their mothers speaks to the historical demographic shift of domestic and care workers that took place in the 1960s and 70s as younger black women began to refuse this work. With the advancements made by the civil rights and feminist movements, some alternative employment opportunities did begin to open up. Jacqueline Jones analyzes interviews with African American women of previous generations for whom "blue-collar and clerical jobs represented significant intergenerational advancement" (247) because their options had largely been restricted to domestic or agricultural work. The stigma of dependency in Western notions of justice has so stigmatized care labor—resulting universally in low pay, lack of protections, and marked class status—that when given another choice, women have always abandoned this work in pursuit of other employment options. The flight of African American domestic workers from the industry in the 1960s

and 70s was another wave of the same historical phenomenon. Mary Romero documents the decline in African American women's participation in domestic work "from 36 percent in 1960 to 18 percent in 1970 to only 5 percent in 1980" (117). However, contrary to postwar predictions that new technologies would modernize and eventually obviate housework, freeing the housewife of her traditional roles and responsibilities, the care burden has merely shifted. As white women fought for increased equality—the patriarchally-defined, individual rights-based equality that fails to consider interdependent social relationships—women of color assumed a greater share of the domestic and care work that subsidizes the supposed independence of the more privileged. Mary Romero argues that as African American women began to make similar progress, "the composition of the domestic labor force has shifted from native- to foreign-born women of color" (116). This has meant that large numbers of Mexican (but also Chicana) women have taken on these jobs in the Southwest, while in East Coast urban centers like New York many of these jobs have been filled by Caribbean immigrants. Women of color, the most marginalized of which are now in immigrant populations, continue to bear a disproportionate share of society's care burden and are increasingly stereotyped as racially or ethnically suited for care work by the more privileged women who hire them.

Chapter 3:

Hollywood's Other Half: Mexicana-Chicana Domestic and Care Workers in Rechy's

The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez and Riggen's *Under the Same Moon*

Domestic service, as an industry, was supposed to disappear with the technological and social revolutions of the twentieth century. Modernization theorists of the 1960s and 70s predicted that new technologies would transform household labor such that it would quickly become obsolete.¹ Feminists of the same era nursed hopes that as women entered the formal workforce, men would pick up an equal share of household work, thereby obviating the need for outside domestic help. Indeed, the number of dependency workers did decline sharply around 1970 as a new generation of African American women embraced the hard-won employment opportunities that followed the Civil Rights movement, flatly rejecting the stigmatized domestic jobs held by their mothers and grandmothers. However, in the past two decades, domestic service has made a resurgence. The rights-based discourse of the 60s and 70s perpetuated the individualist focus in longstanding notions of justice that does not consider dependency and care concerns. As Arlie Hochschild laments in her book *The Second Shift*, men as a group have not taken on a significant portion of the domestic and care work it takes to keep society running. And large technological changes have not eased the care burden as anticipated; in fact, technology—by causing global economic shifts—has fueled the demand for domestic workers. In Chapter Two I briefly discussed Saskia Sassen's assertion that the rise of what she calls "global cities" has increased the "demand for household workers, particularly maids and nannies" (262) to meet the human dependency

¹ See Mary Romero's discussion of Lewis Coser and others in *Maid in the U.S.A.*, Chapter 2.

needs of those working the new high-end jobs in large metropolitan areas. She goes on to claim that “we are witnessing the reemergence of a ‘serving class’” (262), many of whom are immigrants. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which rescinded the quota system, ushered in a new era of non-European immigration. Women of color, particularly Latinas, have filled the paid domestic jobs once held by African American women, and by Irish and Scandinavian women before them. Domestic service has not gone away. Instead, globalization has renewed the historical trend of domestic and care labor falling to poor women of color and immigrants.

By the end of the twentieth century, Latinas (a conglomerate group, the majority of which is of Mexican origin) became the predominant ethnic group in domestic and care work in the US. Scholars note that one of the most surprising aspects of the conditions of domestic labor today is that so little has changed; historical documents reveal that 19th century domestics toiled under long hours, low pay, social stigma, lack of privacy, no labor protections, and the blurring of boundaries caused by their performing paid labor in the private space of the home.² Mexican and Chicana housecleaners and caretakers today have expressed almost exactly the same concerns, in addition to new burdens particular to the modern globalized world economy, the tightening of borders, and rigid citizenship laws. The new Nativist movements, which grew out of the 80s and gained momentum in the 90s continue today; they push for anti-immigration legislation and turn immigrants into a scapegoat for social and economic ills by painting them as dependent persons who drain state resources. Anti-immigration laws such as California’s Proposition 187 have targeted women with children, threatening to deny education and

² See Margaret Lynch-Brennan’s book *The Irish Bridget* (2009).

healthcare to those children not born in the US. Measures such as these and other immigration factors target women with children, ignoring their basic human care needs, and have given many no other option than to adopt the practice of transnational motherhood,³ such that many women leave their children with relatives or other caregivers in Mexico while they care for privileged American children.

Chicana/o cultural texts such as John Rechy's 1992 novel *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez* and a 2008 film directed by Mexican-born Patricia Riggen, *Under the Same Moon* (*La misma luna* in Spanish), use the representation of space within Los Angeles in their works to reveal the dismal labor conditions of Chicana and Mexican immigrant domestic workers. Both works take place in LA, a global city where the presence of extreme wealth and a large population of Latinas—both native- and foreign-born—has made it a leader in the new domestic service economy.⁴ The plot of Riggen's melodrama, *Under the Same Moon*, revolves around the separation of the protagonist, Rosario, who is working as a housecleaner and nanny in LA, from her son, Carlitos, who is being cared for by his grandmother in Mexico. As an undocumented worker, Rosario also battles with the modern-day exclusion of citizenship status and the consequential lack of protections for those without documents. Amalia of Rechy's novel has citizenship, having been the first child in her family born on the US side of the border in El Paso, Texas; nonetheless, she is subject to state surveillance that points to systemic racism and the limits of citizenship. She struggles to provide the basic necessities of food and shelter for her three children and her aging mother. She also faces the antagonistic

³ Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila coined the term “transnational motherhood” in their 1997 article on domestic workers in LA who have children residing in Latin America.

⁴ See “The Macrosociology of Paid Domestic Labor” (1998) by Ruth Milkman, Ellen Reese, and Benita Roth.

and racialized “welfare mother” rhetoric of the 80s and 90s. Amalia and Rosario represent the emergence of a servant class of Chicanas and Mexican immigrants who are increasingly fulfilling the domestic and care needs in the economies of global cities like Los Angeles in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Rechy and Riggen use representations of space in their respective works to reveal the “other half” of LA’s global economy—those who clean and care unseen within the homes of the wealthy.⁵ I argue that the lack of attention to dependency concerns in the US not only perpetuates historically poor labor conditions but also translates to the dehumanization of Chicana and Mexican care workers. This commodification of their labor fails to consider the care needs of the worker, who often has children and other dependents of her own. Rechy’s *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez* and Riggen’s *Under the Same Moon*, which revolve around human dependency and intergenerational networks of care, complicate individual rights discourse and call for an ethics of care that extends rights to dependent persons as well as to those who care for them, regardless of race or citizenship status.

Chicana/o literature is a literature of resistance and, therefore, a rich site from which to reexamine and revise the limits of liberal rights discourse. The sheer act of writing stakes a claim for Chicanas/os, who have been marginalized throughout US history. Ramón Saldívar fleshes out this argument in his 1990 book *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference* in which he analyzes the critical social function of many of the seminal works in Chicana/o literature up to that point. In his introduction he argues

⁵ In using this phrase here as well as in my chapter title, I allude to Jacob Riis’s famous book of photojournalism, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890). Riis used the relatively new visual technology of photography to reveal the squalid conditions of the working poor, often immigrants, in New York City. This parallel to the Gilded Age of robber barons highlights the ways in which the glamour and glitz of LA today is made possible by the exploitation of Chicano and immigrant Mexican labor. Like Riis, Rechy and Riggen similarly reveal the spaces of the working poor within Los Angeles.

that one “function [of Chicana/o texts] is to shape modes of perceptions in order to effect new ways of interpreting social reality and to produce in turn a general social, spiritual, and literary revaluation of values” (7). Because they speak from the margins of society and history, the writings of Chicanas/os serve as a counterpoint to hegemonic ideologies that might otherwise go unquestioned even when they oppress ‘other’ peoples. Of course the degree of resistance offered by any given Chicana/o text varies greatly; while some texts take an active political stance or actually perform a political function,⁶ other texts that are routinely anthologized as Chicano literature actually perpetuate assimilationist narratives.⁷ As one might guess from the title of Saldívar’s book and the fact that only the final chapter out of eight features female writers, Chicano literature was first dominated by men whose works center around the predominantly masculinist 1960s and 70s Chicano movement and its related social issues, such as farm workers’ rights and racist wartime practices. While women’s lives were certainly bound up in the aforementioned movement and its causes, the specific concerns of Chicanas came to the fore one or two decades later along with those of other third wave feminists of color.

Since the 1980s Chicanas have been prolific in publishing texts that deal with women’s issues and experiences and which offer real possibilities to redefine the limits of justice to include dependency. Works by authors such as Helena María Viramontes, Denise Chávez, and Sandra Cisneros often deal directly with care concerns and

⁶ For example, Luis Valdez’s *El Teatro Campesino*, which he founded as a farm workers’ theater troupe actually performed plays as protests in the farm workers’ rights movement of the 1960s. These are some of the foundational texts of the current body of Chicana/o literature.

⁷ Richard Rodríguez’s autobiographical narrative *Hunger for Memory* (1982) serves as an example. In his book, he promotes the separation of a public and private self—with the Spanish language being restricted to what he considers the language of home.

domesticity as these represent the real material lives of women of color.⁸ Gloria Anzaldúa, perhaps the most recognized Chicana theorist, affirms the interconnectedness of Chicana/o identity in her pioneering work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In her culture, she argues, “The welfare of the family, the community, and the tribe is more important than the welfare of the individual. The individual exists first as kin—as sister, as father, as *padrino*—and last as self” (40). Certainly the preeminence of “the family” as an intrinsic part of Latina/o cultures is an exaggeration that romanticizes and flattens the circumstances and life choices of individuals. In the context of Anzaldúa’s book, her statement is meant as a critique of the way that Mexican and Chicana/o cultures contain what she calls “the deviants,” particularly females who reject the traditional, scripted roles of gender and sexuality. However, in comparison to US dominant culture in which care concerns have been diminished by a hyperbolic focus on personal independence and self-reliance, Mexican and Chicana/o societies maintain a stronger culture of caring for dependents.⁹ Unsurprisingly, women tend to bear the brunt of the work of caring for children, elderly relatives, the ill, and the disabled. As Anzaldúa writes, “In my culture, selfishness is condemned, especially in women” (40). In her activist stance, Anzaldúa is operating within the limits of liberal rights discourse that focuses on individual rights—rights that indeed had been denied her as a queer woman of color. However, in her statements I see the possibility for a revision of the individualism

⁸ Viramontes’s collection *The Moths and Other Stories* (1985) features unpaid household work like gardening and the cultural designation of caring for elderly relatives by daughters and granddaughters. The stories of Denise Chavez in *The Last of the Menu Girls* (1986) contain similar narratives of paid and unpaid care work and female gender expectations of Chicanas in New Mexico. Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street* (1983) as well as several stories in *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991) deal with motherhood and the containment of women within domestic spaces.

⁹ For example, in Mexico, health insurance procured through an employer typically covers all of the employee’s dependents—not only their children but uninsured parents as well.

in rights discourse. The female protagonists of much of Chicana fiction are mothers, daughters, sisters, friends, aunts, and *comadres* who care for their own dependents and others in society, in both paid and unpaid roles. In lieu of an individualistic, male protagonist, these texts tend to feature Chicanas whose identities are bound up in interdependence. While the care burden needs to be shared more equally, the overall recognition of interdependent identities and the importance of care in Chicana/o and Mexican cultures allows for a new perspective of justice that mainstream US cultural myths equating independence with rights tend to miss.

The possibility of reading dependency in Chicana texts does not mean that an ethics of care is openly advocated or even intentionally included as a political stance in these works. In fact, many Chicana writers and scholars have adopted the discourse of individual liberal rights in their identity politics. Often the protagonist struggles with her own community and family as well as systemic racism and sexism in order to exert her agency in getting an education, becoming a writer, or whatever the individual end goal may be. Many authors seem to lead their protagonists out of working class backgrounds or ethnic enclaves in an authorial act of achieving equality with the mainstream, seizing the opportunities for characters that have been denied so often to Chicanas/os historically. Considering the overrepresentation of Chicanas in domestic work, the paucity of domestic workers appearing in Chicana texts is surprising. Perhaps those who have had the kind of opportunities and success necessary to become published authors have not had to perform domestic or other physical labor themselves, even when they may come from working class families or communities. This lack of representation might also be attributed to the persistence of the stigma of domestic and care work. In *Maid in the*

U.S.A., Mary Romero—a pioneer in the study of Chicana-Mexicana domestic labor—recounts her conversation with one of the participants in her ethnographic project with domestic workers in Denver, during which the woman “argued with [her] for twenty minutes about conducting research on an occupation that was low status, suggesting instead that I study Chicana lawyers or doctors, that is, ‘another occupation that represents our people in a more positive light’” (37). The same prejudice appears in the overall body of Chicana literature; instead of writing about those who perform the necessary work of society, more often Chicana authors present a female protagonist who defies traditional gender roles that require care.

Both John Rechy and Patricia Riggen occupy a kind of outsider status in the field of Chicana/o studies, which may mean they are removed from the stigma attached to domestic work and more inclined to address it in their work. Within the Chicana literary canon, little mention is made of domestic workers despite their predominance within the domestic service industry within the past few decades. The stigma against dependency work is so prevalent that even these progressive authors seem to see it as a backwards step. Although Rechy is of mixed Mexican and Scottish descent and grew up in El Paso, Texas, he is most widely recognized not as a Chicano author but as a pioneer in LGBTQ literature because of his groundbreaking first novel *City of Night* (1963). *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez*, however, is often included in Chicana/o literature courses. It seems that as a man he is automatically at a distance from the stigma associated with domestic workers, who are almost always female.¹⁰ Patricia Riggen, as a Mexican

¹⁰ The 2011 novel *Barbarian Nurseries* by Héctor Tobar attests to the notion that male authors may have fewer inhibitions writing about Latina domestic workers. His novel, also set in LA, focuses on a live-in Mexican maid who is accused of kidnapping her employers’ children when their parents leave them in her

national who came to the US as an adult to study and work in the film industry, might be considered a Latin American rather than a Chicana filmmaker. However, her subject matter aligns with Chicana/o concerns of social justice. The pairing of these authors admits the perspectives of both a female and male author, and allows for a reading over the past two decades in which domestic service has risen. While the debunking of stereotypes is necessary and merited, the lack of attention to the material lives of working class Chicanas and Mexican immigrant women by more canonical Chicana/o authors only perpetuates the failure to recognize the societal value of care work.

Those cultural texts that do recognize domestic work, such as Rechy's novel and Riggen's film help draw attention to the rise in numbers of Chicana and Mexican immigrant domestic and care workers in what Saskia Sassen terms "global cities" like Los Angeles, where the latest iteration of injustices in this unprotected occupation is happening behind closed doors. Sassen attributes much of the reemergence of a serving class to worldwide economic and demographic shifts that have created metropolises that "concentrate some of the global economy's key functions and resources" and cause "a sharp growth in the demand for highly paid professionals" (255). These high-end jobs, according to Sassen, "generate a demand for low-paid service workers" (255), like nannies and maids. Mexican and Central American immigrants have migrated (more often legally, than not) to the US in increasing numbers in the past thirty or so years due

care because of their own miscommunication. Although Tobar does address many of the problems surrounding this racialized and gendered work, he ultimately depicts the US justice system as giving fair and equal treatment to undocumented immigrants, which is rarely the case.

to various political and economic crises in Latin America, but have largely chosen the US because of the persistent demand for their labor in these low-end service jobs.¹¹

Boasting one of the largest economies in the world, California quickly became the most popular destination for Mexican and Central American migrants with a large concentration in the globalized economy of Los Angeles. The 2010 census found that at 16 percent, Latinos are now the largest minority group in the US. This represents a significant shift from the year 2000 when the numbers of African Americans and Latinos both hovered around 13 percent (2010 Census Reports). Among Latinos, people of Mexican descent make up the majority at 63 percent. In his study of Mexican immigration to the US after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, Albert Camarillo explains that immigration, both legal and illegal, increased as family reunification and targeted worker visas became the focus (509). Mary Romero reports that “nearly half of the 120,000 visas granted to Latin American women in 1968 were for prospective live-in maids” (117). Domestic workers like these immigrants tend toward large cities along the US-Mexico border, like LA. While the Mexican origin population has now moved beyond the Southwest region, at least one-third still reside in California. Mexican immigrants have a long and continuing history of working in the state’s rural agricultural sectors, but the globalized economy has more recently drawn most to seek work in California’s city centers. Camarillo states, “Los Angeles has been the epicenter

¹¹ Decades of civil war backed by the US in Central America led to the influx of Guatemalan and Salvadoran immigrants to Los Angeles in the 1980s, for example. NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994, was supposed to curtail Mexican immigration by creating jobs in Mexico as the US built factories there. Because of poor management and rash decisions by both the US and Mexican governments, the agreement has all but destroyed the agricultural industry, particularly that of traditional family farms that cannot compete with subsidized US import crops, in many parts of Mexico. Mexican immigration to the US in turn increased after NAFTA.

of demographic change since 1970. By 1980, Los Angeles County contained nearly half of the state's 4.5 million Hispanics" (511-12). He also reports that immigration rates continued to increase: "For example, of all Mexican immigrants in the U.S. as of 2000, nearly half (48.7 percent) entered the country during the 1990s" (Camarillo 510).

Workers come with costly human needs, a consideration that many Californians chose to ignore; the demand for domestic workers increased sharply in the globalizing economy of the 80s and 90s.

A vast supply of domestic labor makes hiring domestic help relatively affordable, especially for the large numbers of wealthy LA households. In their 1998 study of domestic workers in Los Angeles, Milkman, Reese, and Roth argue that class inequality and large disparities in the wealth of a city's populations account for the size of the domestic workforce in a given area. Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo has extensively documented the lives of Mexican and Central American domestic workers in Los Angeles; she also cites Milkman's study in her book *Dó mestica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* (2001) and its findings that the LA-Long Beach area has the highest percentage of women working in paid domestic work in the US. Hondagneu-Sotelo continues, "Los Angeles' dubious distinction is not hard to explain. All of the top-ranked cities in paid domestic work have large concentrations of Latina or Caribbean immigrant women, and Los Angeles remains the number-one destination for Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans coming to the United States" (6). In the cities with the highest percentages of domestic jobs these two demographic factors are at play: there is a concentration of affluent people who are wealthy enough to pay for care, and an even larger population of Latinas—some immigrants—who are

compelled to perform this racialized and gendered work at a low cost. The 2010 census findings specify that East Los Angeles has the highest concentration of people of Mexican origin in the nation at 97%. The relative proximity of East LA to the moneyed neighborhoods to the west means that the supply of available housecleaners or live-out care workers is abundant, driving down costs. In turn, demand increases as not only the very rich but generally well-off can afford some of these services. However, in calculating the cost of a maid or nanny, very few employers consider the human care costs attached to the worker. Very few pay social security taxes, let alone consider the needs of the dependents attached to their employee.

In the wake of the global economic shifts of the 1970s and Reaganomics in the 1980s, California became increasingly inhospitable toward poor ethnic minority groups, segregating them geographically as well as socially, all the while demanding more of their cheap labor. The privileged classes wanted Mexican and Chicana maids and nannies, but only as a labor force, not as individuals with families and members of their social and cultural communities. Xenophobic antagonism toward the growing Latino population in LA materialized in the politics of space in the city. In his 1990 study of LA, *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis deconstructs the spatial segregation of class and race in Los Angeles; he links this “urban apartheid” (226) to the Reagan-Bush era of increased US militarization and of the social polarization that widened the gap between rich and poor. The rich barricade themselves in upscale residences behind private alarm systems, gated communities, and even armed guards. The city planners and government are complicit. In LA, geographic barriers like freeways and floodgates isolate the rich areas from the poor

neighborhoods where residents are mostly people of color.¹² Davis argues that this heightened security responds largely to perceived rather than real threats. He writes, “As a prestige symbol—and sometimes as the decisive borderline between the merely well-off and the ‘truly rich’—‘security’ has less to do with personal safety than with the degree of personal insulation, in residential, work, consumption and travel environments, from ‘unsavory’ groups and individuals, even crowds in general” (224). The wealthy that hire domestic workers want all of the benefits of receiving care but they do not want to live alongside the communities of the Mexican or Chicana women in their employ. In short, the wealthy want Mexican maids not Mexican neighbors. They purchase commodified labor, thus dehumanizing the domestic worker and refusing to see that she also has human dependency needs.

In *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez*, Rechy details one Saturday in the life of a Chicana maid through which he reveals the manufactured class- and race-based spatial divisions in Los Angeles that mirror the societal contradictions of demanding cheap labor of Mexican immigrants and Chicanas/os but rejecting their human presence. As Amalia moves through the city in the time span of the novel and in frequent flashbacks that connect to the day’s events, Rechy maps out the divided spaces of LA: Hollywood’s mansions, as well as its seedy sidestreets, a sweatshop, and finally ends up at the posh Beverly Center mall. The novel has been called a *fábula*, or fable, by José David Saldívar because Rechy creates a pastiche of religious and cultural narratives in relation to these spaces. The opening scene in which Amalia wakes up and imagines she

¹² See Helena Maria Viramontes’s novel *Their Dogs Came With Them* (2007), which elaborates on the spatial divisions that reinforce the social segregation of Los Angeles.

sees “a large silver cross” (3) marks her tendency to escape the realities of her own oppression through the narratives of her Catholic faith, which for her is centered on the Virgin of Guadalupe. However, this vision also sets the day apart as one that will be revelatory. All of her delusions, which have been her way of refusing to accept the signs of systemic violence that surround her, will fall away and in a moment of further divine manifestation, she will arrive at her own social consciousness.

Rechy’s novel opens with a juxtaposition of spaces. In Amalia’s decaying Hollywood bungalow, just after she wakes up to the vision of the cross, she remembers that it is Saturday and that any other day of the week she would already be at work in one of the “pretty houses” she cleans (6). She has already moved her children out of an East LA barrio to get them away from the gang violence and drugs that had encroached there. She deludes herself—her typical coping mechanism—that because it is Hollywood it “retains a flashy prettiness” (7) and is comforted by the one remaining Anglo neighbor’s comment that “movie people”—“grips and extras” (73) once lived there. Despite the bars on the windows, boarded-up houses, persistent graffiti, and increasing nocturnal homeless population, Amalia judges the home to be “far better than anyplace she had ever lived in” (73). As she looks out her window, she looks to “a vacant lot enclosed by wire” and up “toward the tall pines bordering the giant Fox Television Studio that extended incongruously from the end of the weedy lot to Sunset Boulevard; and then her gaze floated over the huge HOLLYWOOD sign amid distant hills smeared with flowers, crowned with beautiful homes” (7). Here there are two Hollywoods: the glitzy center of film premiers and red carpet celebrity appearances, and right alongside it, the decrepit slum neighborhoods that house the working class people of color who power the global

economy of LA. The glittering mansions on the hill just above Amalia's bungalow only retain their shine through the untiring labor of women like Amalia. Although they are within her literal sights, these luxury homes are vastly out of reach for a Chicana woman born into Amalia's circumstances. While she cleans a cavernous expanse of rooms, she lives in a cramped and crumbling one-bedroom home. For a time Amalia's aged mother, Teresa, sleeps nightly on a cot in the converted-porch bedroom while her oldest son, Manny sleeps on the floor next to his grandmother. Her other teenage children, Gloria and Juan, convert the living room into their sleeping quarters at night. Amalia shares the one bedroom with her boyfriend, Raynaldo, who she keeps around mostly because he helps her afford the rent. Her only access to a luxury home like those outside her window is as the maid who cleans it.

The *de facto* segregation of Chicano and Mexican immigrant *barrios* from wealthy white West LA neighborhoods not only echoes the Jim Crow South but also exposes the commodification of domestic labor. While traveling to and from her employers' homes, Amalia "learn[s] not to work after certain hours in exclusive areas. From others on the buses she rode, she had heard that Mexicans and black people were routinely stopped and questioned by Beverly Hills police" (56). Merely being present in the privileged neighborhoods of LA approximates a crime for people of color whose every movement is policed. This racial profiling again presents the social contradiction of demanding labor but rejecting the laborer; when working, people of color are invited into this privileged space, but when working hours are over they are seen as an invasive presence, a threat. Amalia recalls an incident when she simply stopped to admire a garden after work. Then, "a fat motorcycle cop asked her what she was doing" and that "it

humiliated her deeply” (56). Likely, had she been working in the garden, she would not have been questioned. Amalia feels humiliated because her humanity—the ability and right to appreciate beauty on her own time—is challenged by the representative of state authority. She also painfully recalls how “he kept referring to her as a ‘pretty *muchacha*—a girl!” (56). The policeman belittles her by infantilizing her and reducing her to her physical body, one that is sanctioned only for labor and sex rather than her own aesthetic judgments. His gaze functions as a representation of the state and its power to control laboring bodies. She is objectified sexually by him in a way that parallels society’s commodification of her domestic work that is racialized, gendered and classed. In both cases, she is dehumanized.

In *Under the Same Moon*, Riggen also uses space in order to call attention to the material conditions for LA’s underclass of domestic workers like Rosario, whose geographic position marks her social exclusion. Rosario lives with another young Mexican domestic worker, Alicia, in a garage apartment in East LA. Her living conditions as an undocumented immigrant in this ethnic enclave are basically equivalent to those she left behind in Mexico, where her son lives with her mother. Feminist scholar Heather Hewett has described “the film’s parallel opening sequence in which mother and son wake up to alarm clocks, apparently only a few feet from each other; quickly, however, the audience realizes that they are separated by thousands of miles” (Hewett 124). While this sequence does infer the emotional closeness that Rosario and her son feel for each other despite the distance as Hewett argues, it also serves to remap the space of LA along socioeconomic lines. In material conditions, Rosario is much closer to Mexico despite the national border that separates the two countries than she is to the

extravagant McKenzie and Snyder residences where she works. Riggen contrasts the confluence of space between Rosario's garage apartment and her home in Mexico that is represented in parallel jump cuts with the almost real-time scenes of Rosario and Alicia's bus commute to the affluent homes across the city. In film time, then, the distance across the US-Mexico border is imperceptible while crossing the space that divides the rich and the poor within LA takes much longer. The women start out shivering in the early-morning darkness at a bus stop. When they board the bus, Riggen dubs in a popular Spanish language morning radio show that also blurs the lines of national boundaries by representing the viewpoint of the predominantly Latino community in a humorous critique of California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's denial of driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants (the irony being that he himself is an immigrant). As day breaks the women are still making bus transfers, finally arriving on foot to the security station that, in addition to the two-story walls of hedges, guards the private homes that Rosario and Alicia clean. As Mike Davis argues, these are the real borders that separate class and race in Los Angeles.

The socially segregated position of Chicana and Mexicana domestic workers today and the poor labor conditions they suffer cannot be understood one-dimensionally from the point of view of race, class, or gender discrimination; rather, dependency workers—who shoulder society's care burden—have historically been excluded in all three areas and much of the time on the basis of citizenship status as well. In her 2011 book *Making Care Count*, sociologist Mignon Duffy states that “not only gender but also race-ethnicity, immigration status, and class radically impact the division of care work” and argues that this labor must be examined “through this intersectional lens” (41).

Dependency work has always been performed predominantly by women, first as unpaid labor in their own homes. Those women who could afford to do so hired poor women to perform this stigmatized labor. Since poor women of color and white European immigrants were often barred from other industries, they would accept domestic work at very low wages. As such, for hundreds of years, domestic and care work in the US has been the province of women of color and immigrants; it continues to be so today. In fact, although the tasks performed have changed dramatically, the poor working conditions of domestic work have not. Domestic and care workers are socially stigmatized by their closeness to human dependency, particularly in the US because as Duffy notes, “In this society, structured around an ideology of individualism and self-sufficiency, dependency has been much maligned” (13). The societal vituperation of dependency and all that is related to it abets the exploitation of domestic and care workers who are still underpaid, overworked, largely unorganized and unprotected as a labor force, and often treated as an invisible underclass of expendable workers.

Although low wages have never been the chief complaint of domestic and care workers, compensation has generally been meager and reflective of society’s low esteem for this essential labor. Chicana and Mexican dependency workers today are often mothers themselves and struggle to support their own dependents despite working long hours in labor that is physically taxing.¹³ Pay varies greatly depending on the individual employer, the social standing of the worker (such as whether she speaks English, has a car and driver’s license, or has legal status in the US), and on the type of work

¹³ See Barbara Ehrenreich’s chapter “Maid to Order” in which she describes the conditions of labor during the month she worked for a maid service in *Global Woman* (2002).

arrangement. Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo categorizes domestic workers into three categories: live-in workers, live-out workers, and housecleaners in her book chapter “Maid in L.A.,” which I also correlate to spatial politics in the form of mobility. Live-in work was the norm during the 19th and even into the early 20th century, during which Irish and other immigrant women moved directly into the homes of their employers; for recent arrivals to the US, then and now, live-in work solves the problem of finding a place of residence but is also the most restrictive and isolating. Today, Hondagneu-Sotelo finds that live-out arrangements continue to be more common,¹⁴ and yet she states, “Live-in work never completely disappeared ...and in the last decades of the twentieth century, it revived with vigor, given new life by the needs of American families with working parents and young children—and...by the needs of newly arrived Latina immigrants, many of them unmarried and unattached to families” (37). Live-in workers tend to be the most vulnerable to exploitation, often earning “less than minimum wage for marathon hours” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 35). Undocumented immigrants are the most likely to accept live-in positions, since the INS rarely checks private residences and this arrangement provides the workers with needed lodging upon arrival. Hondagneu-Sotelo also writes, “The lack of privacy, the mandated separation from family and friends, the round-the-clock hours, the food [shortages], the low pay, and especially the constant loneliness prompt most Latina immigrants to seek other job arrangements” (36). Live-out workers have more mobility; they tend to make more money and maintain more control over their

¹⁴ African American women largely transformed the occupation such that live-out work became more common. Because they were often older, married women with their own children—and for whom domestic work was not merely a transitional job but their lifelong employment—the majority of African American women chose to live in their own homes. Despite this arrangement, the workday was unregulated and many women worked well beyond eight hours. See Jacqueline Jones’s *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present*.

own lives. Housecleaners—as the most mobile group—often have cars, speak English, and particularly enjoy shorter hours, more flexibility, and more income security because their wages come from many sources. However, these are marginal distinctions.

Domestic and care workers' wages generally keep them within the ranks of the working poor, especially when they are supporting their own children, parents, or other dependents as are the fictional Rosario and Amalia.

Rosario from *Under the Same Moon* has secured live-out work in two separate households despite her undocumented status in the US; however, the historically poor compensation for the work she performs as a maid and nanny negate the master narrative of immigrant uplift. After four years of working in the US she is still far from being able to afford the lawyer fees for obtaining legal status, which would allow her to eventually bring her son over from Mexico. The film never discloses her wages, but she tells her roommate that she yet lacks the \$4,000 that the lawyer requires just to take on her case. In a previous phone conversation with her son she discloses that one lawyer has already swindled her. While trying to save for this enormous expense, Rosario also sends \$300 in monthly remittances to her mother in Mexico to provide for her son's wellbeing.

Although some time has passed since Hondagneu-Sotelo performed her ethnography of Latina domestic workers in LA in the 90s, her findings may provide an accurate estimate of Rosario's wages; at the time of her interviews, the mean wage for live-out workers hovered just over minimum wage (36). Given that domestic service has continued to rise in the past decade (Duffy 32) despite the overall economic downturn, if anything, wages are likely to have dropped in relative terms. Considering her undocumented status, Rosario's employers probably get away with paying her less than the minimum wage. I

will return to a more thorough discussion of wage exploitation and other abuses tied to citizenship status later in this paper. Rosario's focus is always on providing for her son and saving enough money so that they can be reunited; she incurs very few expenses. She lives in a shared garage apartment, takes public transportation or gets rides to work, does not go out, and yet four years later there is no end in sight.

As an American citizen, Amalia from Rechy's novel has the relative freedom of working as a housecleaner in many different homes, which allows for more autonomy, flexibility, and earning potential than working as either a live-in or live-out care worker. Rechy explains some of these advantages as he writes, "She preferred to work at different homes in order to get paid daily, and for variety. Too, the hours provided her more time with her children, although now [as teenagers] they were seldom around" (6). Like a good portion of Chicana and Mexican domestic and care workers today, Amalia has her own children to care for and home to clean. In fact, it was early motherhood due to being raped at age fourteen by the son of her father's friend, and then being forced to marry the rapist, that drove her into what became a career in domestic service. Because her gang-affiliated husband "had money only off and on," she "took a job 'helping out'" in an El Paso home for "\$3 a day" (23). Soon she began to work in several homes because her mother "had begun to demand that she help her and her father, who was usually out of work" and drunk (25). Amalia was forced to take on the care burden while still a teenager. The care work of society disproportionately falls to poor women of color who have few other options.

In the current moment of the novel, with her children now teenagers, she still cannot make ends meet with the depressed pay of care work. She notes that being paid in

cash for her cleaning services, “without deductions” is “essential to her day-to-day survival” (42). After Amalia’s oldest son, Manny, goes to prison and dies there (a likely suicide that she refuses to accept), she moves her other two children out of that “*barrio* in East Los Angeles” to the tiny Hollywood bungalow. Unable to pay the rent on her meager income despite having many employers, she invites her boyfriend, Raynaldo, to live with them. The many years of poverty are partially the cause of Amalia’s coping mechanism of denial and delusion. She has convinced herself that Raynaldo is a good man and that she loves him, mostly because he actually helps pay the rent, despite the early signs that eventually lead to her discovery that he has been sexually threatening her adolescent daughter, Gloria. In the early pages of the novel, Amalia thinks, “What had Gloria wanted to tell her the other morning when she hadn’t been able to listen because she was on her way to work and came back too late to ask her?” (8) Despite the work strategies she employs—daily, more flexible work; being paid in cash; selecting many employers instead of one—Amalia is among the working poor and unable to adequately provide for her children economically, or even as well as as she would like to emotionally. She is not making a living wage that would allow her to adequately care for herself and her dependents.

Amalia from Rechy’s novel and Rosario from Rikken’s film both work the long hours of an unprotected workday that sometimes extends even into the time and space of their own homes. As noted above, Amalia’s work schedule allows her little time to spend with her children, causing them to be more exposed to the systemic violence of their neighborhood. Similarly, early establishing shots in Rikken’s film show Rosario traveling to work in the early-morning dark, and then leaving her second job at the Snyder home in

the dark of the evening. At varying moments, both women are forced to supplement their income with take-home sewing work. Amalia remembers that she “occasionally took in piecework to do at home. Her children would help. Gloria would adjust the expensive labels, Juan would glue them on the garments, and Amalia would sew them” (56). In discussing the feminization of globalized labor, José David Saldivar argues that this passage of Rechy’s novel shows how extra sewing work “mak[es] the domestic space of home a site of labor” (90). It is another sign of the globalized nature of LA’s economy to which not only Amalia but her dependent children contribute.

Sewing, as traditionally feminized domestic work, also serves as a supplement for Rosario’s income, a way for her to save for the legal fees of obtaining papers more quickly. Although the space of her apartment is never shown as a sewing workspace, on their way to work, Rosario comments to her roommate that she finished the dress she was making for a girl (likely for a *quinceañera*) for which her parents paid \$53. The roommate quickly responds with a calculation that she only has to finish 48 more dresses to meet her goal—a statement that discourages Rosario. As women of color excluded either legally or practically from the formal employment sector and the benefits of its protected workday and wages, Rosario and Amalia enter the exploitation of the informal labor market. Even in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the labor conditions of the domestic work that is available to these women debunk the myth of equal opportunity and prosperity for those who are willing to work hard in the US. This gendered, classed, and racialized work does not “pay off” no matter how many hours they are willing to sacrifice to it.

Part of what distinguishes domestic work from other forms of labor is the additional burden of what Mary Romero calls “emotional labor” that is expected from women like Amalia and Rosario without reciprocal treatment from the employer, who is also almost always female.¹⁵ While caregivers who do nurturant¹⁶ work like Rosario might expect to provide emotional support for the children in their care, oftentimes it is not the children but the employer who demands their emotional attention. Even housecleaners like Amalia, whose care work is non-nurturant can be expected to engage in personal conversations or relationships with their employer. Romero writes, “Domestics are hired not only for their physical labor but to do emotional labor” (135). Therefore, beyond whatever cleaning and care responsibilities they perform, “private household workers manipulate and manage their feelings to fulfill the psychological needs of their employers” (135). While Hondagneu-Sotelo claims that many Latina domestic workers long for a more personal relationship with their employers—or what they often refer to as *consideración*, meaning a personal kind of respect not only for what they do but also for who they are (*Doméstica* 171-72)—both scholars agree that the personal relationships employers foster tend to reinforce hierarchies of power between employer and employee. The emotional labor is one-sided, and the more privileged female employer determines the limits of that relationship.

Both Rosario and Amalia are expected to perform emotional labor with their employers. Even as a housecleaner who works in many different homes and, therefore,

¹⁵ Dependency scholars, like Eva Kittay, tend to use the term “affective labor” in reference to this aspect of care work.

¹⁶ See Footnote 17 in the Introduction of this dissertation.

spends less time in each of them, Amalia expresses irritation at her employers' tendency to encumber her with their personal lives in the following recollection:

The people she did housework for had very little reality for Amalia, only outlines; a newly divorced woman, a single man, a married couple with children in school. She was no longer surprised at how often the women gave her dresses they had no more use for—and that she wouldn't be found dead in, thank you; nor how often some berated her with their problems—as if she didn't have any, none. With some of her employers, she pretended to know only enough English to get by, and so to limit any conversation with them, conversation which was always about them.... Eventually—she was a good worker, recommended to others—she retained only jobs where the inhabitants would be home briefly, if at all, while she was there. (Rechy 56)

Because of her mobility as a housecleaner, Amalia can at least mitigate the hierarchies of power forced upon her by emotional labor demands. Rosario, on the other hand, as a live-out worker and an undocumented person, effectually loses one of her jobs when her employer finds out that Rosario is not exclusively devoted to the maintenance of her own palatial home. In what seems to be a vengeful act of jealousy, Mrs. McKenzie fires Rosario, appending her speech with a reference to Rosario's having another job at a different house. I will analyze this power dynamic as particularly associated with Rosario's lack of citizenship rights below, but clearly both Rosario and Amalia represent the existence of a second class of racialized workers in the late 20th and early 21st centuries' global economy. While the accumulation of capital depends on the (increasingly feminized) cheap labor of Chicana/o and Mexican workers, large-scale social hierarchies that mirror the individual power dynamics of employer-employee relationships in domestic work frame these women of color as a second class that drains state resources.

The historical moment of the early 90s in which Rechy sets his novel lands Amalia right in the middle of the Reagan- and Bush-era diatribes against the so-called “welfare queen”—a fabricated scapegoat figure represented as a black or Latina single mother who, rather than choosing to work, lives off of welfare checks as a societal dependent. These administrations that had exacerbated the already dire systemic causes of poverty for women of color went on to foment public sentiment against dependency and simultaneously furthered the erasure of motherhood as real work.¹⁷ In his 2007 book *Blame Welfare, Ignore Poverty and Inequality*, law professor Joel Handler charts the ways in which the social causes of poverty are ignored while welfare is maligned. He details some of the misconceptions about welfare in the following:

The myths about welfare recipients, mostly poor single mothers and their children, stereotype them as “welfare dependent,” when in fact most stay on welfare for a short time. They are perceived as promiscuous young women who use welfare to have more children, when in fact their fertility rates are lower than for all women in the same age categories. They are vilified for using welfare to avoid work, when in fact many are working while on aid and most leave welfare because they become employed. Still, many face barriers to employment. . . . Most important, the image of welfare recipients is mostly of young, uneducated African American women, when in fact there are considerable demographic variations among welfare recipients. (53)

Dependency has been demonized in US culture in order to perpetuate the myth of meritocracy and racial equality. The historical social forces that keep large numbers of women of color, particularly single mothers, in impoverished conditions are exculpated by racialized rhetoric about an individual lack of independence and work ethic. As Latin American immigration to the US increased through the 80s and 90s, the stereotype of the

¹⁷ See Paul Pierson’s book *Dismantling the Welfare State?: Reagan, Thatcher, and the Politics of Retrenchment* (1994) for a closer look at the Reagan-Bush era of drastic cutbacks in public housing, food stamps, Medicaid, and attempts to reduce Social Security benefits to people with disabilities.

“welfare queen” began to include Latinas, including Mexican and Chicana single mothers who were accused of simply not wanting to work. When wealth did not “trickle down” through the channels of capitalism as Reaganomics promised, those on the furthest margins of society and most in need of help were blamed for the crisis; these “welfare queens” were purportedly to blame for the economic crisis of the early 90s because they were draining all of the country’s resources and living the high life as dependents on the tax-payer’s dime.

In addition to targeting dependency, the political rhetoric of the “welfare queen” perpetuated the erroneous idea that the unpaid care work of reproductive labor—in the form of raising children—somehow does not count as real work.¹⁸ Because it is not paid employment, the contributions of motherwork to the national economy have been completely disregarded. Ann Crittenden’s book *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World Is Still the Least Valued* (2001) traces the erasure of the social value of women’s unpaid motherwork in the US. She argues that because the gendered division of labor in the 19th century resulted in men moving away from a barter system to a cash economy while women’s labor in the home remained unpaid, “women’s family labor lost status as ‘work,’ [and] was increasingly sentimentalized as a ‘labor of love’” (47). While Crittenden does not argue against motherhood being about caring and emotions rather than monetary compensation, in her book she tallies up the unheralded contributions and hidden subsidies that the unpaid work of mothers adds to the US economy. Like her, some earlier feminists argued for fair compensation for the so-called

¹⁸ This discourse dates back to Reagan’s 1976 speech as a presidential candidate in which he invented the term “welfare queen,” referring to a non-existent woman of color in Chicago’s Southside who had purportedly been exploiting welfare benefits and making over \$150,000.

“housewives” that perform the reproductive labor of producing the next generation of productive citizens and workers. Those who attack the single mothers who receive government assistance fail to recognize that raising children alone on the meager income that welfare allots is work in itself. Someone has to care for society’s children, all of whom are in a state of dependence that cannot be avoided. Dependency is a fact of life.

The cultural vilification of dependency stigmatizes those women on the outer margins of society, like Amalia, who genuinely need financial assistance as they perform the unpaid work of motherhood. Amalia’s first husband, Salvador, whom she was forced to marry when just a teenager after he raped her, ends up in jail for his gang-related activity in drugs and assault. This leaves her pregnant and alone. While she is able, she continues to work in the houses of El Paso’s affluent residents. One of her employers, a lawyer, helps her file for divorce from Salvador, who had stolen money from her before going to prison. This supposedly lazy Chicana had not only worked to save the money for her own rent but her parents’ as well. The lawyer has also helped her secure social assistance—a “one-bedroom government project unit” (26)—so that she can care for her newborn child. Rechy disrupts the myths detailed above in Handler’s book by detailing the constant surveillance of so-called “welfare queens” who supposedly cheat the system and become rich. Because she is on public assistance, the space of her home is not private but open to state investigation. Amalia remembers that “she lay in bed—it was still dark, just dawning—holding her child in her arms and looking at him in awe. There was a loud knock at the door” (26). It is a woman making spot checks for the government, to make sure there is not a man living there with her who could be providing for her. She questions Amalia about a scarf, asking her if she’s sure it is not a man’s tie. She then

insinuates that having just one child to care for is a dubious justification for public assistance. Rechy narrates her thoughts: “Amalia wanted to tell this woman to get out of her house, tell her she didn’t want their welfare, that she could not leave her child alone” (26-27). Domestic workers like Amalia, who often care for children in addition to cleaning, have historically been at the end of the care chain. While they care for other children, who cares for theirs? Amalia later finds an old nun who had been her teacher in Catholic school, who is willing to watch her son, Manny, for free. These types of care arrangements are often informal and interdependent, which accounts for women being on welfare for short stints at a time, as outlined above. Her work caring for a newborn is not socially valued. Even Amalia has internalized this devaluation, and resents accepting public money even though she is making a real contribution to society. Amalia goes off of welfare a short time later when she returns to cleaning houses.

Although she had been on welfare assistance only when her oldest son, Manny, was a baby, she is still being racialized as a “welfare queen” in the current moment of the novel in the early 90s when she has teenage children. As she buys a lottery ticket in a convenience store near her Hollywood home, the store clerk makes a racist welfare joke. He says, “If you win, that’ll keep you off welfare—at least for a while” (136). When Amalia becomes incensed and challenges the man, who is also of Mexican origin, he ironically reveals that his joke is in fact directed at her race. He replies that it is a joke that he tells “to all [his] Hispanic customers” (136). The racialized “welfare queen” stereotype so prevalent in the political discourse of the 80s and 90s has become such a dominant cultural trope that even another person of color has internalized the racism and is now deploying it. Amalia painfully recalls the time that she received welfare when this

man directs his “joke” at her. So many years later, she still feels the unfair stigma against dependency. Welfare has been transformed into something one should be ashamed of when dependency is a natural part of life. Caring for children is a necessary labor that needs to be recognized and provided for through public funds when necessary, not burdened with the racialized and gendered badges of shame associated with dependency.

The cultural and political attack on welfare in the 80s and 90s coincided with the rise of xenophobic and reactionary new nativist movements that railed against the large influx of Mexican immigrants to California and other states during these two decades. Mass migration and globalization expert Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco outlines the ways in which anti-immigrant sentiment paints undocumented immigrants as social dependents.¹⁹ In 1996, a hotbed year for the ongoing immigration debate as well as the passing of a welfare reform bill²⁰, Suárez-Orozco wrote, “Those who see immigration as a burden maintain the new immigrants simply cannot resist the seductive entitlements of the welfare state” (156). This statement bares the connection between the excoriation of welfare and the new nativism of the past few decades: the “welfare queens” and the “illegals” are racialized as inherently lazy individuals who endlessly take money from hardworking and self-sufficient (white) Americans. This viewpoint discounts the economic and social contributions of those who perform the hardest work for the lowest wages, much of it care work. Those who are mothering their own children do some of the

¹⁹ Suárez-Orozco’s article is written in response to California’s Proposition 187, the controversial anti-immigration legislation, which I discuss in the next paragraph.

²⁰ The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was enacted in 1996 as a bipartisan effort. The Republican controlled Congress made this bill part of their “Contract with America” and Democratic President Bill Clinton touted it as a fulfillment of his 1992 campaign promises to “end the welfare system as we know it.” PRWORA implements a “workfare” component that forces single mothers to work in the formal sector in order to receive cash assistance benefits.

hardest work for no wage at all, or perhaps only a minimal government stipend in the form of cash assistance, food stamps, or government housing. Suárez-Orozco also points out the irrationality in the new nativist charge that undocumented immigrants come here for welfare benefits when the undocumented do not qualify for welfare (155).²¹ These claims are not founded on economic threat, but are rather a product of xenophobia and racism that wield the stigma of dependency as an ideological weapon.

Longstanding antagonism towards dependency in the US materializes in the language of California's infamous Proposition 187, a 1994 measure that sought to deny undocumented immigrants access to public services, specifically health care and education. Alex M. Saragoza refers to Prop 187 as "the touchstone of the new nativism" and argues that "the promoters of the referendum conducted a xenophobic campaign" that drew from "the discursive practices afforded by reaganism (immigrants as a drain on the state's resources, especially its schools and social services)" (236). It passed by nearly a 60-40 margin. The text of Prop 187 purposefully inspires fear and criminalizes immigrants, alluding to an invasion of "persons entering this country unlawfully" from which the people have a "right to the protection of the government" (qtd. in Orozco-Suárez 151). It is in the very first line that the proposition paints the immigrant population as dependent persons that are leeching off of California's economy by claiming that the people of California "have suffered and are suffering economic hardship caused by the presence of illegal immigrants in this state" (qtd. in Orozco-Suárez 151). It

²¹ Of course, children that are born in the US are entitled to social supports as US citizens and future workers. Recent political debates have termed these children "anchor babies," and new nativists have argued for a revision of the laws that grant citizenship to all children born in the US.

was along these masked economic lines that the proponents of Prop 187 would justify their cause as non-discriminatory.

The economic argument made by the new Nativists not only aims to disguise the racist, anti-immigrant policies contained in Proposition 187 but also draws upon the longstanding condemnation of dependency in the US. It brands immigrants as dependents rather than contributors who in fact provide a large subsidy to the state economy in the form of the huge profit margins gained by those who pay less than minimum wage for long hours in jobs that most Americans have rejected, revive abandoned urban sectors with local ethnic businesses, and provide a “flexible” workforce that has kept some industries that would otherwise have moved offshore present in the US (Suárez-Orozco 156). The myth of the self-made American fails to recognize universal human interdependence. As such, a strategic tactic in a xenophobic campaign is to project an image that opposes this supposedly independent American. Omitting the need for labor that brought Mexican immigrants to California in the first place, the promoters of Prop 187 cast these workers as freeloaders who came here to bleed the economic resources. The law specifically targeted female immigrants who are more likely to be in the US with children who need precisely those public services Prop 187 set out to withhold—namely, education and healthcare. This hypocritical stance fails to see immigrants as humans with bodies that need care and families that require support. While in this instance the courts eventually recognized the unconstitutionality of the law, its popularity shows that care concerns are routinely excluded from rights discourse allowing care labor, specifically, to be easily commodified.

While domestic work has long history of being gendered, racialized, and classed, the new nativist movement has heightened national scrutiny of legal status, making citizenship a category of social and political exclusion. Nineteenth and early twentieth century ethnic groups of immigrant women who worked as domestics in large numbers—the Irish, German, and Scandinavians, for example—suffered under the same low wages, unprotected workday, and lack of privacy as Latinas today. However, they did not have the constant anxiety about not having papers, INS raids, deportation, and generally having to live without any guaranteed rights under the law. Lisa Lowe’s book *Immigrant Acts* focuses largely on the politics of Asian immigration, but her discussion of how ideologies surrounding citizenship are produced by culture in the US are useful here in thinking about how undocumented immigrants are framed by the new Nativist movements. If the paragon of citizenry is defined as the “independent, self-made man” (2) as Lowe suggests, then the maligning of undocumented women who are bound up in dependency with children who need education and healthcare pits them as the least deserving of citizenship rights and privileges. Domestic and care workers, who are already bound up in dependency by association are further tainted when they have children or other dependents for whom they assume care. Chicana and Mexican dependency workers, many of whom are also mothers, do not match up to mythic representations of the US citizen, and are therefore excluded socially on the basis of citizenship whether they actually have documented status or not. Amalia of Rechy’s novel and Rosario of Riggan’s film are both at the mercy of state immigration authorities despite the difference of one being a legal citizen and one being an undocumented immigrant.

The film *Under the Same Moon* certainly romanticizes the border and fails to accurately portray the constant fear and imminent violence that hound the lives of those who are undocumented in the US; however, the film is able to display and humanize the story of so-called “illegal immigrants” for a mainstream US audience that would be less likely to watch a film that dealt with these issues without the sugar coating. The main conflict of the cross-border separation of Rosario from her son, Carlitos, is magically resolved at the end with a *deus ex machina* in which the 9-year-old actually finds his mother without an address in Los Angeles solely by remembering the landmarks she had described during their weekly phone conversations. Prior to this, Carlitos miraculously manages to cross the border undetected inside the seat of a van, avoids being sold into prostitution, escapes an ICE raid, meets his father for the first time in Arizona, and obtains a job to pay his own bus fare to LA. Indeed, the political resistance of the film is undoubtedly tempered by its fairytale ending. Despite this unrealistic storyline, Rikken brings out the human complexities of immigration and does not allow them to be flattened into simplistic policy solutions (all the while keeping the dialogue in Spanish with English subtitles—a political statement in itself). In particular, the film actualizes the constant threat of state authority and violence that undocumented people face. In my estimation, this makes it worthy of study and qualifies it as a Chicana text of resistance, albeit limited.

As undocumented persons, Rosario and Carlitos live outside the protection of labor laws and the fundamental rights that are purportedly guaranteed by citizenship in the US. Rikken’s film opens with Rosario waking up traumatized after dreaming about her own border-crossing, depicted on the river with floodlights, sirens, and people from

all walks of life (as opposed to the criminals that “illegals” are portrayed as) being handcuffed roughly while Rosario narrowly escapes. During the violent ICE raid of a tomato farm in Texas, several men are beaten with batons and shots are fired in the air. Although he is merely a child, Carlitos already fears the police, who he is told will deport him if they find out he is “illegal.” Indeed, Enrique, a man who accompanies the child to LA and becomes his stand-in father, finally takes a police beating and apprehension so that Carlitos can escape and be miraculously reunited with his mother.

Economic necessity and Rosario’s desire to reunite with her son drive her to work in more than one house, but each new employer increases the risk of betrayal and deportation. Rosario lives in a converted garage in East LA; renting a more conventional apartment would require a credit check based on a social security number. The aforementioned Spanish radio program explains California’s denial of driver’s licenses to the undocumented. Therefore, even if Rosario had the money for better housing or a car to drive to work, she has no access to these basic entitlements; she is disenfranchised from political life. Persons without legal documentation in the US often live in fear of illness, accident, anything that will attract the attention of authority or put them into the system and, thus, reveal their presence. Simply living and working is a crime. There is little to no recourse for rights abuses, personal property infringements, or labor exploitation. In comparison to many undocumented persons who are increasingly under attack by state enforced violence and human rights abuses, Riggen’s characters—Rosario and Carlitos—bear relatively light injustices. Like most domestics who work in private homes, Rosario has no guarantees of fair labor practices; though laws exist, they are rarely if ever enforced. Those without papers live completely outside of the law.

In *Under the Same Moon*, Rikken's use of space emphasizes how one of Rosario's employers—Mrs. McKenzie—wields Rosario's lack of citizenship as a weapon of labor exploitation that she uses to reinforce race and class power structures. I made mention of this scene in my previous discussion of emotional labor. Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo addresses the same enforcement of social hierarchies in domestic employer-employee relationships in a whole chapter called "Blowups" in which she shows that class insubordination (118) or a "lack of gratitude and deference" (121) can lead to abruptly ending these informal labor arrangements. Such is the case when Mrs. McKenzie essentially fires Rosario for splitting her days between two houses. Rikken constructs the space of the McKenzie mansion that Rosario cleans as impersonal and cavernous—not only wide but vertically expansive—with white marbled wall space and open rooms that showcase art pieces and minimalist furniture. It appears that Mrs. McKenzie lives there alone, at least for the time being. As Rosario writes her son's name in the glass surfaces she is wiping clean of any human traces, Mrs. McKenzie walks by on the phone, saying, "But why can't you come home?" Both women are lonely, but one has access to wealth and power. This social inequality is emphasized in the scene when Mrs. McKenzie adds a previously unmentioned task of repotting plants to Rosario's regular workday. She is filmed high above Rosario on a white catwalk that overlooks the room in which Rosario stands. The open space echoes, establishing further distance between the two women. Responding that she will not have time because she has to get to her next job where she cares for another family's toddler-aged son, Rosario promises to attend to the plants the next morning. Mrs. McKenzie, seemingly exasperated that Rosario is not her sole possession, responds, "I guess I'll just have to do it myself."

The on-screen spatial separation of the two women, which parallels their social segregation, continues in the scene that takes place the next day, when Mrs. McKenzie fires Rosario. Waiting until Rosario has finished her work for the day, Mrs. McKenzie tells her that she has “decided to try someone new” and insinuates that she need not return to the house. As they speak, a large potted palm tree divides the space between them, which also recalls the source of the tension—potted plants. Because Rosario needs both jobs, she eagerly asks if she did something wrong. Mrs. McKenzie is adamant, firing her apparently without cause other than the implied inconvenience of the plant incident. When Rosario relents and says that she needs to get paid for her last few days of work, Mrs. McKenzie responds, “I don’t think so.” When she insists that she’s worked half the week and desperately grasps her employer’s arm, Mrs. McKenzie recoils and threatens Rosario on the basis of her citizenship status: “What are you going to do, call the police? Oh, I just remembered. You’re an illegal, aren’t you? Not a good idea” (*Under the Same Moon*). Throughout the scene, Mrs. McKenzie is holding a mobile phone, brandishing it as a weapon that can be used to make one life-altering phone call to state immigration authorities. The presence of the phone further reinforces their unequal access not only to state power but to economic privilege. An establishing scene in the film shows Rosario’s weekly ritual of walking to a public pay phone to call her son in Mexico. Either the expense or the application process makes a private phone inaccessible to the undocumented Rosario. She is forced to relinquish payment for half a week’s work because she lacks access to legal recourse or law enforcement, but Mrs. McKenzie’s real threat when she fires Rosario is against her right to exist in the United States. Her care

labor in the McKenzie home has no political value without legal documents; she is excluded from legal and political protection on the grounds of citizenship status.

Exploring the limits of citizenship through the use of flashback in his novel, John Rechy interjects the space of a Los Angeles sweatshop where Amalia worked before returning to private housework. He locates the poor labor conditions usually imagined in the developing world right in the entertainment capital of the world when he writes, “On the top floor of an old six-story building—just blocks away from glassy new ones—electric fans churned only hot air while dozens of Mexican women sewed steadily in crowded rows of buzzing machines” (48). Like cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, factory sewing continues to be a racialized and gendered form of domestic labor, with conditions such that only the most desperate take on this employment. Because working at a sweatshop is closer to formalized labor, it may be more stable but the risk of working without papers is higher; these sites are subject to raids by state immigration officials, as seen in Rechy’s novel. Despite Amalia’s legal status as a US citizen, her ethnic identity as a Chicana subjects her to state surveillance and inspection upon demand. Similar to the state intrusion into her home by the welfare agent, INS officials raid the sweatshop and demand that Amalia prove her citizenship with legal documents. She resists to a certain degree. Rechy writes, “Amalia was indignant. Did she look like an illegal? Didn’t this man see that her dress was pretty, fresh, that she wore sophisticated makeup? She answered in her best English that she was an American citizen, born in El Paso, in Texas” (52). Her thoughts reveal that she has internalized the social hierarchy of citizenship status, yet for all her perceptions of herself as superior, her citizenship status is rendered nominal in the execution of state authority. Despite her

protests, “Still, he demanded her papers” (52). She has no real expectation that her citizenship status separates her from the other women, both documented and not, in the sweatshop, as made known by a previous assertion to a co-worker that she carries her Texas birth certificate with her at all times (49). Experience has taught her that she can be accosted by the state at any moment. Yet, her refusal to submit immediately to the state’s racialization by the INS official who demands her papers during the raid marks her individual process of gaining social consciousness in this hidden space within Los Angeles wherein state surveillance and even violence affects citizens and non-citizens of color alike.

The culminating point of resistance in Rechy’s novel occurs when Amalia transgresses the spatial boundaries that segregate the privileged from the working class people of color that power the economy in the global city of LA. When she enters the upscale Beverly Center mall, the separate but coexisting spaces of Los Angeles are brought together. Up to this point, Amalia has survived the multiple oppressions based on her race, gender, and class—all of which have been manifested in her social position as a domestic worker—by refusing to see the reality around her. She uses her religion as an escape, often imagining herself like the Virgin Mary who is a mother like herself. When physically abused, she has always shrunken into herself and taken it until it stopped. She has made a habit of re-imagining her world as she would like it to be—one in which she lives in glitzy Hollywood, makes pretty dresses for herself and her daughter, pretends she is married to her live-in boyfriend, who is really there to help pay the rent, and refuses to believe that her son’s death in prison was a suicide. In the luxury mall of Beverly Hills, the truth finally hits her in a revelatory moment after she sees a pretty dress in a window

and realizes, “she might even have sewn a part of it at the sewing factory!” (202). Shortly after this realization, she comes to understand that the stares she has been getting are not men admiring her looks but tacit accusations of her being “out of place” (202). When only a few moments later, in a random act of violence, a man holds her as a hostage at gunpoint in the mall, Amalia performs an act of defiance that signals her achievement of an increased social consciousness. She begins to retreat into herself, to take the violence as she always has, but instead pushes her captor down as she screams, “*No more!*” (205). She has come to accept that her oldest son killed himself in prison, that the next oldest has been hustling as a male prostitute for money, and that her teenage daughter is being preyed upon by her live-in boyfriend.

Rechy marks this revelation of the truth with religious manifestations, since this is how Amalia understands her world. In this moment of self-definition, she feels moved to bless the man who had held her at gunpoint, who now lies bleeding after being shot by the police. Rechy frames a pieta scene: “The man’s head fell onto her lap” (205). Here, she literally takes on the role of the Virgin. Having doubted seeing the vision of the cross from that morning, only in this acceptance of the truth of her life does she receive the spiritual manifestation of the Virgin of Guadalupe marked by the color blue and standing “on a gathering of red roses” (206). In this moment, she feels “resurrected with new life” (206). Rather than deflating what is a powerful symbol of faith for many working class Mexican and Chicana women, Rechy combines Amalia’s political and social enlightenment with a religious revelation. This manifestation of truth occurs only as the separate spaces of the global economy of LA collide, represented by the literal commodity of a designer dress and the commodified domestic laborer who sewed it.

The feminization of the global labor force manifested in part by the demand for domestic workers in cities like Los Angeles has in some ways given Mexican women more autonomy to migrate on their own, and at the same time has altered patterns of care in what Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila describe as “transnational motherhood.” In their 1997 article, which predates Hondagneu-Sotelo’s 2001 book-length ethnography of domestic workers in LA (*Dó mestica*), the authors argue that, “Examining transnational motherhood, defined not as physical circuits of migration but as the circuits of affection, caring, and financial support that transcend national borders, provides an opportunity to gender views of transnationalism and immigration” (550). A significant portion of the women that Hondagneu-Sotelo was interviewing in the 90s had left children in Mexico and Central America to be cared for by others, usually relatives (with a strong preference for the maternal grandmother) but also by paid caregivers. Thus, the global chain of care extends as women who migrate to care for the households and children of privileged US families pass on the care of their own children to others. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila are interested in the ways in which these women break out of traditional caring roles and redefine motherhood for themselves in a transnational context; however, they recognize the eschewing of care concerns in the new Nativist policies that call for workers without any provision for their dependents. They write,

While proponents of Proposition 187 have never questioned California’s reliance on low-waged Latino immigrant workers, this restrictionist policy calls for fully dehumanized immigrant workers, not workers with family and family needs (such as education and health services for children). In this respect, transnational mothering’s externalization of the cost of labor reproduction to Mexico and Central America is a dream come true for the proponents of Proposition 187 (568).

Therefore, although the shifts in the global economy do allow women more mobility and wage-earning power, these gains in social equality still exclude dependency and care in the framing of liberal rights.

Under the Same Moon admittedly sentimentalizes transnational motherhood care arrangements, but through the use of melodramatic elements the film argues for a much-needed revision to current notions of justice. Certainly many Mexican women find the redefinition of their gendered role as mothers and primary caretakers empowering and find satisfaction in providing for the material wellbeing of their children while arranging for someone else to perform the day-to-day care work. However, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila notably end their article with a wider view of justice that would include care, not just empower women as individuals:

While demanding the right for women workers to live with their children may provoke critiques of sentimentality, essentialism, and the glorification of motherhood, demanding the right for women workers to choose their own motherhood arrangements would be the beginning of truly just family and work policies, policies that address not only inequalities of gender but also inequalities of race, class, and citizenship status. (568)

Transnational motherhood challenges traditional gender prescriptions, but the injustice lies in the lack of alternatives for those women who would choose to keep their children with them. A society that demands labor, must also be willing to accept the costs of care that come with the workers as human beings.

Riggen's film does exude sentimentality and has been critiqued for reinscribing traditional roles of motherhood couched in Catholicism,²² but it is through this melodramatic form, with *telenovela*-style acting and overwrought affect, that care

²² See Armida de la Garza (2009) and Heather Hewett (2009)

concerns are brought to the forefront. Again, the use of space in the film is instrumental in unmasking the inequalities bound up in the contradictory demand for immigrant domestic labor and simultaneous social exclusion of the undocumented worker. With editing techniques, the film consistently jumps back and forth between Rosario in LA and Carlitos on his journey from Mexico to find her. In crossing the border illegally in the empty seat of a minivan, Carlitos lies in the stifling darkness as the vehicle is impounded for unpaid traffic tickets. As he recites the Lord's Prayer to comfort himself, the film cuts to Rosario sitting on the bed of another child who is also lying in the dark. Rosario sings Tommy Snyder a lullaby and kisses him goodnight, caring for this American toddler even as her own child has been left to the dangerous conditions of illegally crossing the border. The parallels between the two boys lying in the dark only call attention to the contrast in privilege between them. As Rosario watches Tommy's mother, who has just returned home, tending to her son, she is visibly saddened by her transnational motherhood arrangements. In her case, leaving her son in the care of others was not an empowering act of mobility and autonomy, but rather an imposed separation due to economic necessity and unjust immigration policies that create a cheap labor force precisely by rendering these workers "illegal". Even the last scene of the movie, with its miraculous reunification of mother and son in East LA draws upon a melodramatic use of space to show the suffering caused by forced separation that restricts the freedom of Mexican immigrant women to care for their children as they choose. Rosario and Carlitos find each other but they are never physically reunited; they remain on opposite street corners with the danger of heavy traffic impeding their ability to connect. Though the film ends unrealistically, it does protest the lack of choice in care arrangements due to the

commodification of domestic labor and the failure to recognize dependency as an intrinsic part of the human condition.

Mexican and Chicana domestic and care workers like Rosario and Amalia inhabit the invisible spaces in Los Angeles, working in private homes where labor exploitation goes largely unnoticed and unchecked. As wealth concentrates in global cities the demand for cheap labor to perform society's care work rises, creating two co-existing but segregated communities in a partitioned geographic space. This late 20th- and early 21st-century rise of a new servant class of Latinas unfortunately reiterates the historically poor labor conditions for domestic workers in the US, where dependency is shunned and care undervalued. Labeling both immigrants and women of color as social dependents, or "welfare queens," neoconservatives blame the most disenfranchised in society for consuming public resources. These same women are often the working poor upon whose backs the rich are getting richer. The rise of new Nativist movements, as seen in California and particularly with Proposition 187, demonstrates the contradictory nature of globalized capitalism—demanding the labor but rejecting the laborer—in a country that touts itself as the forerunner of equality and justice. Care concerns have been so excised from liberal rights discourse that even labor and immigration activists stop short of demanding rights not only for the worker but for their dependents, such that transnational motherhood could be a choice rather than an imposition. Dependency affects all humans at some stage in life and, therefore, the care of dependents needs to be recognized as a basic human right that extends to all, regardless of race or citizenship status.

Chapter 4

Unsustainable Independence: The Global Care Crisis and American Imperialism in

Santiago's *America's Dream* and Cruz's *Let It Rain Coffee*



Image 3: Homework in the So-Called Needlework Industry.
Ponce, Puerto Rico. 1938.

Nearly forty years after the US took possession of Puerto Rico, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote in her weekly column in the popular magazine, *Woman's Home Companion*, “Many times I wonder whether the people of the United States have any real interest in our insular possessions. I doubt if many of us even know that we own the Virgin Islands or Puerto Rico or Hawaii” (4). The first lady goes on to address the wellbeing of Puerto Ricans, women in particular. It was 1934, and she had just returned from a tour of the United States’ holdings in the Caribbean. It was a time of financial relief and reform for all Americans as the New Deal began to take effect. In her text, Mrs. Roosevelt expresses

concern over the poor labor conditions in the expansive needlework industry, especially bemoaning the meager wages paid to the women (and girls) doing piecework sewing from home as in the image above, taken just a few years later. Detailing the discrepancy between what the women are paid for a dozen handkerchiefs or nightgowns and what her readership pays for those products in the US, Roosevelt reveals the exploitation of Puerto Rican women's domestic labor, the work that supposedly unites all women. She concludes her piece with the following plea to her typically middle-class, white, female audience:¹ "So women let us think a little about our future citizens in all these islands and try to bring about wherever our flag lies conditions of which we can be proud" (4).² This piece establishes Puerto Rico as a colony of the US in no uncertain terms. As a "possession" of the US, Puerto Rico's economy—of which the needlework trade was a part—was fully controlled by American political power. By this point in the 20th century, the generally privileged readership of *Woman's Home Companion* had stopped doing most of its own sewing, opting out of laborious tasks by buying the finished goods produced by the cheap domestic labor of poor women outside of the continental US. Roosevelt's writing appeals to US women's sense of sisterhood in domestic and care work, clearly drawing a distinction between privileged US consumers and poor Puerto Rican needle workers. The text ends with a vague but optimistic call for increased economic and political equality, tacitly imagining the elevation of the women of Puerto Rico from colonial subjects to full-fledged US citizens worthy of the same fair labor

¹ *Woman's Home Companion* was one of the top three women's magazines in circulation during the 1930s. Its content ranged from fiction to educational and political articles to advertisements that "provided advice about homemaking and woman's proper role" (86-87) according to Mary Helen Zuckerman.

² In the phrase "all these islands" Roosevelt refers to her article's previous discussion of the Virgin Islands—St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix—which she visited on the same tour in 1934.

conditions and wages for which the administration was fighting.³ It implicitly argues for the inclusion of Puerto Rico and the other “insular possessions” into the cultural and political boundaries of the US state, and opposes their exclusion as colonies ripe for exploitation.

I begin this chapter on domestic and care work in contemporary US Latina/o fiction, specifically my analysis of Esmeralda Santiago’s *America’s Dream* (1996) and Angie Cruz’s *Let It Rain Coffee* (2005), with this study of Eleanor Roosevelt’s 1934 article because it points to the long history of US colonial exploitation of women workers who perform domestic and care labor. It also serves as a point of departure by which to measure the degree to which the extraction of women’s labor from the Caribbean was not alleviated as Roosevelt had hoped but, unfortunately, was increased and entrenched by the global economic shifts of the later 20th century. While the political and economic control of both Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic by the US began in the late 19th century with sugar plantations and a desire for military outposts in the region,⁴ the 20th century decline of manufacturing and the emergence of a service economy in the US created an aggressive demand for women’s dependency labor that continues today. As Grace Chang argues in her book *Disposable Domestic: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy*, “First World countries routinely make deliberate economic interventions to facilitate their continued extraction of Third World resources, including

³ Officially, the Jones Act of 1917 granted US citizenship to all Puerto Ricans.

⁴ While my literary and historical discussion in this chapter will focus on the Hispanophone Caribbean—namely Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, as well as Cuba to a degree—it is important to note that the US exerted the same type of control over much of the Caribbean, including the West Indies, Jamaica, Haiti, and others.

and especially people” (3).⁵ Although Puerto Rico’s official status is “commonwealth” (in Spanish, “estado libre asociado”), it is essentially, and widely recognized as, a US colony. I argue that the Dominican Republic, although officially a sovereign nation, historically has been and continues to function as if it were a colony under US imperialism. The care crisis in the US has so far been met with women’s immigrant labor from the Global South, especially from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. The increasing dependency needs of East Coast metropolitan areas like New York are currently being filled by poor women of color, many of whom are Latina immigrants from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

Because of the shared experience of performing domestic and care work as well as being lumped into the same category of “Latina/o” in the US, this chapter on the Puerto Rican and Dominican characters in Santiago’s and Cruz’s novels will build upon my previous argument about the commodification of care labor performed by Mexican and Chicana women in LA (Chapter Three). The poor labor conditions and abuses are the same, for the most part, as are the demographics of very wealthy and very poor populations residing in the same city space, a situation that engenders a large care work industry.⁶ In Los Angeles, there is a concentrated Mexican origin population, and the shared border with Mexico accounts for a long history of fluid migration, now evidenced in the growing number of Mexican and Chicana care workers there. New York’s geographic distance from the Caribbean and its more diverse immigrant population raise

⁵ Like other scholars at the time, Grace Chang uses the terms “First World” and “Third World” in her 1990 publication. I follow the progression of current scholarship in my use of the term “Global South” to refer to those nations that would have been classified earlier as “Third World.”

⁶ See my reference to the work of Ruth Milkman, Ellen Reese, and Benita Roth. “The Macrosociology of Paid Domestic Labor” in Chapter Three.

questions that require an understanding of US colonial history in the Caribbean to explain why Puerto Ricans and, more recently, Dominicans have come to be so overrepresented in care work there. Despite the diverse origins of women working in the care industry in New York, I focus on these groups because they are the largest segments of the region's Latina/o population, which is the second highest in the country after Los Angeles. The 2010 passage of a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights in New York⁷ confirms the effectiveness of coalition building among diverse groups and the type of collective action proposed by Santiago's and Cruz's novels.

In this chapter, I argue that *America's Dream* by Esmeralda Santiago and *Let It Rain Coffee* by Angie Cruz depict the impact of the global economy on Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic that has led to the migration of at least half of the Puerto Rican population (4.6 million) and about 1.5 million Dominicans to the US. These global migration circuits, built upon the history of US colonialism and imperialism, enable the importation of labor from poor women of color as domestic and care workers to meet the care needs of an aging population and double-income families with children in New York and other global centers.⁸ The global care crisis represented in these novels results, in part, from a national culture steeped in the unsustainable, independence-based model of individual rights.⁹ The lack of individual and governmental commitment to dependent

⁷ This landmark legislation requires employers of domestic and care workers to pay overtime, allow one rest day per week, and give three days of paid leave per year. It sets up worker's compensation and disability benefits and also facilitates the process of lodging formal complaints for labor violations and sexual harassment.

⁸ As stated in Chapter Three, Saskia Sassen uses the term "global centers" to refer to those powerful metropolises, like New York and London, that determine the globalized world economy.

⁹ As stated previously in the Introduction of this dissertation, I borrow the concept of a US national culture from Lisa Lowe's book *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996) because it proves useful in the discussion of hegemonic standards in regard to immigrant populations and their inclusion/exclusion from the imagined citizenry of the US.

care depresses wages and fosters deplorable working conditions for domestic and care workers like América and Esperanza. Not only the lack of monetary compensation but the stigma associated with dependency work drive the perpetual reassignment of the care burden (as opposed to its recognition and an egalitarian redistribution) to the most vulnerable population of women—in this case, poor women of color from the Caribbean. The US currently operates under the historical myth of individual independence, when, in fact, all persons are dependent to some degree upon the care of others. These novels suggest that breaking out of individualist rights practices and forming alternative collectivities and coalitions offer hope for a redefinition of social (including feminist) values in which dependency is acknowledged, domestic and care work is valued, and the care burden is shared more equally.

América González, Santiago's protagonist, and Esperanza Colón of Cruz's novel migrate from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic respectively to the New York metropolitan area where they labor in dependency work. América works as a live-in nanny and housekeeper while Esperanza primarily performs elder care, which often requires her to sleep at the client's home on overnight shifts. Their work represents the confluence of increased care needs in the US with impoverishment and displacement in the Global South. While their individual reasons for migration differ, employment plays a central role. América, who lives on the island of Vieques in Puerto Rico, follows a job offered by the wealthy Leverett family that vacationed at the resort hotel where she works, cleaning and sometimes babysitting for guests. Santiago documents Puerto Rico's colonial history and the place of women's labor in that history as she recounts the generations of González women who have worked in the Casa del Francés, a private

residence (owned by a French man) that was developed into the tourist resort where América and her mother are employed. América uses this job offer to escape the domestic violence of her longtime boyfriend, Correa, especially after he moves their teenage daughter to his aunts' house on the main island of Puerto Rico against her wishes. She seizes the opportunity to start a new life in the Leverett's home in Westchester County, with weekend visits to her relatives in the Bronx. However, she works exhausting hours for little pay and lives in isolation despite her attempts to foster caring relationships with her employers and their children.

Cruz's Dominican protagonist, Esperanza, dreams of living the life she sees on the US television series, *Dallas*, and detests the rural village of Los Llanos where she lives with her husband and his family. After her desperate attempt to escape to the US via Puerto Rico, Esperanza's husband, Santo, agrees to move with her to the US where she believes they can own a home and live the life of luxury she has seen on TV. When her father-in-law comes from the Dominican Republic to live with them ten years later, they are still barely scraping by in a rundown apartment in Washington Heights, even with a dual-income provided by Santo driving long shifts in a taxi and Esperanza working as a home aid for the elderly. The global market has brought América and Esperanza to the US to fill the care needs of the wealthy, thereby passing the care burden to poor, immigrant women of color.

The care crisis in the US has created a vacuum in employment that pulls women from places like the Caribbean to work as nannies, maids, and home care aids for an aging population. Because New York is home to so many high-end professionals with

children, it has become a hub for the nanny industry.¹⁰ All over the nation, including the New York metropolitan area, the need for elder care workers is steadily increasing as life expectancies rise. Long workdays and demanding careers also detract from the unpaid care that adult children (mostly women) can, or are willing to, give to their parents. Like the 1930s female readership of *Woman's Home Companion*, women who can afford it today tend to purchase the domestic and care work of other women rather than performing it themselves; goods like handkerchiefs have been replaced with services like childcare and eldercare. Without adequate social or governmental recognition of dependency, care needs in the US tend to be written off as individual concerns to be filled by a private market or at the family level. As Martha Albertson Fineman argues in her book *The Autonomy Myth*, “this privatization of inevitable dependency” frustrates gender equality (37) as women are still expected to take on the primary responsibility for dependent persons like children, the aged, the disabled or infirm. These individual needs cumulatively add up to a global market in (almost exclusively female) care workers who migrate from their homes in the Global South to care for the dependent persons in wealthier countries like the US, hired and managed by women with their own careers who cannot or choose not to take up the care demands typically placed upon them.

In New York City, many of the women who fulfill society's dependency needs are of Puerto Rican and Dominican origin.¹¹ The Pew Hispanic Center (PHC) provides

¹⁰ The Park Slope Parents Guide to Hiring a Nanny/Babysitter (parkslopeparents.com) provides an example of the dynamics, including pay, arrangements, and parental concerns, that surround the booming child care industry in New York.

¹¹ Other immigrant groups, however, also make up a significant part of the workforce. For example, Tamara Mose Brown's book *Raising Brooklyn: Nannies, Childcare, and Caribbeans Creating Community* deals with West Indian women's dominant place in child care work in specific neighborhoods of New York.

detailed reports about the demographics of Latinos in the US. One 2012 PHC report titled “Characteristics of the 60 Largest Metropolitan Areas by Hispanic Population” and authored by Seth Motel and Eileen Patten compiles data (gathered in 2010) that provides revelatory statistics about Latinas/os in New York. As the largest minority ethnic group, “In the New York metropolitan area, Hispanics make up about one-in-four (24%) of all residents” with about 4.2 million people, or 8% of the entire US Latino population. This places New York as second in the nation after Los Angeles where 11% of Latinos live (Motel and Patten, “Characteristics”). Pew also reports that Puerto Ricans and Dominicans make up the largest constituencies within the broader category of Latinos or Hispanics,¹² with Puerto Ricans at 27% and Dominicans at 21%. The annual household income for Latinos lies well below the average of other New Yorkers, at \$41,000 compared to \$61,000 (Figure 10), placing them squarely in the working class. Other factors like citizenship, education, and English fluency also determine the type of employment available to Puerto Ricans and Dominicans. Motel and Patten report that only 16% of New York Latinos have at least a bachelor’s degree (Figure 7) and more than a third are less than proficient in English (Figure 8). These conditions lead many Puerto Rican and Dominican women to the domestic and care work that privileged women have chosen not to do, and which, as I have argued in Chapter 3, exploits and commodifies them.

Also, the National Domestic Workers’ Alliance integrates several smaller associations of ethnically affiliated women including Brazilian, South Asian, Haitian, and other workers.

¹² The Pew Hispanic Center states that it uses the terms Latino and Hispanic interchangeably. Regional preferences and political affiliations account for a variety of labels. I favor Latina/o and will, therefore, use Hispanic only when citing others.

While geographic proximity makes the large presence of Mexican and Chicana care workers in LA unsurprising, the migration of women to New York from the far away Caribbean begs further historical explanation. Both Cruz and Santiago point to the peculiarity of these migration patterns by including airport scenes in which their characters arrive directly from the tropical Caribbean climate to frigid winter temperatures in New York. When Don Chan, Esperanza's father-in-law walks out of the airport into the cold, he feels "himself contract into something small and hard" (Cruz 7) much like América who "is paralyzed by a gust of cold air" (Santiago 130) in her best turquoise dress and heels that are quickly ruined in the snowstorm outside the terminal. These characters are clearly out of their element, literally and figuratively. These scenes call attention to the constructed nature of these migration patterns, which bring people thousands of miles across the ocean to a completely new physical and social climate. The sizeable populations of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans can be charted to the late-19th century rise of the US as an imperial power in the Caribbean.

Long before the end of the Spanish American War, when Puerto Rico would officially become a US colony, the United States effectually controlled the island. As Luis Martínez-Fernández writes in his essay, "The Rise of the American Mediterranean, 1846-1905," the US "achieved a high degree of control over both Cuba and Puerto Rico by subordinating them economically" by becoming the largest purchaser of sugar. The US bought 49% of Puerto Rico's sugar from 1856-59 (375). At the same time, US imports also flooded the Puerto Rican market, becoming the only choice for consumption. Martínez-Fernández states that this type of economic dominance without official political control "creates what have been called 'informal colonies'" (377). Later,

Puerto Rico would become a formal possession of the US and would be under strict military control from 1898-1900, followed by the direct political control of the US government. During this time, the US revived the Spanish colonial plantation system, with waged labor instead of slavery, but as César J. Ayala notes, with the following characteristic markers of colonial control: “extreme land concentration, the huge income inequalities, the impoverishment of the rural workers, the dependence of the islands on one export crop at the expense of diversified agriculture, [and] the thwarting of urban development by plantations” (434). Not until the 1917 Jones Act did Puerto Ricans receive US citizenship, and still their governor was directly appointed by the president of the United States until 1949, when Luiz Muñoz Marín became the first democratically elected governor of Puerto Rico.

In the post-WWII era, US interventions like Operation Bootstrap (1947) sought to industrialize Puerto Rico, and its importance as a sugar colony diminished. The failure of industrialization in Puerto Rico, due largely to Operation Bootstrap’s emphasis on tax breaks and profits for corporations rather than employment and economic growth for Puerto Ricans, resulted in mass migration to the US. While many workers had already come to the manufacturing centers of the US, especially New York, during WWII labor shortages, many more migrated in the 1950s and 60s. While the production of goods still fueled the US economy, large numbers of Puerto Rican women moved to New York in search of jobs in the city’s abundant sweatshops. Many had already been trained in the needle trade, either doing piecework from home—like the woman pictured in the photograph above—or in the sweatshops of Puerto Rico. However, as the US economy shifted in the 1970s, manufacturing jobs disappeared, and cities were deindustrialized,

these jobs for women became scarce. In her essay “Generational Paths into and out of Work: Personal Narratives of Puerto Rican Women in New York,” Aixa N. Cintrón-Vélez analyzes this decline of industrial and unionized women’s labor and the flow of Puerto Rican women into either domestic and care work or welfare (or both) that followed. Cintrón-Vélez quotes one woman, identified as “Marta, age sixty-nine, retired garment worker” as saying:

I never had much trouble finding a job. The reason is that there were “People Wanted” signs all over the place, for anything you’d like. If you didn’t know how to sew, they would teach you. And once you were in the union, you could go to the union and they would give you referrals. But, now it is a different story. Now all there is is jobs to take care of the elderly. (207)

This decline in garment industry jobs, where “in 1965, 46.7 percent of Puerto Rican women workers were employed” (Cintrón-Vélez 209), meant moving from a unionized, social space of employment to care work, much of which is isolated in private homes with no labor protections. The stigma attached to care work, especially the nurturant care work of physically tending to dependent persons, is evident in the last line of Marta’s comment. In addition to the lack of labor protections and fair wages, the intimacy required in caring for the physical needs of others ranks this labor as low-status work. This employment shift not only led women into jobs caring for the elderly and others in need of care,¹³ it also led to large-scale migration back to the Island during the 1970s.

Those who stayed transitioned along with the US economy from the production of goods

¹³ The prevalence of Puerto Rican women in the domestic and care industry has been rendered visible, though in problematic and stereotypical ways, by mass media representations such as Jennifer Lopez’s role in the 2002 film *Maid in Manhattan*. In 2009, for six episodes of the NBC sit-com *30 Rock*, Salma Hayek (who is actually of Mexican origin) played the part of a Puerto Rican home care nurse hired by Alex Baldwin’s character; she performs care tasks like drying his elderly mother off after her bath and other intimate work to which he expresses an aversion.

to service, often in the rising domestic and care industries. These patterns of labor migration, established through the history of US colonial control over Puerto Rico, continue today in the migration of more women workers from the Caribbean to meet the impending care crisis in the US.

Esmeralda Santiago sets *America's Dream* on the small island of Vieques that lies eight miles to the east of Puerto Rico in order to emphasize the colonial power dynamic that permeates US-Puerto Rican relations, one strain of which takes shape today in the importation of care labor from the US colony to the mainland. The entrenched US Naval presence in Vieques, which was finally abandoned in 2001 after decades of popular protests, was the latest historical iteration of foreign control over the approximately 20-mile-long island that is a municipality of Puerto Rico. In her book about popular protest against military power in Vieques, Katherine T. McCaffrey writes, "Its [Vieques's] fall into the U.S. Navy's web of power is part of the larger story of Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with the United States and the way that relationship has been shaped by military concerns" (21). Prior to the seizure of Puerto Rico by the US after the Spanish American War, Spain held Vieques as a sparsely-settled sugar colony with intermittent rivaling claims by British, French, and Danish citizens on the island. In 1843, Vieques officially became a part of Puerto Rico, which the US obtained in the 1898 Treaty of Paris. Recognizing the strategic location of Vieques as a military installation in the Caribbean, the US built Roosevelt Roads Naval Base. Taking over three-fourths of the island's land mass and relocating thousands of people to a landlocked section of land in the middle of the island through eviction, the US Navy invaded and completely restructured the agrarian sugar economy and the small farms upon which individuals fed

their families, thereby exacerbating the already rampant poverty and unemployment in Vieques. Clearly, the US military chose a small place already somewhat isolated from Puerto Rican society and political life.¹⁴ As Vieques scholar Amílcar Antonio Barreto asserts, “Mainstream politicians on the main island shamelessly, and with alarming frequency, sacrificed *viequense* interests to curry favors from the metropolitan capital, which is why Vieques residents often refer to themselves as the *colonia de la colonia* (the colony’s colony)” (2). The literal US occupation of Vieques as well as its alienated status from Puerto Rico make it a site of heated political contest and a potent reminder of the undeniable history of US colonialism in the Caribbean.

At the time Santiago wrote her novel, Vieques remained under the control of the US Navy’s occupation; however, popular protest of the US military presence continued as it had for decades. Although the US had built the Roosevelt Roads Naval Base prior to entering WWII, it was after the war ended that the base was further developed into an arsenal, a site for weapons testing, and a training ground.¹⁵ There is also reason to believe that the navy stored nuclear weapons in the region; the US consistently denied such allegations, yet refused to add Puerto Rico into the list of nations protected from nuclear storage by treaty (Barreto 28). Protests increased after a bombing incident in 1993, during which “a navy fighter accidentally dropped several quarter-ton bombs six miles off course. They detonated only a mile from a populated sector” (35). The catalyzing event

¹⁴ I use the phrase “a small place” purposefully as an allusion to Jamaica Kincaid’s 1988 memoir of the same name. Her text about Antigua’s post-colonial status makes a powerful argument about how the global economy, controlled by wealthy nations, affects the less powerful island nations of the Caribbean.

¹⁵ Barreto documents the use of Vieques as a training ground for interventionist military actions in Latin America, among them: “the overthrow of the Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, the Cuban Bay of Pigs operation in 1961, the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965” as well as using “Puerto Rico to train the Contras fighting Nicaragua’s Sandinista government” (27). McCaffrey cites some of the same findings in her book (37).

that led to President Bill Clinton signing an order for the removal of the base in Vieques was the death of a civilian employee, David Sanes Rodríguez, in an accidental bombing (not the first) during the spring training of 1999. Finally, after decades of protests carried out solely by Vieques residents, protests began in San Juan and even in the US while major Puerto Rican politicians and citizens joined the cause that would end the approximately 100-year military occupation of Vieques and by extension of Puerto Rico. Still, the decades of weapons testing took a toll on the environment as well as the health of the population in Vieques, with local people attributing high cancer rates on the island to the many years of bombing and weapons storage.¹⁶ The aftermath of colonialism always reverberates into the future, and even the evacuation of a physical presence does not preclude imperialist activities like those that continue to dominate the daily lives of Viequenses through economic policies and consequent migration patterns.

Although Santiago's novel does not make an overt political statement about the military occupation and colonial domination of Vieques and Puerto Rico, a persistent subtext addressing the overpowering and violent presence runs parallel to the patriarchal and abusive control of Correa, América's boyfriend, over her. Santiago frames the island as a feminine space,¹⁷ one that has been invaded by a violent, patriarchal force—the US military. América's relationship to Correa functions as an allegory, albeit a problematic one, of the abuse that the globally powerful US inflicts upon the physically weaker and

¹⁶ Barreto discusses the navy's denials that the depletion of uranium, used in some of the shells dropped on Vieques, could cause cancer while at the same time warning soldiers against prolonged exposure to it (48). McCaffrey notes that protestors took up the symbol of the cross used to represent David Sanes and began to use it to also represent the deaths due to high cancer rates on the island (160-61).

¹⁷ By "feminine space" I mean one that is dominated by the presence of women. The González home is matrifocal; América lives with her mother, Ester, and her daughter, Rosalinda. Her boyfriend, Correa, usurps control when he visits, but he does not live there. The first half of the novel, while América is still in Vieques, largely takes place in this domestic space or in the hotel rooms where América cleans and babysits the children of US tourists, namely the Leveretts.

smaller nations of the Caribbean.¹⁸ In a reflective moment, as América first begins to contemplate an escape from Correa, she thinks, “He’s not smarter than me. He’s bigger, and stronger, and he frightens me” (114). While my reading coincides with Mary Pat Brady’s assessment of the novel as an allegory for colonialism, I disagree with the anachronistic portions of her analysis that link Correa—who arrives in Vieques as a construction worker—to what she calls “the period when the United States invested heavily in Puerto Rico...during the dicey early moments of the Cold War” (214); the timing of the novel places Correa in Vieques in the late 1970s or early 80s, a time when development projects in Puerto Rico had failed, return migration to the island increased as jobs disappeared in New York; the Cold War was winding down, but world economic systems were being reshaped by globalization. The US has been the forerunner of global economic policies that restructure economies through international organizations like the IMF and the World Bank, along with multinational corporations, and thereby reinstitute imperial control over the Caribbean. Correa’s arrival to Vieques represents this latest iteration of US colonial domination in which a power that would appear to be a friend or lover inflicts patriarchal violence resulting in internal and external wounds on its would-be partner.

In the feminine domestic space of Ester’s carefully cultivated garden, the ever-present military force on the island interrupts one particular moment of female communion and reestablishes Puerto Rico’s status as a colony of the United States. An extension of the González house, Ester’s garden is instrumental in her masterful cooking

¹⁸ In Mary Pat Brady’s analysis of *América’s Dream*, she comments, “What is worrisome is that an allegorical figuring of Puerto Rico (and given América’s name, of Latin America as well as the Caribbean) as a battered, naïve, domestic servant participates far too easily in an already well-burnished discourse of coloniality that figures the colonized country as weak, passive, and in need of colonial rule” (215).

and traditional healing. Entering the garden in the middle of a sleepless night, América notes, “Every bush, plant, and vine is edible, or useful in treating burns, headache, or stomach upset” (63). Food plays a major role in fostering care relationships in the novel, and most of the important conversations among the González women are had while partaking of food that one of them has made for the other. In addition to using her garden to maintain her neighborhood reputation as an exceptional cook, Ester makes poultices from her herbs to heal the wounds Correa leaves on América’s body. In this scene, América wakes up in the middle of the night, distraught by the previous day’s events during which Correa threatened to take Rosalinda away to live with his relatives in Puerto Rico. She feels powerless and knows he will have his way; she is left, “wishing she had been born a man and could fight him and have a chance at winning” (62). As she ponders the situation in her mother’s garden that night, Ester also awakens and joins her. In this feminine space that engenders healing and care, the two women are accompanied by the reminder of the larger political forces that control their lives: “Somewhere off the eastern shore of the island, the Navy is using the beaches for target practice” (64). During their conversation, Ester tries to convince América that she needs to resist Correa’s plans to take Rosalinda away. Once Ester returns to bed and América is left alone, the comparison between Correa’s patriarchal domination through violence and the US’s military rule over Vieques becomes clear. América thinks, “Correa rules every action I take, whether he’s around or not. Is that any way to live?” (68). Santiago then draws the parallel to Vieques’s, and by extension Puerto Rico’s, colonial status: “The question hangs in the fragrant air of her mother’s garden, punctuated by the flashing red sky, the thumps of bombs finding their target, the yielding earth quaking beneath her feet” (68). The female

space of care and the cultivation of interdependent relationships is ultimately surrounded and controlled by the military might and political power of the US state—another manifestation of the personal being political. Worldwide US military and economic domination controls América’s future.

US domination of the global care market is manifest in the way the Leveretts fly América from her home in Vieques to come work for them as a live-in nanny and housekeeper in New York. Admittedly, the decision to migrate is ultimately made by individuals like América in the private market, but these women are also susceptible to global economic forces that draw them to seek employment, even low-waged and stigmatized domestic labor, in the US. As a dual-income family of highly paid professionals, the Leveretts have multiple care needs; they have two children who need to be fed and nurtured as well as an enormous house in need of cleaning and maintenance. The Leveretts meet América during their stay in the Casa del Francés and pay her extra to babysit their two children on several occasions during their stay. They make a personal connection. América, in turn, accepts their offer to work for them as a live-in domestic worker in New York as a way to escape the violence of her personal life. While she is not recruited as part of a state sponsored program, as happens in some parts of the world,¹⁹ América has no other options. The microeconomics of the Leveretts’ vacation are emblematic of the macroeconomics of globalization. The inequalities of the global

¹⁹ The Philippines stands out as the most prominent example. Robyn Magalit Rodriguez writes in *Migrants for Export: How the Philippine State Brokers Labor to the World*, “It is because Filipina migrants do the work of care for people in other countries and because care work is denigrated that women’s employment as domestics abroad becomes problematic and ultimately shameful for the nation-state” (95). See also Rhacel Salazar Parreñas *The Force of Domesticity: Filipina Migrants and Globalization* (2008) and *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (2001), as well as Ligaya Lindio-McGovern *Globalization, Labor Export and Resistance: A Study of Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers in Global Cities* (2011).

market allow the wealthy who live in global centers like New York to exert power over local economies in the Global South. Saskia Sassen argues that “globalization has produced new labor demand dynamics that center on the global cities of the north. From these places, global economic processes are managed and coordinated by increasing numbers of highly paid professionals,” (273) or people like the Leveretts. The inequalities between the parties go beyond economics, however, and are steeped in the nature of care work itself—the stigma, the intimacy, and its association with dependency.

An analysis of América’s experience working as a maid and babysitter at the Casa del Francés resort in Vieques, where she first meets the Leveretts, points to the myth of individual independence that has flourished in the US. The romance of the self-made man (tellingly, not a woman) dominates US national culture. In part because the US purports to be a classless society where social mobility is not only possible but unexceptional, this country is in perpetual denial of the existence of a servant class. The idea that one depends on others for their daily existence is repugnant, and reminders of physical dependency are often avoided. While América cleans hotel rooms, she thinks about how “[s]he knows more about them than they will ever know about her. She knows whether they flail in their sleep, or whether they sleep quietly on one side or the other. . . . She knows the brand of toothpaste they use, whether they have dentures. She knows if the women have their periods” (Santiago 30). This passage demonstrates that even those who perform non-nurturant care work, such as the domestic work of cleaning hotel rooms, often deal with the personal intimacies that reveal the ubiquitous dependency of the human body. América notes the embarrassment and discomfort of the guests when they come into contact with her as “they look right past and pretend not to see her” or that,

“[t]hose who do see her, smile guardedly, then slide their gaze away quickly, ashamed, it seems, to have noticed her” (30). Unlike other cultures that openly acknowledge class difference and the existence of a servant class, US national culture is under the delusion that we are all equal and independent persons. This is simply not true as some degree of dependency is an intrinsic aspect of physicality; moreover, at any time accident or illness could render any of us entirely physically dependent.

My reading of Santiago’s novel through the lens of dependency integrates a vein of feminist scholarship that promotes an ethics of care with disability studies’ focus on ability as a social construct. Feminist scholar Barbara Hillyer, writing from her experience raising a disabled daughter, has pointed to interdependence—what she calls “reciprocity”—as an alternative model for interpersonal relationships that circumvents masculinist notions of equality—“that people should be treated the same” (17). Some people will always be dependent on the physical help of others for their survival. Hillyer recognizes her own bias toward independence and poses the question, “Because I understand mothering to be nurturing independence, how can I mother this dependent woman?” Other feminists who argue for further incorporation of disability studies into feminist circles argue that not only those persons who are labeled “disabled” are dependent on others; rather, it is an undeniable reality of human existence that women particularly should understand since female bodies have historically been classified as abnormal. In her essay, “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,” Rosemary Garland Thomson writes, “Disability itself demands that human interdependence and the universal need for assistance be figured into our dialogues about rights and subjectivity” (364). América performs non-nurturant care work at the hotel for

people who would be considered able-bodied, yet her labor uncovers human frailty, vulnerability, and the universal dependence that accompanies having a body that needs care. Susan Wendell, in her essay “Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability” writes, “Dependence on the help of others is humiliating in a society which prizes independence” (347). The intimacy of care work, even in the somewhat removed form of cleaning, causes discomfort and embarrassment as it removes the veil of independence. This association with dependency contributes to the stigma attached to domestic and care work.

América is accustomed to the type of interdependence and caregiving that occurs in multigenerational households such as her own; she is steeped in care work, paid and unpaid. Moving in with the Leveretts—a heteronormative, nuclear family with two children—adds to the culture shock she feels from the weather, the language, and the technology attached to her new life in New York. In their home, América comes up against manifestations of the US obsession with independence and individualism, which the novel constructs around foodways. Santiago describes food in her novel in great detail, and food marks the interdependent nature of relationships. In the González home in Vieques, important conversations between women occur during mealtimes. For example, Ester inquires about whether América will make the life-threatening decision to leave Correa and take the job with the Leveretts over dinner. Santiago writes, “Ester and América face each other over dinner, rice with cuttlefish, fried sweet plantains on the side” (119). As I mentioned previously, Ester cares for América when she has been beaten through the preparation of food and herbal remedies. When Ester, an alcoholic, has had too much to drink, América routinely prepares soup or coffee for her. Both

women cook for Rosalinda, América and Correa's daughter, and use food to draw her out of her room and into the familial space of the kitchen. These intergenerational relationships of mutual caregiving contrast with the nuclear family structure of the Leverett household. América observes that the children are treated as if they were already adults, rather than dependent persons. Their mother, Karen, "punctuate[s] every instruction with 'okay?'" (152), and three-year-old Meghan surprises América when she closes the bathroom door and insists on using the toilet all by herself. América thinks, "These American kids are so independent!" and "remembers wiping Rosalinda's bottom until she was four" (174). América finds these practices alienating and attempts to use food to forge relationships of care and interdependence. She replaces the family's cold cereal with a hot breakfast: warm milk with cinnamon and oatmeal with honey. At the grocery store she deviates from Karen's list and buys ingredients to make Puerto Rican food. América's notion of interdependence becomes clear in her assessment of her living situation after breakfast on her fifth day in New York: "She's learning their ways and beginning to change them" (152). She values mutual exchange and support.

América seems to move to the US of her own volition in search of a new start in life; however, in the second half of her novel, Santiago clearly positions América as one of the many other Latina caregivers who populate the affluent town of Bedford, New York. These women from the Dominican Republic, México, and Central America—whom América meets at parks and through the Leverett children's afterschool activities—have been imported as part of the global market system set up to answer the care crisis in the US. Alongside the wealthy, white professionals who commute daily to Manhattan, a second community of Latina dependency workers populates Bedford. These

women are the daytime residents, less visible than their employers as they clean and care in cavernous suburban homes. However, a sub-economy of businesses catering to this population also exists as evidence of their presence; there is a storefront called “OFICINA HISPANA,” (162), a Chinese take-out restaurant full of other Latino customers whom the owner has learned enough Spanish to address (163), and a whole section of Goya foods at the local supermarket (176) where América buys ingredients to cook Puerto Rican food. This novel gets outside of the individualistic immigration narrative of uplift by showing América as one of a much larger community and a collective struggle that she does not overcome by the end of the novel.

Santiago presents this community of workers as a coalition with latent political power. It is through her contact with these women that América’s social consciousness begins to develop. Even before meeting Mercedes, Frida, Adela, Liana, and the other neighborhood care workers, América has already begun to calculate her own wages in terms of how much Karen Leverett spends on luxury items for herself, such as \$15 panties and \$30 bras with tags still on them for a total of \$750 in underwear. América realizes, “It would take me two and a half weeks to earn enough to hold up my breasts and cover my culo” (218). América’s statement after noticing Karen’s expensive shoe collection—“One week of my work puts her out the price of a pair of shoes” (218)—points to the undervalued status of dependency work in the US. Already determined to ask for a raise after her trial period, América really begins to see her own situation in light of a larger labor struggle of rights discourse as she hears about issues such as citizenship, invisibility and isolation, fair compensation (including paid vacation), from the informal labor community of other Latina housekeepers and nannies who congregate

in local parks. They form an interdependent network that helps mediate job insecurity and informally negotiates acceptable wages and labor conditions. In her essay “So Your Social is Real? Vernacular Theorists and Economic Transformation,” Mary Pat Brady analyzes a playground exchange during which Adela—an undocumented worker from Guatemala—realizes that América has legal status as a US citizen born in Puerto Rico and marvels that she still works in domestic service. Brady points out that the ambiguous political status of Puerto Rico provides América with a “slim meaning of citizenship” (218) such that América’s options are still mediated by her outsider status in the US. Brady writes, “The lack that drives the other *empleadas*’ phantasmagoric ‘social’—a social without any of the guarantees of security—is precisely the lack of State commitment to their care and well-being, even while it demands their labor” (217). I would add that the nature of these women’s work, providing for the care and well-being of society makes the state’s negligence somewhat ironic and all the more egregious. Without individual access to the exclusionary US legal system—one that is founded on principles that espouse independence and repudiate dependency—these workers must forge interdependent coalitions that bridge ethnic and national differences to foster collective action.

Angie Cruz’s 2005 novel, *Let It Rain Coffee*, also reflects the heterogeneity of Latina/o groups in New York and explores how the uneven histories of colonization and immigration are manifest within the politics of care labor. Unlike Los Angeles, a city where peoples of Mexican ancestry or origin hold a clear majority, New York has a more diversified population in the national origin of those that the state classifies as “Latino” or “Hispanic.” Puerto Ricans and Dominicans together make up almost half (48 percent) of

this group, followed by the Mexican origin population at 13 percent (“Hispanic Population”), meaning that smaller shares of Cubans and all other nationalities of Central and South America constitute the remainder. The use of blanket terms like “Latino” and “Hispanic” by the US government and other political and market entities flattens significant differences in class, ethnicity, race, and citizenship, as well as culture and language. The main characters—the Colóns—in Cruz’s novel are Dominicans, but the nature of their interactions with other Latinos are rooted in history, especially the political relationships between Caribbean nations and the US. Colonial practices dating back to at least the 19th century and inequalities in immigration policies during the 20th century reverberate into the 21st century global care market, as seen in the imbalance of power between Esperanza Colón and her Cuban employer. The Dominican Republic’s history as a *de facto* colony of the US has reemerged in the mainland exploitation of care workers from the islands.

The Dominican Republic has historically maintained a precarious legal sovereignty from the US but has been subject to US economic domination, political sanctions, and military invasion such that it has functioned as a colony in many of the same ways as Puerto Rico. Like Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other parts of the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic constituted part of what some scholars have called the “American Sugar Kingdom” of the 19th century.²⁰ At one point, as César Ayala explains, a single US sugar refinery owned and controlled fully half of all the sugar produced in the Dominican Republic (437), rendering the country heavily dependent on the US market just like its

²⁰ In his article titled “The American Sugar Kingdom, 1898-1934,” César J. Ayala traces this term back to historian Eric Williams and his 1984 history of the Caribbean, *From Columbus to Castro*.

Caribbean neighbors. In his widely recognized history of the Dominican Republic, Frank Moya Pons documents US President Ulysses S. Grant's attempt to annex the Dominican Republic after forging a treaty with the Dominican president; the measure failed in the Senate on moral grounds against the way the treaty was wrought (229-231). However, under the auspices of the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary—an expansion of the 1823 Monroe Doctrine—the US took over the Dominican customs office in a paternalistic intervention designed to manage debt repayment to Europe. As Moya Pons discloses, “For payment of the debt, 50 percent of the customs revenues was to be deposited in a New York bank” (295). Economic control is no less aggressive than overt political sovereignty when it produces the same results.

Military intervention and rule also mark the Dominican Republic as an informal colony of the US. In 1916, the US Marines invaded the Dominican Republic, not only establishing a very unpopular US military government that would last eight years but organizing the National Guard within which the future dictator, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, would be trained and quickly promoted. After being complicit throughout Trujillo's 40-year reign and then finally assisting in his assassination in 1961, the US again sent Marines into the Dominican Republic in 1965. This invasion was meant to extinguish political resistance movements that sought to restore democratically-elected, leftist president Juan Bosch to power; the US helped place Joaquín Balaguer—a former minister to Trujillo, who was more compliant with US interests—into the presidency, beginning a new era of human rights abuses and economic downturn. He would return to power in the 1980s and again in the 90s, decades that also saw rapid increases in outmigration to the US as Dominicans fled widespread poverty caused by inflation and currency devaluation.

Dominicans are a fast-growing segment of the US Latino population in metropolitan areas on the East Coast, primarily in New York and New Jersey but also in other cities like Boston and Providence. The US Census Bureau reported in 2010 that over 60% of Dominican immigrants came to the US after 1990 (“Selected Population Profile”), which may contribute to their having the lowest annual median household income (\$34,000) of all US Latino groups (Motel and Patten, “10 Largest”). Economic changes brought about by the global market have transformed the Dominican economy. It largely survives on tourism, which provides some jobs but not nearly enough, and also on remittances from family members abroad. Pedro L. San Miguel writes about demographic shifts in the Dominican population and argues, “Like most of their Caribbean neighbors, Dominicans now live under the omnipresent influence of the United States” (560). Rather than controlling the Dominican Republic through the economic domination of commodity markets like sugar (the 19th century colonial model) or by maintaining a physical military presence and importing cheaply-produced goods like textiles (20th century imperialist practices), the US now controls the Dominican Republic through neoliberal policies and the global market. One iteration of current US imperialist practice is the importation of care labor through workers, like Esperanza, whose lives have been disrupted directly by economic policies and indirectly through the cultural spread of consumerism and the American uplift narrative.

Esperanza’s personal determination to migrate to the US eclipses the systemic forces of the global market that are driving what is actually a large-scale movement of women from the Caribbean to meet the care crisis in the US. In Cruz’s novel, Esperanza’s character reflects the historical influence of the US invasion and continued

presence in the Dominican Republic; she absorbs the messages disseminated by mass media—as exemplified in her devotion to the TV drama *Dallas*—and adopts the culture of capitalist individualism, consumerism, and the myth of meritocracy. Although her marriage to Santo meant moving to the cooperative farming community of Los Llanos, her dreams are individualistic. Her greatest desire is to move to Dallas, where she thinks she can live a life of luxury in a mansion on a ranch like the one pictured on television. On the surface, these fantasies appear to be peculiarities of her character; however, Frank Moya Pons explains that in addition to a lasting political influence, “The U.S. occupation also left a marked taste for the consumption of U.S. goods” (338). He specifically refers here to the eight-year US military rule in the early 20th century and goes on to discuss examples such as the enshrinement of baseball as the national sport (replacing the more traditional cockfighting) and the popularity of American music as a sign of class privilege (338). Esperanza comes from a Santo Domingo family of opportunists who benefitted under the Trujillo regime and helped undercut social resistance movements against the dictator. Esperanza is miserable in the outlying rural town of Los Llanos, where neighbors work a communal garden. Watching *Dallas* on the neighbor’s TV, she internalizes mass media messages about opportunity and uplift, packaged neatly into trite phrases like, “*You’ve got to take chances in life, if you want to make anything of it,*” pronounced by millionaire characters. For Esperanza it is “as if she had just been touched by gospel” (17). Over time, she ingests these ideological messages until she decides to leave the Dominican Republic to pursue the so-called American Dream at any cost.

Esperanza’s dreams are individualistic, fashioned from the popular narratives of wealth and power found in US media. Her ambitions contrast sharply with the values of

Los Llanos, an agricultural social cooperative established in large part by her father-in-law, Don Chan. Cruz writes, “And if Esperanza had learned anything from watching the Ewings, it was that no one becomes a millionaire by sharing” (15). Thus, leaving her husband and son behind, Esperanza sets out to access the privilege she associates with the US by making the risky journey on a makeshift boat across the Mona Canal to Puerto Rico. Her fictional migration reflects what “became one of the most popular ways to leave the island” during the early 90s (Moya Pons 435). In a precursor that speaks to the widespread classification of domestic work as the least-desired work—work generally taken on by the most desperate—as an undocumented immigrant in Puerto Rico, Esperanza works as a housekeeper. Santo wants to reunify the family before Esperanza gives birth to the daughter they are expecting. He taps into the global circuit of labor between New York and the Dominican Republic, securing visas and a job as a taxi driver through connections he has there. To Esperanza’s dismay, she will not be going to Dallas or the ranch house of her TV fantasies. Cruz unmasks just how misguided are her character’s views of the US when she writes that upon Esperanza’s arrival to New York, “when she first saw all the trees in the distance, she had imagined that the Southfork Ranch in Dallas, Texas, was not too far off” (9).

Dallas and all it represents prove to be immeasurably far off. In her reading of the novel, Marisel Moreno notes that “Dallas, as a geographical and psychological destination, will always remain out of reach for Esperanza, who as her name suggests, will be left only with the hope of a better life” (115). Ten years later, when the aged Don Chan’s wife dies and he joins Santo and Esperanza’s family in New York because he can no longer fully care for himself, the family is still living in poverty. Even with two

incomes from full-time service work—Santo’s, as a taxi driver, and Esperanza’s, as a home health aide—the Colóns are barely surviving; they are nowhere near owning their own home, let alone a Texas mansion. When Santo is shot and killed in his taxi soon after Don Chan’s arrival, Esperanza’s struggle to support the family through her job caring for the elderly exposes the exploitation occurring in this industry that yields many of the jobs that draw so many women from the Caribbean to the US. The United States’ lack of moral commitment to dependency has contributed to the current care crisis, manifest in the shortage of native-born and white Americans willing to perform care labor because of the low wages, lack of protections, and the stigma attached to care work. Esperanza adopts this focus on independence and individual success along with the ideology of uplift transmitted through US media and national culture. Thus, she internalizes the same individualistic mindset that ignores the realities of dependency; this myopic focus on independence lies at the heart of the global system that is exploiting her.

Esperanza is unaware of the market forces and governmental policies—such as predatory consumer credit practices and discriminatory immigration laws—at work to ensure that she remains in poverty. To meet the demands of the current care crisis in the US without enacting fundamental social changes that recognize dependency and value care work, it is in the state’s interest to secure a vulnerable workforce compelled to accept deplorable employment conditions. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, who has written extensively on the racialization and denigration of care work, argues that “those who engage in caring are drawn disproportionately from among disadvantaged groups (women, people of color, and immigrants)” (84). Esperanza fits all three categories. My discussion in Chapter Three of legislation (such as California’s Proposition 187) that

aims to exploit the cheap labor of immigrants and simultaneously deny their human dependency needs by withholding services like education and healthcare, resurfaces in New York for Puerto Rican and Dominican care workers. In this case, however, systemic forces manipulate the historical, colonial relationship to the Caribbean through global labor circuits that bring workers to the US, where they are kept in an impoverished class that is distracted by myths of meritocracy. The strong US presence in the Dominican Republic encourages immigration through seductive media messages like those portrayed in *Dallas*, and then defaults on those illusory promises once these workers have arrived.

Global capital, managed by a complex constellation of government forces, international agencies, and multinational corporations, ensures the existence of a poor, working class—including care workers—by spreading consumer culture and then enslaving the poor with predatory credit practices. Mainstream media cultural productions, like *Dallas*, promote high-end consumption as the norm. As John Tirman, director of MIT's Center for International Studies, writes, "The reference group is typically those in the upper 20 percent, who set the standard for consumption, and that standard is blazing away at us from TV sets, magazines, and all manner of advertising" (117). Esperanza's consumption of *Dallas* leads to her desire to consume in the ways depicted on TV; the bourgeois ideologies of opportunity, financial success, and the rewarding of hard work, stimulate her longing for material goods that she cannot afford. Cruz writes that Esperanza "had wanted to get some brocade fabric to make curtains like the ones she had seen on *Dallas*. And some gold paint to paint over all the wood frames and old lamps. She loved gold" (31). Although at this point the family lives in New York, they find their standard of living only marginally higher than it had been in the

Dominican Republic, and Esperanza's glittering dreams still unreachable. The global market depends upon the containment of the working class within the confines of poverty in order to maintain the exaggeratedly asymmetrical distribution of wealth and to secure the supply of care workers needed to meet the demands of those who can afford to pay others to care for their children, parents, or other dependents. In an interview she gave after writing *Let It Rain Coffee*, Cruz stated, "I started thinking that maybe if we stopped pushing kids and people in general, to consume, to 'make it,' just so they can keep our economy going, then maybe there will be a revolution that sticks" (Cruz and Maldonado 143). Cruz presents alternative forms of capitalism founded on principles of interdependence and care ethics, the specifics of which I will discuss later in this chapter. Global capital foments the desire to consume as the rich do while safeguarding against the working classes ever being able to afford to break free of the very systems put in place to keep them there. One of these is credit.

Esperanza becomes a victim of the predatory credit practices used by global financial institutions to keep her indebted and, therefore, in poverty so that she remains desperate to work even in unfair conditions like those offered by the care industry. To do so, multinational corporations like Mastercard and Citibank, strategically target those who are least able to pay, locking them in to a lifetime of indebtedness at high interest rates. When asked to give a seminar for the Citibank corporation, Elizabeth Warren—formerly a Harvard professor of bankruptcy and contract law—explained to the boardroom that they could cut their bankruptcy losses in half immediately by not issuing credit cards to people who likely would not be able to pay them; the chief executive, however, unabashedly declared that solution unfeasible because it is with those customers

that they make their most significant profits (*Maxed Out*). Thus, global capital keeps those it has often already forced into underpaid labor through its control of the means of production enslaved in a system that lures them into buying beyond their incomes, so that they will contribute to the most profitable consumption of all—the paying of interest, or giving money in exchange for virtually nothing.

Esperanza has not been instructed on how credit really works, and at the same time she is enamored with US mass media and consumer culture—a bi-product of the United States' imperialist presence in the Dominican Republic; that is to say, she is the perfect target for credit card companies. She feels as if she has finally achieved something in the US when she receives a preapproval notice in the mail. Cruz writes, “After working as a home attendant for five years, Esperanza was eligible for a credit card, her very own five-hundred-dollar credit card. . . . Days later another letter arrived. *You have been preapproved for up to 1,000 dollars.* Preapproved. She mouthed the words in front of the mirror, licking her lips in anticipation of her first credit-card purchase” (33). Five, and even ten, years after migrating to the US, Esperanza still clings to her belief in the myth of meritocracy, that in this country if you work hard you will eventually rise to the top. In her attempt to accumulate luxury items like those she sees on TV, she fills up the closets, buying material goods she cannot really afford on credit. She assumes that if they gave her the card, she will be able to pay it off eventually. As a credit card company's dream customer, Esperanza would be paying it a small amount at a time, maximizing corporate profits on interest. Tellingly, it is only after Esperanza's run-in on the subway with the actor who played Bobby Ewing on *Dallas*, and his hostile attitude toward her in return for her accolades of familiarity, that she gains the critical distance

necessary to see a glimpse of the harsh reality of her working class material conditions. She tells the actor, “They should’ve shot you. They should’ve shot all of you for lying to people making it look so easy” (250). Following this scene, she finally gets advice from a local debt counselor who explains, “To pay a bill of two thousand dollars, it will take thirty years. And you will have paid five thousand in interest and two thousand for your original purchase when you’re finally done” (254). This type of financial exploitation compounds the barriers faced by Esperanza and other immigrant women like her whose services are imported from the Caribbean to global centers like New York, where they work as caregivers for the wealthy. Global capital works to keep these workers, whose labor is already gendered and racialized, in poverty, thus guaranteeing a supply of workers to meet the care crisis. However, not all immigrant women from the Caribbean share this plight.

In her novel, Angie Cruz complicates the state-imposed racial category “Latino” or “Hispanic” and contests the unequal treatment allotted to different immigrant groups, specifically exposing the preferential treatment given to Cubans. Esperanza works as a home care worker for a Cuban couple, Mr. and Mrs. Hernández. Pitting the two Latino immigrant families against each other uncovers the political motives that drive immigration law and belies the myth of America as a land of equal and unlimited opportunity. US Census categories count Cubans as Latinos along with Mexicans, most Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, Guatemalans and Salvadorians. Many non-Latinas/os in the US are unaware of the socioeconomic and political differences between Cubans and these other groups of immigrants. During every election cycle, conservatives hold up Cuban Americans in an attempt to prove that their constituency includes Latinas/os and

upholds their interests. Yet, the history of immigration in the late 20th and 21st centuries explains why the majority of Cuban immigrants have been integrated into the middle and upper classes while so many other Latinas/os in the US continue to struggle against class and racial barriers to success. A brief summary of Cuban immigration will lay the foundation for my reading of Esperanza's social position as an elder care worker for the Hernandez family in Cruz's novel.

The United States' exceptional treatment of Cuban immigrants, as a group, began in the wake of Castro's revolution when thousands of displaced landowners fled the country. While the US has historically neglected and exploited other Latino groups, it received the anti-Castro Cubans with not only open arms, but an open pocketbook. In the midst of the Cold War, the US used its protection of the Cuban exile population as a declaration of Western, capitalist power. Any enemy of the state of Cuba became a friend of the United States. Writing about the continuing privileges extended to the Cuban population today, especially in contrast to the treatment of Haitian refugees, Ted Henken explains, "No other US refugee resettlement program has been more generous and accommodating than the Cuban Refugee Program (CRP) set up for the 'Golden exiles' and later applied to continuing waves of Cuban immigrants" (395). Although government support for Cubans coming to the US slowed with the 1980 arrival of the so-called *Marielitos*,²¹ a group that was quickly characterized as mentally unstable or criminally dangerous by the South Florida media. Despite the stigma attached to them,²² echoes of

²¹ Almost 125,000 migrants left Cuba from the port of Mariel between April and October of 1980, when Fidel Castro allowed those who wished to leave exit through the Peruvian embassy.

²² Gastón A. Fernández argues that this social stigma was "especially experienced by the younger, male, non-White, disabled Marielitos" (606.) Despite reports that the Marielitos had been released from prisons and mental institutions, Fernández points out that their educational and work backgrounds "resembled the

the original subsidies and support systems set in place to receive those who established Little Havana in Miami still give today's Cuban migrants an advantage. In the years immediately following the 1959 revolution, when the critical mass of today's Cuban population arrived to the US, the government welcomed the anti-Castro exiles with the following extensive and unprecedented assistance: "housing and jobs," "an extensive bilingual education program," "job retraining services," "a college loan program," and "unprecedented exceptions ... to residency and citizenship laws" (Henken 395). This rosy path to citizenship has guaranteed the bulk of Cuban Americans access to government entitlement programs that serve the elderly, as is the case with the fictional Hernández family. Given the aforementioned programs, it follows that Cubans have joined the ranks of the middle class in large numbers and largely support Republican platforms that propagate the immigrant uplift narrative, which preaches that with individual effort and belief in one's self, anyone can rise to the top in this land of opportunity for all. This independence-based story fails to recognize that these Cuban immigrants were economically dependent on government aid, precisely the accusation that is often hurled at other Latino immigrant groups by the right.

Mrs. Hernández's ability to hire Esperanza to care for her husband, who uses a wheelchair and does not speak as a result of suffering a stroke, marks the social disparity between them and points to historical inequalities in US immigration policy. While Mrs. Hernández complains of tight budgets and is employed managing a twenty-four-hour laundromat, hardly signs of opulence, she enjoys privileges unavailable to Esperanza

social and economic diversity of Cuba" (605), while their racial backgrounds included more non-White (about 25-40%) persons and a higher percentage of males (70%) than earlier waves of Cuban exiles (605).

Colón. The first obvious difference between the two Latina immigrants emerges as Esperanza arrives to her first day of work in the Hernandez home, “a spacious two-bedroom”(108) in the Bronx. Esperanza is impressed by the shiny floors, “new lobby doors,” and “stained glass that bordered the lobby windows,” all of which give her “a pang of envy” (108). She notes how different their apartment is from her own, with “plenty of room for Mr. Hernández to move around in his wheelchair” (109). In addition to access to better housing, the Hernándezes also benefit from access to the government programs and helps available to them as US citizens. Mrs. Hernández has officially divorced her husband so that he can receive more state benefits. Cruz comments here on the deficient status of care in the US for even middle-class citizens, but these are benefits completely denied to the Colóns as Dominican, rather than Cuban, immigrants.

Cruz reveals how access to formal care for dependents who cannot fully care for themselves physically not only marks class position but directly contributes to it. Mrs. Hernández’s diatribe on the subject of caring for her husband distills many of the inequalities that are rife in care work today:

I can’t take care of him by myself anymore. I’m too tired. He’s too heavy.... Twenty-four hours he needs to be watched. When am I supposed to work? I might be sixty years old, but I’m not staying home all day with that crazy man. You know something, it’s less work to go to my job every day and have you deal with him than me put up with his shit all day and night. (111)

Mrs. Hernández bluntly states how difficult this work is, that she cannot do it herself and strongly prefers not to; she even admits that her own job is less difficult. Yet, she demonstrates a blatant disrespect for Esperanza, obliquely adding the work of a housekeeper to her position as an eldercare worker; she expects Esperanza to make coffee

and cook, not only for her husband but for herself.²³ She exerts her marginal class advantages, treating Esperanza like a servant rather than a peer. Mrs. Hernández has the ability to hire Esperanza to perform what Evelyn Nakano Glenn calls the “dirty work” of society that she herself prefers not to do.²⁴ While she is not rich and might still be considered working class, the advantages afforded her as a Cuban immigrant ensure that she is able to escape the full brunt of the care burden. She enjoys dressing up for her job at the laundry mat, and although her labor might still be considered in the realm of the domestic work industry, Mrs. Hernández does not suffer from the social isolation of eldercare in a private home. Because Esperanza continues to believe in the American Dream narrative, she listens intently when Mrs. Hernández shares her own hokey financial advice to eventually buy a house by saving a few dollars here and there: “Let them accumulate and do what they will” (151). Esperanza naively imitates this practice in good faith without the outside financial advisement that no one buys a house solely by putting dollar bills into a cookie tin. She alone supports her father-in-law, her teenage son and daughter, as well as a 15-year-old, pregnant Salvadoran immigrant named Hush, a neighbor whose family rejects her. The reality of her family life contradicts the cultural myths of independence that she swallows. Mrs. Hernández is able to pass the care work typically assigned to wives and mothers on to another, less privileged woman. In this case, one Latina immigrant can hire another and ease her own care burden because of the

²³ The practice of increasing the workload of domestic and care workers has been documented extensively by scholars like Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Mary Romero, even dating back to the earliest known US study of domestic work by Lucy Maynard Salmon, in which her survey respondents complain about the extended workday. An extensive 2012 survey of domestic and care workers by the National Domestic Workers Association ranks the addition of duties outside the scope of the original agreement or contract as one of the most common complaints and reasons for quitting.

²⁴ Evelyn Nakano Glenn uses this term to describe the domestic and care work—cleaning, cooking, childcare—that carries a stigma because it is gendered, racialized, and classed. See her article “From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor” (1992).

unequal distribution of US immigration laws that privilege Cubans while denying Dominicans and other groups the same opportunities.

Esperanza's ethnic and class background demands that she make do with informal care arrangements rather than employing someone to meet her own dependency needs. These care networks are common among many ethnic minorities; while they may be built out of necessity, they also offer alternative models of how care can be interdependent.²⁵ Like Mrs. Hernández, Esperanza also lives with an elderly person—her father-in-law, Don Chan—who needs care. He suffers from dementia brought on by old age; he frequently mistakes his grandchildren for his children, thinks he is still fighting Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, and gets lost in New York City. Care workers like Esperanza not only work for less money than their employers, they are often nearly the same age, and also have their own children, elderly parents, or disabled relatives to care for at home without the option of being able to pass that work on to someone else. As Nakano Glenn writes, “One ironic result is that those who care for others usually have to give up caring for their own dependents, yet cannot afford to pay anyone to care for them” (86). Esperanza's care work often requires her to stay in her clients' homes on overnight shifts. In her absence, day or night, Don Chan and the children mutually care for one another in their multigenerational household. Esperanza relies on Don Chan's presence as surveillance over her teenagers, Bobby and Dallas. At the same time, Bobby and Dallas—and later, Hush—not only do some of the cooking and cleaning, they also care for Don Chan by making sure his confusion is kept in check and that he abides by his

²⁵ See my discussion in Chapter 1 on the role of “fictive kin” and “othermothers” in African American communities.

routine. According to Greta Gilbertson's 2009 essay, "Caring Across Generations: Aging, State Assistance, and Multigenerational Ties Among Immigrants from the Dominican Republic," multigenerational households are common for Dominicans in the US and caregiving, including emotional support and companionship, plays a central role (136-37). Bobby's unjustified incarceration in a juvenile detention center, Dallas's tendency to skip school, and Don Chan's dangerous episode getting lost in the city demonstrate that the family needs more support. Barriers stemming from their race, class, and citizenship status deny them the same kind of help that is available to Mr. and Mrs. Hernández.

Yet, the mutual caregiving occurring in Cruz's novel calls attention to the universality of dependency and even disability, while Esperanza's paid care work points to the extension of the social stigma of dependency to the worker herself. The very category "disabled" is unstable in light of the shared human condition of aging. Susan Wendell writes, "Aging is disabling. Recognizing this helps us to see that disabled people are not 'other,' that they are really 'us.' Unless we die suddenly, we are all disabled eventually" (339). Granted, there is a broad spectrum of dependency, and it is not my intention to conflate the experience of those who need full-time physical care with the need to have one's kitchen maintained clean and food put on the table in order to continue to function. Yet, to vilify dependency the way politicians, US national culture, and even liberal rights discourse often do is merely to deny the reality that humans need care. While this omission particularly marginalizes those who are categorized as "disabled," as well as the ill, the elderly, and children, it also alienates those who give care; whether paid or unpaid (or both), society's caregivers tend to be women. To carry on any feminist project without recognizing the care burden borne by women, and borne

more heavily by women of color and immigrants in the US, is to continue to use a discourse shot through with patriarchy. In this model, the care burden merely gets shifted unsustainably to the next most vulnerable group of women until it reaches the end of the global care chain, whether those at that end reside in the US or in the immigrant care worker's country of origin.

Angie Cruz uses Esperanza's character foil, Miraluz, to suggest that interdependent social models rather than the independence-based myths of individual success featured in US mass media hold promise for women's labor rights. On the surface, Esperanza resents Miraluz because she grew up with Santo in Los Llanos and was romantically involved with him for a time; however, the more profound antagonism between the two women lies in their respective social paradigms. Miraluz, while she was Santo's age, was more of a peer of Don Chan; she was deeply involved with the revolutionary struggle against Trujillo and a proponent of the communal project of Los Llanos. Esperanza fled that collective economy in search of the South Fork Ranch of *Dallas*, essentially seeking the wealth and success promised by capitalist individualism. Even at the end of the novel and despite the lack of economic progress she has seen in New York, when the family travels back to the Dominican Republic for a visit, Esperanza reaffirms "that Los Llanos was never a place she could call home" (286). She is adamant about returning to the US and still staunchly invested in the immigrant narrative; as she and her daughter pass out the gifts they have brought for the family, Esperanza thinks, "Maybe she hadn't accomplished what she had set out to do just yet, but when she looked at all the things she'd brought for her family, the history was there inside the clothes, she saw her labor. Every piece of clothing she had earned from her own sweat" (277). Much

like Ann Petry's Lutie (Chapter One), who fictionally lives fifty years earlier in Harlem, just a few miles from the Colón's literary home in Washington Heights, Esperanza blindly continues to believe in the Franklinesque uplift narrative of hard work leading inevitably to success in the US. She fails to comprehend that larger systems like the global care market, steeped in imperialist and colonial history, control her life.

Esperanza also fails to see the value of the manufacturing collective, El Secreto de la Victoria,²⁶ that Miraluz has set up as an alternative to the foreign-owned sweatshops in the Dominican Republic. Opting out of the typical global model of accepting the meager jobs brought in by multinationals to the tax-free *zona franca*,²⁷ Miraluz has set up her own cooperative that she calls "socially responsible capitalism for the people" (278) to produce women's undergarments. The women who work there own and control the means of production, and the consumer has the choice to buy goods produced under fair labor conditions.²⁸ Cruz inverts the colonial history of women's sewing work in the Caribbean, with which I began this chapter, by offering a labor model that gives proper attention to care concerns. Cruz details exactly how the women sort through important issues of care that are usually disregarded as individual matters, touching upon several factors that contribute to the inequality that shadows the care burden in the US as well. First, these women demand that men start to shoulder more of the load such that "wives were asking their husbands to make their own meals and their sons were doing their own

²⁶ The name of the company is clearly an allusion to the multinational Victoria's Secret lingerie company while also literally meaning "the secret of victory" for the worker.

²⁷ A *zona franca* is a designated site in the Dominican Republic where multinational corporations can locate their manufacturing businesses—ie—sewing factories—and receive an abundance of incentives, tax breaks, and exemptions. Often, a local company manages the infrastructure and workforce.

²⁸ Cruz may have modeled Miraluz's cooperative on Alta Gracia Apparel, which produces college sweatshirts and other apparel that is then sold in university bookstores. Workers are paid a living wage (three times the minimum wage in the Dominican Republic), are unionized, and labor conditions are overseen by the Worker Rights Consortium. See more at altagraciaapparel.com.

laundry” (228).²⁹ They ask some vital questions about how to address the care needs of their members as they form their company: “Who would babysit for their children? Who would cook? Who would take care of the viejos? Who would take care of all the things the women had to do after they got off work? And in weeks, they started a bartering system that inspired even the most skeptical to want to join El Secreto de la Victoria” (228). This collective model that embraces care and dependency concerns resists imperialist labor practices and offers an alternative to Dominican women who might otherwise be usurped into the global care market and forced to migrate to the US in search of the ever-elusive success that Esperanza seeks. With their own unpaid care work more equally distributed, they are able to perform their paid sewing work more efficiently.

The potential of the interdependent models suggested in the novels of Santiago and Cruz are highlighted by their sharp contrast with the individual decisions that their characters, América and Esperanza, make at the end of each book. Rather than fully integrating into the informal labor collective of Latina care workers in Bedford and working to change labor conditions, as has in fact happened in New York in recent years, América moves to Manhattan with her daughter and takes a job working in a luxury hotel downtown. Not working in private homes does bring certain benefits such as health insurance and overtime pay, along with fewer hours; however, the association with dependency recalls the same type of invisibility she experienced working in the hotel in Vieques. Santiago writes that the guests “mostly ignore her. They don’t even see her half

²⁹ Many feminist scholars have addressed this topic. For example, in *The Second Shift* (1989), Arlie Hochschild with Anne Manung assert that advances made by women in the workplace have not been matched by an increase of men performing domestic labor at home. Barbara Ehrenreich, Ann Crittendon, and others have made similar arguments.

the time” (322). She has begun a life in New York that will likely resemble that of Esperanza, struggling as a single mother to support her child on the low wages of domestic work. Like Esperanza, América has become invested in the independence-based liberal rights model. The last line reads, “It is, after all, her life, and she’s the one in the middle of it” (325). The same phrase could be written for Esperanza, who, unbeknownst to her children or her father-in-law, has decided she will sell the land in Los Llanos to pay off her debt in the US and to start saving for a house. She is fully staked in the slippery promises of the US, the individualist narrative that does not consider the real circumstances of dependency in her life. She does not make enough money to care for Don Chan and her children on her salary; she has actually regressed economically through consumer debt since her arrival in the US. She is exactly the product that the global market has shaped her to be—a hard worker who will meet the care needs of the ever-increasing elderly citizens of the US, easing the care burden of more privileged women while increasing the profits of multinational banks by paying her credit card bill every month. By importing the labor of care workers like América and Esperanza, the US can continue to operate under the independence-based model that omits care and dependency as political concerns.

The current global market in care labor from the Caribbean, namely Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, is grounded in the historical past of colonization and US imperialism. Rather than profiting from women’s domestic labor in the needlework industry, importing hand-sewn goods that relieve women in the US from performing these tasks, the US state and multinational corporations that dominate global markets import labor to meet the impending care crisis in the US. The lack of attention paid by

individual employers and the US government to the importance of care and the universal nature of dependency has given rise to an unsustainable system of care in which the burden is perpetually being passed to the next most vulnerable group of women desperate enough to perform the work for the meager compensation that an independence-based culture and society awards it. Grace Chang argues that “immigration from the Third World into the United States doesn’t just happen in response to a set of factors but is carefully orchestrated—that is, desired, planned, compelled, managed, accelerated, slowed, and periodically stopped—by the direct actions of US interests, including the government as state and as employer, private employers, and corporations” (3-4). The overemphasis on independence and the stigma surrounding dependency helps explain why care work has historically been assigned to women, who have also been labeled social dependents. Considering dependency as inseparably attached to the human condition of physicality allows for the removal of the stigma historically attached not only to dependent persons but to those who perform the work to care for them. Reading contemporary Latina literature through the lens of dependency, which integrates the perspective of disability studies with feminist concerns of care, broadens the spectrum of liberal rights discourse. These novels not only call attention to the often invisible labor conditions of Latina domestic and care workers, they offer alternative labor models that extend beyond individual rights and include care concerns in their pursuit of social justice.

Conclusion:

Public Discourse and *The Help*: Any Help at All?

As I have developed my arguments about the centrality of care work and its intersections with race, class, and gender in my dissertation, these issues have also been discussed in open public forums and in conjunction with recent popular cultural texts. In fact, the political movement toward equal labor rights for domestic and care workers is gaining momentum. The National Domestic Workers Alliance, which was founded in 2007 and made up of a coalition of 39 regional domestic worker and immigrants rights associations, has been spearheading this movement. Although in their writings, they consistently refer to their constituents as “domestic workers,” they do, in fact, represent the same demographic of childcare workers, housekeepers, and caregivers of aging and disabled persons that I have categorized as “care workers” in this dissertation. Through grass-roots organization, this coalition worked for six years in New York to pass the first piece of legislation—the New York Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, passed in 2010—that expands the labor protections of care workers. The New York Department of Labor lists the newly gained provisions of this law as:

The right to overtime pay at time-and-a-half after 40 hours of work in a week, or 44 hours for workers who live in their employer’s home;
A day of rest (24 hours) every seven days, or overtime pay if they agree to work on that day;
Three paid days of rest each year after one year of work for the same employer;
and Protection under New York State Human Rights Law, and the creation of a special cause of action for domestic workers who suffer sexual or racial harassment.

The NDWA along with journalists and others who have written about this bill herald these modest specifications, which still do not include social security benefits, as a first

step toward reversing the exclusion of domestic workers (as well as farm laborers) from the Fair Labor Standards Act (FSLA) of the 1930s. That law and other New Deal legislation guaranteed workers minimum wage and social security benefits, along with collective bargaining rights; all of these protections have been denied to domestic and care workers. Although they were granted minimum wage benefits in 1974 in an extension of the FSLA, breaches of this law are all too common. The marginal social status of many care workers renders them vulnerable to accepting substandard pay and conditions.

In 2012, the NDWA released a comprehensive report of labor conditions for domestic and care workers, 95 percent of whom are women and the majority of whom are women of color and immigrants in the US. This landmark report called *Home Economics: The Invisible and Unregulated World of Domestic Work* compiles data that confirm the perpetuity of longstanding denigrations of carework, such as low pay, the lack of social security or healthcare benefits, noncontractual labor arrangements, hazardous working conditions, as well as disrespect and abuse on the job. Although the NDWA appears to be primarily concerned with the individual labor rights of each worker, evidence of the organizers' familiarity with the importance of care and its significant contribution to the public good shines through in many of this report's findings. Linda Burnham and Nik Theodore, who authored the report, explicitly demonstrate this stance when they claim that "improving the conditions in which domestic workers labor is an important step toward creating an economy that values the hidden work of care" (5). Furthermore, the NDWA used a collaborative methodology to gather data, which involved the work of 190 domestic workers from 34 different labor organizations in 14

metropolitan areas. These workers not only carried out the 2,086 interviews given in nine different languages, they also helped design the survey to ensure that the questions and concerns met the interests of the actual women who perform this labor. This methodology recognizes interdependence and communal organization as opposed to a top-down, patriarchal approach. The investment of these workers in care concerns also shows in the type of data collected. For example, wage levels are not only compared against local minimum wage laws and standard numerical measures of poverty; the authors also state, “Indeed, overall wage rates for the vast majority of domestic workers are below the level needed to adequately support a family” (22). Workers are not just employees, but people with dependents to care for in their own homes. The study also notes that “20 percent were discharged for missing work to take care of themselves or a family member” (30). This is a rare acknowledgement of the gap in privilege between those who are responsible to care for dependents and those who are free of this charge or who have adequate means to pay for care. The basic remunerations made by the legislation in the New York Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, which has become the model for similar bills being drafted and promoted in other states, still fall short of bridging the care gap. Women who work as care givers for others rarely have the resources to hire someone to care for their own dependents.

Public interest in, or at least awareness of, domestic and care work appears to be on the rise. Currently, domestic workers bill of rights campaigns are happening in California (where it passed the state Senate last year only to be vetoed by the governor), Illinois, and Massachusetts, Hawaii, and Oregon. In 2012, NDWA Director Ai-Jen Poo was named as one of TIME’s 100 Most Influential People. She has since written several

articles and given interviews that have been featured in national publications.¹ The popularity of the recent British television miniseries, *Downton Abbey*, in the US speaks to widespread interest in the class divide and simultaneous intimate connections between domestic workers and their moneyed employers. However, perhaps the most salient example of the reach of domestic work into popular culture as of late is Kathryn Stockett's New York Times bestseller, later turned into a commercially-successful film, *The Help*. The story takes place in early 1960s Jackson, Mississippi and revolves around a young white woman, Miss Skeeter, recently returned from college with ambitions to be a professional writer even as all of her socialite friends are baby booming. Encouraged by a New York editor to find something troubling to write about, Skeeter latches on to plight of the African American domestic workers who raise Southern white children (including Skeeter) but are simultaneously living in Jim Crow America. The most recent scandal is the Home Help Sanitation Initiative, a bill authored by Skeeter's best friend; the bill would require every white home to have a separate bathroom for their black employees. Feeling sentimental about her own maid, Constantine, who she finds out her mother fired after 29 years of service while she was away at school, Skeeter takes up this noble cause and decides to interview these domestic workers so that their stories, "the good and the bad," (*The Help*) can be heard. She partners up with Aibileen, a friend's maid, who then recruits several more women, who eventually fill up a book of their stories that eventually gets published, sending Skeeter off to New York to make her way in the writing world.

¹ See The Huffington Post, The Nation, Ms. Magazine, and The New York Times.

Both the book and film versions of *The Help* received ample attention, accolades and Oscar nominations from some and scathing critiques from others. African American as well as white scholars and cultural commentators came out in full-fledged criticism of *The Help*, particularly upon its movie release. The same week the film debuted, African American feminist scholar Duchess Harris wrote an article on *The Feminist Wire* called “Kathryn Stockett Is Not My Sister and I Am Not Her Help” in which she argues that the book’s real focus is not on the dangers faced by black women at this moment in US history; rather, it “quickly devolves into just another novel by and for white women” as the reader is expected to empathize with Skeeter as she mourns the loss of the maid who raised her and then cheer for her atypical professional success. Melinda Henneberger, a white political writer, points out, “The book’s real appeal . . . is in its invitation to ease into a warm bath of moral superiority over the racist ninnies in the book” (7). Thus, contemporary readers and viewers get the sense that the blatant racism shown in the film is something from the past, a notion that fosters a post-race ideology confirmed by the reduction of the racism to one haughty housewife whose defeat supposedly means liberation for the domestic workers. The violence and real threats faced by the African American domestic workers represented in the film are ameliorated by the nostalgic quality of the film: the white women dress in cartoonish, bright colors; pop music from the era such as Chubby Checker’s “Let’s Twist Again” plays in the background; and Southern foods like fried chicken, butter beans, and various pies are photographed to perfection in a manner that supersedes the sweat and toil required to garnish those white tables. In an open statement directed to the fans of *The Help*, the Association of Black Women Historians (ABWH) condemned both the book and the film, stating,

Despite efforts to market the book and the film as a progressive story of triumph over racial injustice, *The Help* distorts, ignores, and trivializes the experiences of black domestic workers. We are specifically concerned about the representations of black life and the lack of attention given to sexual harassment and civil rights activism. . . .

The popularity of this most recent iteration is troubling because it reveals a contemporary nostalgia for the days when a black woman could only hope to clean the White House rather than reside in it. . . .

Portraying the most dangerous racists in 1960s Mississippi as a group of attractive, well dressed, society women, while ignoring the reign of terror perpetuated by the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens Council, limits racial injustice to individual acts of meanness.

The ABWH goes on to suggest some alternative texts for those interested in more accurate representations of the history of African American domestic workers' lives, including Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, Ann Petry's *The Street*, and Alice Childress's *Like One of the Family: Conversations from a Domestic's Life*.

Given the excoriation that progressive groups and scholars gave the book and film versions of *The Help*, it may come as a surprise to learn that the National Domestic Workers Alliance has wholeheartedly embraced the film by promoting public showings of it. The NDWA website features a printable guide on how to throw your own *The Help* Oscar party. In fact, the website states, "On Oscar night NDWA hosted #BeTheHelp Academy Award viewing parties all around the nation to keep talking with our friends and family about how domestic workers touch our lives and do the work that makes all other work possible." In doing so, the NDWA attempted to transform the representation of domestic workers in the film from entertainment into meaningful political discussions of labor rights. The book and the film do make mention of the lack of social security benefits, low pay, long hours, and lack of vacation time that have historically plagued domestic work. In the opening scene in the film that depicts her first interview with

Aibileen, Skeeter asks, “What does it feel like to raise a white child when your own child’s at home being looked after by somebody else?” (*The Help*). Having these issues and questions brought up in the mass media presented an opportunity too good to relinquish. An article from the race-focused news site, *Colorlines*, reports, “The Alliance’s Director Ai-jen Poo noted that the film provided a rare portrayal of domestic workers in ways that allowed them complexity, humanity and individuality, and further related very closely to the portrayal of the relationship between workers and the children they raised.” Poo goes on to state, “It felt like that dimension of their story was being told for the first time. . . . The relationship between the kids and the workers was portrayed in a very deep way, and our members appreciated that” (Sen). Despite the multiplicity of problems in representation found in the book and the film, the fact that the subject of care labor entered public discourse created a rare political opportunity to garner support for the domestic workers’ rights movement.

The public debate that ensued after the publication and subsequent film debut of *The Help* serves as an example of how literary and filmic texts can intersect with and influence not only political movements but the rights discourse that underwrites them. Collective discussions about issues of race, labor, care concerns, class issues, and how specific persons or groups are represented shows an engagement at the level of discourse. While the majority of what has been published of this debate, either in print or online, comes from professional scholars, writers, or groups, the NDWA’s emphasis on empowering their members to hold screening parties, giving them talking points to foster discussions with their guests about the rights of domestic laborers offers a unique model of grass roots work at the discursive level. Cultural texts allow for an examination of the

language that society deploys and for what purpose. Reading literature through the lens of dependency elucidates the need for more social attention to interdependence and concerns of care.

The main thrust of the NDWA's political campaigns, now happening in several states, is to codify the labor rights of domestic and care work through legislation. While I agree that these legal exclusions urgently need to be reversed, I trace the social exclusion of domestic and care workers much further back to the omission of dependency and care concerns from foundational philosophies of individual liberal rights. Thus, the change also needs to occur at the level of discourse, rather than on the surface level of the law. After all, minimum wage laws for domestic workers were instituted in 1974, yet the NDWA reports that currently, "Nearly one-quarter (23%) of survey respondents are paid less than the minimum wage" (18). What the NDWA's focus lacks is an understanding of care workers' association with dependency. The lack of provisions and rights for the dependents in society casts a shadow over those who care for these dependent persons. Their work is not protected or fairly compensated because it is not esteemed. Our social priorities are reflected in market values. Liberal rights have mainly focused on the supposedly independent individual, without concerns for those who are and will perhaps remain dependent. Social change needs to happen not only at the juridical and political level of policy, but discursively such that the definition of liberal rights includes the recognition of interdependence and relationships of care as primary concerns. Only when "dependency" stops being a bad word, and care work is valued as "the work that makes all other work possible," will the care burden cease to be unsustainably passed on to the next most vulnerable social group. We need to examine literary narratives of care that go

beyond the lost Judith Shakespeare who shouldered the care burden alone and, thus, had no further opportunities at self-realization. We need to investigate and implement the kinds of collectives, coalitions, and alternative models of care that are patterned in many literary and filmic texts by people of color in the US. Doing so would help to remove the stigma of dependency from care work and to ensure that those who care for the people we claim to love the most are compensated fairly and treated justly.

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