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The Portrayal of White Characters in the Slave Narrative Tradition

The slave narrative tradition is a form of autobiographical writing that closely examines the narrator's journey to emancipation from slavery. In this tradition, former slaves compose one of the most influential forms of African American literature in the nineteenth century. Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* each depicts the narrator's journey from slavery to freedom. Douglass's and Jacobs' autobiographies characterize their personal relationships with people along their journey to freedom, both slaves and slaveholders alike. The neo-slave narrative stems from the slave narrative tradition wherein authors reimagine accounts of slavery in the United States, written primarily in the mid to late nineteenth century as a way of expressing the hardships enslaved African descendants faced in the Americas. Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*, Sherley Anne Williams's *Dessa Rose*, and Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* each contributes to the neo-slave narrative tradition, and through their stories they recreate the tragedies of slavery in the nineteenth century United States.

The portrayal of white characters in these two slave and three neo-slave narratives is truthful to human nature in representing both good and bad-natured people by depicting white individuals in varying degrees of cruelty and kindness. Within these African American authored works, the portrayal of the white character is complex, and there are some characters who are slaveholding whites in the antebellum South. These African American authors each constructed

white characters with realistic portrayals of complexity even when their white characters represented people who historically supported slavery and white supremacy. There were cruel, bloodthirsty white men in every slave narrative, which was typical among the whites in the South, but each author also depicted white sympathizers, some risking themselves to help slaves gain freedom. These sympathizers lived in a world where white supremacy presided, and although they saw the cruelty of slavery, they could never comprehend slavery to the fullest. The white sympathizers in each narrative are those whose ideas of slavery transformed, and I will examine their relationship with the main character throughout this transformation. Despite their inability to fully comprehend the confines of slavery, the good or partially good white characters reveal the intricate web the authors weave to portray accurate white characters of the antebellum South.

In investigating the key good white representations, the main questions include the following: What is the white character's intentions? Are they pure? In understanding the white characters' motives, we must examine their relationship with the narrator or main character. The next most important questions include: What is the nature of the white character's and the narrator's relationship? How does this relationship evolve over time? Relationships across the color line were dangerous and complicated. The evolution of these relationships reveals the characters' true nature. Lastly, the following questions will bring further clarity: How did the white characters change, and was the change to the character's moral betterment or detriment? Did their relationship with the main character/narrator train them to follow rules or inspire them to continue risking themselves to free slaves? The white characters, as well as the black, are each maturing in their own way, but in what ways are they doing so? Investigating all of these questions ultimately leads to answering the final question, and main subject of this essay: How

are white characters in the slave and neo-slave narrative tradition portrayed? In answering the main question we can then decide whether the authors of these narratives believed that people on opposing sides of the color line were capable of resolving their differences so they could coexist despite the legacy of slavery and the mistrust it created between races. In writing their narratives, the authors could either encourage the division of races or bind them together through trial and hardship. Whichever story the authors adopt and portray would disclose more about the author by indicating whether the author believed in reconciliation of races after slavery.

Part 1: Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

One of the major themes in both Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is the influence of white people in their lives and what it brought, or stripped from, each of them as slaves in their narratives. Some white influences came in the form of slave owners, and others they met as fugitives in passing through their domain. Along with Douglass's persistence and, for Jacobs, through fate and trust in other people, they each had a desire that would sometimes serve for them as the only motivation that helped them acquire their freedom from the Slave States. As fugitive slaves with a burning desire to become free, Douglass and Jacobs had to rely on the kindness of white people, who ultimately risked their lives, in order to help them gain freedom. Looking at the following passages, readers can gain a greater critical understanding of the lives of Douglass and Jacobs and how they obtained their freedom through the power of their own willfulness, and a little bit of unexpected help from various white people.

In his *Narrative*, Douglass reports that he realized as a child that having an education would be critical to acquiring his freedom someday. The mistress he was on loan to in Baltimore as a child, Sophia Auld, began teaching him to read until her husband Hugh Auld forbade her. Up until then, Mrs. Auld, having never owned slaves, was kind to Douglass and treated him like she would her own child. Because of her husband's disapproval, Mrs. Auld evolved into a cruel slaveholder whose hatefulness Douglass describes later. Without either Mrs. Auld's help or her blessing, Douglass was forced to look elsewhere to find his education.

One instance wherein he became acquainted with white people was after Mrs. Auld ceased teaching him, when he quite literally stole and fought for his education through the means of his own intellect. He created a plan which he utilized to trick the poorest young white boys in his neighborhood to teach him how to read. As a slave he was forced into this situation, but his powerlessness grew into determination. Through that determination, he composed the following plan on his own accord:

The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful, was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers. With their kindly aid, obtained at different times and in different places, I finally succeeded in learning to read. When I was sent of errands, I always took my book with me, and by going one part of my errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before my return. I used also to carry bread with me, enough of which was always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to bestow upon the

hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. (Douglass and Jacobs 49-50)

Douglass can be considered quite fond of the white children, or “little urchins” (Douglass and Jacobs 50) that he referred to them as. Douglass was living at the discretion of white children, but even then, with those little white boys as his teachers, Douglass was benefitted in innumerable ways. Douglass undoubtedly had mixed emotions about his situation, given that white supremacy was the reason he was considered a slave, but there is a moment that reveals his gratefulness for the education the children bestowed upon him. As a slave, under the law and per his white Master’s demands in his household, he was forbidden to have an education. Trading bread for education seems to be fair, except that slavery through any lens is *never* fair. These unnamed white children had such a large impact on Frederick Douglass’s life, and whether they realized it at the time, or even if they grew up to be supporters of slavery, they’d played a part in helping Douglass secure his freedom.

As Linda Brent in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs writes her story and describes a vastly different relationship with her mistress in comparison to that of Douglass’s relationship with Sophia Auld. Jacobs understood that even under the veil of kindness her mistress showed her, especially in teaching her to read and write, she still thought of Linda only as a slave girl, as seen in the following passage:

My mistress had taught me the precepts of God’s Word: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” “Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.” But I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognize me as her neighbor. I would give much to blot out from my memory that one great wrong. As a child, I loved my mistress; and,

looking back on the happy days I spent with her, I try to think with less bitterness of this act of injustice. While I was with her, she taught me to read and spell; and for this privilege, which so rarely falls to the lot of a slave, I bless her memory. (Douglass and Jacobs 134-135)

Jacobs was incredibly fortunate for her mistress's kindness; she taught Jacobs how to read when it was considered dangerous for slaves to receive an education. However, this was rare treatment by slave owners and the mistress was in as much danger as the slave, given that it was generally frowned upon and in some places illegal to educate slaves. In her childhood, she did not even understand that she was enslaved; she had a great love for her mistress. Jacobs grew up to understand her situation, and with this knowledge she came to despise the memory of her mistress. Despite this, she remained grateful for the education she received and the happy childhood her mistress allowed her to have, which are both rare blessings to befall upon a slave at the time.

There are many more instances in the two slave narratives of contact between white people and our authors as they grew up. As children, Douglass befriended individuals who would otherwise have been considered the enemy to teach him to read, whereas Jacobs trusted in her mistress and never had the need to fight for her education as Douglass did. Douglass hints that his idea of befriending the boys was a con by saying that he traded bread for the "more valuable bread of knowledge" (Douglass and Jacobs 50). His view of having valuable knowledge over having bread to eat says a lot about his desire to become freed from slavery, and it emphasizes the importance of the friendships he made with white little boys.

Jacobs, as a child unaware of her circumstances, was not privy to the ways of slavery until her mistress passed away and her life was significantly changed under ownership of her

new master, Dr. Flint. She came to understand that her former mistress was cut of the same cloth as all other slaveholders because even generous slaveholders still own and enslave human beings against their will. Jacobs came to realize that her beloved mistress considered her property throughout her childhood. No matter the ways in which the authors received their education, their education, and the white people that helped them receive it, helped to pave the road to freedom for both Douglass and Jacobs.

The inclusion of scripture throughout Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is in direct relation to the intended portrayal of her opinions of white people. Many times, throughout her narrative, Jacobs talked about her and her grandmother's relationship with Christ and the ways in which she believed He would deliver them from slavery. She was given the opportunity to read by her childhood mistress, and this is how she came to read the Bible and gain a relationship with Christ. Frederick Douglass, however, does not deny his belief in Christianity, but he does deny his belief in the Southern white man's Christianity. Through Christianity, Southern men declared power over slaves as slaveholders and claimed their actions were justified because black peoples were known as decedents of Ham, and cursed by God, meaning black people's purpose was to serve God's chosen people.

Jacobs and Douglass both see the Southern white man's Christianity as hypocritical, but Douglass writes that is because the Christian God that he knew was not the same God that the Southern men claimed to know. Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass's written view of Christianity is a window through which we see their true opinion of white people. There were, in each narrator's lives, white people of good and bad quality, but with these passages, we can see that their assessment of white people was overall innately negative, save for those who worked alongside them to gain their freedom.

When in the North, Jacobs faced her owner many years after her escape. Emily Flint, after serving her father's interests in trying to convince Jacobs to return to their farm, marries a man named Mr. Dodge who in turn does the same thing. Mr. Dodge's obsession in finding his "property" after marrying Emily replaced that of Dr. Flint's obsession. Jacobs first worked in the Bruce household when she escaped to New York City, where Mrs. Bruce was an abolitionist helping Jacobs hide from her former owners. At the risk of herself, Mrs. Bruce does what she can to protect Jacobs and buys her from Mr. Dodge, who found Jacobs without difficulty. Mrs. Bruce, in buying Jacobs's freedom, upsets Jacobs. Jacobs was hoping to attain freedom on her own terms, without the buying and selling of her freedom, and even though this overall concept deeply offended her, she was still grateful to Mrs. Bruce for her generosity. Jacobs was idealistically hoping that Dr. Flint would give up, and so would Emily, but with Mr. Dodge's growing insistence in finding her, Jacobs had but few other options than to allow herself to be "bought" for a final time.

Two characters with some likeness in the narratives were *Incidents'* Mr. Sands and *Narrative's* William Freeland. Both men lived and worked in the South, surrounded by slavery and benefitting from its practices. Mr. Sands and William Freeland were the milder kind of slaveholder; neither treated their slaves cruelly nor treated them with loving care. This version of the Southern man was less common than the cruel and narcissistic slave owners who would take pleasure in the suffering of slaves who didn't work or act as they are assumed they should. Although Mr. Sands fathered Jacobs's children, he could not deny that they were half black. They were slaves, not a subject of love and adoration, even to their father. William Freeland, in Douglass's opinion, was one of the most fair and forthright masters he had encountered during his time as a slave working hard labor. The concept of slavery and the acceptance of slavery are

preposterous, yet in these slave narratives, Douglass and Jacobs felt the need to describe certain white people as more forgiving and forgivable in comparison to others. The fact that the slave had near-compliments for the slave masters in any circumstance shows the willfulness and forgiving nature that even the most broken black slaves had in the antebellum South. This, just as much as their silent perseverance in reaching freedom, says more about the authors than it does those they write about by showing their good nature and forgiveness, and it should shame any person who supported slavery in any form.

As a runaway, Douglass found adult white men in the North that were vastly different from the white men he encountered all throughout his lifetime, including Captain Anthony, Thomas Auld, and Hugh Auld. His narrative was a personal account of his life, and these people were named publicly as cruel slaveholders. In escaping from Maryland to New York, Douglass came across men and women who protected him and helped him attain freedom, but for their safety and the assurance of future slaves' passage through the same means, Douglass refrained to mention most of them by name or refer to where they were located. Two of the men he met as a runaway slave in Boston were William Lloyd Garrison, who wrote the preface for *Narrative*, and Wendell Phillips, who wrote a letter that was published within the narrative as well. Garrison and Phillips were the founder and president of the American Anti-Slavery Society, respectively, and stood to promote Douglass's story in the North to spread the word in support of the abolitionist cause. These two men were impressed by Douglass, and even more so in his ability to rouse support for the abolitionist cause. At the time of publication, when slavery was still legal in the United States, Douglass needed white representation and certification of the authenticity of his work, which was given freely by Garrison and Phillips and helped his *Narrative* gain positive attention in the Northern states.

Harriet Jacobs had the same kind of support in publishing her story, but from L. Maria Child. Child stood as Jacobs' white editor and promoter, giving Jacobs's *Incidents* a preface that ascertained the content's authenticity. As with Douglass, Jacobs needed a white person to provide a personal account of her opinion of the content and the author herself, because even in the progressive North, a black individual did not have the same respect or rights as a white individual. The word of black writers meant little, even if it was the truth, if a white person did not vouch for them. Child helped *Incidents* gain well-deserved attention and succeeded in promoting the abolitionist cause while encouraging a black woman to share the story of her own emancipation.

Both Frederick Douglass's and Harriet Jacobs's slave narratives offer an insider's view of the dangerous and rewarding journey from slavery to freedom. Through different means and experiences, Douglass and Jacobs were only two out of thousands of slaves who escaped slavery and told their stories in the form of slave narratives. They encountered various groups of white people, including evil slave masters, the benefactors of slavery who were indifferent to the cruelties of slave labor because they relished the wealth produced by their labor, and the abolitionists who fought against the injustices of slavery. Some white people did all they could to tear slaves down as if they were animals, while others found ways to prove their humanity exists and should be nurtured and considered equal among people. All forms of humanity are represented and present in these slave narratives, and the authors make note of those who were helpful friends of runaway slaves.

Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents* each addresses my central questions, the first of which examines the white characters' intentions. Sophia Auld in Douglass's *Narrative* began her relationship with Douglass with pure intentions. She began

teaching him how to read and write, but when her husband reprimanded her and forbade her to continue the lessons, she grew cold towards Douglass. The nature of their relationship was almost like a mother to her child, loving and caring, but over time took a downward spiral into the depths of cruelty that many slaveholders took on. Her initial intentions were good and her actions were in Douglass's favor. The moment she understood white supremacy came when her husband reprimanded her; until that moment she had no ties to slavery nor an understanding that slaves were merely property value. Mrs. Auld's changes were essentially for her moral detriment. Once a kind woman, she sank to new lows as a white supremacist, following the social rules that separated black from white. Even though her relationship with Douglass took a wrong turn, Sophia Auld's kindness to begin with was unknown to Douglass in slavery. Her initial decency helped lead Douglass to find an education, which he noted as the first step towards freedom. Her kindness was unwarranted, and it also showed that human's first instinct is tenderness, and also white supremacy and racism are learned flaws.

The same can be said for Harriet Jacobs's mistress in *Incidents*. Her mistress was kind, and Jacobs's experiences in slavery as well as her relationship with her mistress were unusually good. As a child, Jacobs's mistress taught her to read, and this eventually led to her freedom as well. However, as Jacobs grew up, she realized that even though her mistress treated her well, her intentions themselves were not pure. Her mistress was gracious, yet she held human beings as slaves and did not free Jacobs as she said she would. The niceness was understood as an act by Jacobs later, but in reality the mistress benefitted from slavery too much to defy it. She believed in treating her slaves well, but she still believed in the concept of slavery. Jacobs understandably took this as a slap to the face. Without her mistress's kindness though, even with her misplaced intentions, Jacobs would have never had the means to escape from slavery. For this Jacobs

commended the selfless act of her mistress, who gave her the tools to escape and risked her life in doing so.

Also in *Incidents*, Mrs. Bruce was essentially a white woman far removed from slavery, and therefore, able to see the persecution of slavery for what it was. When Linda Brent informed Mrs. Bruce of her predicament and Mr. Dodge showed his intentions of bringing Brent back to the Slave States as his property, Mrs. Bruce was more than willing to help Brent. Mrs. Bruce's intentions, even from the beginning, were pure. Brent had worked in Mr. Bruce's home since before Mrs. Bruce had married him, so their loyalty to one another was intact throughout the entire process. Their relationship did evolve; Mrs. Bruce became the hero and eventually bought Brent's freedom, which initially offended Brent but never overshadowed her gratefulness. Mrs. Bruce's change, from gracious employer to heroine, was to her moral betterment even when she was helpful and good-hearted to start. Jacobs does not reveal whether Mrs. Bruce was led to continue her endeavors in freeing slaves, but freeing Brent proved her upstanding character and progressivism. She did not personally benefit from the act, and so represented the white characters that selflessly fought for slaves' freedom.

This discussion of the two slave narratives prepares us to assess the white characters in the three neo-slave narratives by establishing the focus of this essay, which examines the good and helpful white characters within slave and neo-slave narratives. The portrayal of white characters in neo-slave narratives could determine the degree to which the authors have faith in the reconciliation of black and white people. The assessment of these characters allows us to access the opinions of the African American authors who deliberately write outside of their personal point of view, which is from white characters' perspectives. Neo-slave narrative authors

write fictional accounts of the antebellum South, so through the portrayal of their white characters, we can assess their personal beliefs as African Americans in the modern world.

Part 2: Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*

Octavia E. Butler's neo-slave narrative *Kindred* mixes a bit of the fantastical world of science fiction with the fictional, but nonfiction-based, story of life within slavery in the United States. The novel begins in the 1970s with Dana and Kevin, a married interracial couple, Dana being African American and Kevin being white, unpacking their things in their new California home. Interracial marriages are still relatively uncommon at this point in time in the United States, but it shows the progressivism that Kevin Franklin possessed. In marrying Dana, Kevin opposed his family's racist outlook and became estranged from his family as a result. As a married couple who defied convention through the duration of their relationship, Dana and Kevin's complicated marriage remained an example of a nation's slow progression in race issues.

Butler's use of science fiction brings us to the next chapter of the story. As Dana unpacked boxes in her new home dizziness overcame her, and with Kevin as witness, she traveled back in time to the scene of a young boy drowning. Acting upon instinct, she saved the boy. The boy's father arrived shortly afterward, pointing a gun at her, and Dana realized she was no longer in California – and possibly not even in the same time. She returned after another dizzy spell to her new living room, wet and confused, with Kevin gawking in bewilderment, claiming she was gone mere seconds and had reappeared just as she had disappeared. This phenomenon was time travel, as she and Kevin both came to learn, which took Dana back to her ancestor Rufus Weylin's lifetime in the 1800s. Dana's time travel specifically related to him; when his

life was endangered she appeared so that she may save him. Initially, saving the young white boy was purely instinctual, but soon Dana concluded that Rufus was her great-grandmother Hagar's biological father. However, Hagar had not yet been born. It then became Dana's duty to keep Rufus alive until he could father Hagar, which was difficult due to his knack for troublemaking. Dana could not return to the 1970s permanently without reaffirming Hagar's, and her own, future existence.

Dana met Rufus Weylin when he was only a child, and because she always showed up in the nick of time to save the young boy's life, there was an instantaneous connection between the two of them. Only minutes passed in the 1970s between her departure and return, but years passed by for Rufus and he grew up as a slaveholder's son in the antebellum South. His ideals about Dana as a black woman changed drastically. Dana saw Rufus as a child for most of her time with him while he saw her as a black woman and slave. He grew up practicing and believing in white supremacy, a belief system nurtured by both of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Weylin. Dana's opinions represented a modern standpoint of equality, as demonstrated by her marriage to a white man, and so she relied on Rufus's loyalty and proved to be too trusting of him.

Dana's time spent in the 1800s leads her to create new relationships, including a special bond with a slave woman named Alice. Alice is sexually objectified by Rufus Weylin, and due to this she would soon become Dana's ancestor once Hagar was born. The scene in Butler's *Kindred* in which Alice told Dana what happened to her letters plays a large role in Dana's newfound mistrust in white people:

“You look at this,” she said to me, not even glancing at Tess who had stopped pounding a pair of Weylin's pants to watch us. She trusted Tess. “See,” she said.

“I been looking where I wasn’t s’pose to look – in Mister Rufe’s bed chest. But what I found don’t look like it ought to be there.” She took two letters from her apron pocket. Two letters, their seals broken, their faces covered with my handwriting. (Butler 170)

The letters were written by Dana, intended for her husband Kevin who had accidentally traveled back in time with her, which she entrusted Rufus to mail for her. Dana is free but vulnerable as a black woman in her new world, so she put her trust in a white man of the antebellum South, thinking they had a mutual understanding and respect for one another. Rufus did not keep his promise and betrayed Dana by stashing away her letter without any intention of sending it on to Kevin.

In this case Rufus’s wrongs were righted by another white man, Mr. Weylin, who mailed his own letter to Kevin informing him of Dana’s return. Tom Weylin was not a good man by any means, and in Dana’s experience he was a cruel slave master, but in this case he remained true to his word. Even though Rufus proved himself a distrustful white man, there was a surprising action taken by his father who displayed an admirable quality in keeping Rufus’s word for him. This scene was important to Dana’s character development because it proved she had reason to be cautious. She learned that there were both good and bad white people in the antebellum South, and those she thought were good may have bad qualities and vice versa. Dana concluded that Mr. Weylin valued keeping his word and would go great lengths to do so, while Rufus had a hidden agenda to which, until this point, Dana had been blind.

Both Dana and Kevin changed substantially due to their journey back in time to the antebellum South. There were many instances that changed Dana’s outlook and ability to trust, and the letter scene revealed much about Rufus and the white people surrounding him. The letter

scene was a defining moment for Dana because it permanently changed her, forcing her to think twice before trusting *anybody*, whether they were black or white. From this moment on, Dana felt the need to watch her back more carefully, especially when Kevin was absent. As a result she was afraid for herself and remained distrustful of others. Butler framed this process of change by telling Dana and Kevin's story as outsiders to the ways of the South and showing how their viewpoints changed as they were immersed in Southern practices. Neither Dana nor Kevin went back to their everyday lives unchanged, especially Kevin, who eventually traveled through time back to the modern world after living in the 1800s for five years.

When Kevin and Dana finally returned home for good, Dana felt compelled to travel across the country to visit Maryland in the 1970s. Several times while Dana was in Rufus's time, she found herself becoming almost contented in her work and submissive to both Mr. Weylin and Rufus. She was successfully immersed in antebellum Southern culture as a slave, and instead of remaining an outsider looking in, she almost didn't question whether being a slave was her rightful place. She easily became accustomed to her life as a slave, if one could ever truly get used to such practices of mistreatment. On one occasion, Dana was shocked to realize that she was thinking of Rufus's home place as *her* home, and this profoundly disturbed her (Butler 192). Dana finally returned to her life with Kevin in 1976, but she showed immediate signs that she would never be intellectually or emotionally free again.

Kevin, however, was in shock, first due to traveling back in time and then even more so when he returned to the 1970s. When he initially traveled back with Dana, Kevin was not as astounded by the lifestyle change as Dana had been, given that he was white and nothing, with the exception of modern amenities, was missing from his life. However, when Dana traveled back to the modern era without him, days passed for her whereas years passed for Kevin, who

was unintentionally left behind in the antebellum South. Dana lost her sense of identity a little bit, just as Kevin did due to staying behind five years, but she mostly lost her sense of what was real and where she belonged. Kevin was lost in the sense that he was forced to live and have a livelihood in a past time, all while waiting years for his wife's return.

When Dana returned home permanently, she was also reminded of her journey back in time and of the reality of Rufus's world by her newly missing arm, which she'd left behind in her time-travel transition back to the present day. She ultimately killed Rufus by defending herself against his sexual desires, which turned to her after the death of Alice. When she traveled back to the 1970s, Rufus's hand was on her arm, which then could not pass back through time with her and was left behind. Dana losing her arm works as a metaphor by exemplifying the idea that Dana came back to the 1970s as less than a whole person. Slavery chipped away pieces of her identity, just as the time-travel took her arm and served as a reminder of her forceful transformation. When Kevin returned, however, he came back with a fuller understanding of the hardships that slaves and black people faced in opposition to the popular opinion of white supremacy. Whether or not Kevin was prepared for such a transformation, he found himself in a position where he could be blind to white supremacy no longer. He chose to rise above it and to strive for progressivism by assisting runaway slaves on the underground railroad, which could have gotten him killed in Rufus's time.

As the main white character under investigation in Butler's *Kindred*, Kevin's initial intentions are always pure. Dana was his wife and losing touch with his family over her was hard, but not unbearable for him in the 1970s. When he traveled back in time with Dana, however, his intentions and opinions were all put into perspective. As a white man in the antebellum South, Kevin had to pretend that Dana was his slave, not his wife. This, and the issue

of Mr. Weylin's and Rufus's mistreatment of slaves such as Dana, were issues from the moment he arrived. Kevin's transformation was not only enforced, it was also intensified through witnessing slavery in action in the antebellum South. Kevin was a progressivist in the modern world, but in the antebellum era, he was more of an abolitionist. His understanding of the world as a white person in the twentieth century had prevented him from knowing the mistreatment and cruelties involved in race issues, as he was classified as the race on top. When traveling back in time, Kevin was forced to see the strangulation of slavery, and furthermore, the mistreatment that African Americans still received at the hands of whites even in the 1970s. The only reason his eyes opened to this reality had been because Dana was on the receiving end of such mistreatment. This change in Kevin is easily considered moral betterment, given that his understanding of racial issues was broadened through this experience. His relationship with his wife Dana, who is a black woman oppressed in modern day society, should improve as he develops his progressivist views in his own time as he did in the 1800s, all based on his broadened point of view. Butler ends her narrative before this can be proven, but the audience can assume that his broadened world view changed the way he and his wife live in the 1970s.

Part 3: Sherley Anne Williams's *Dessa Rose*

Dessa Rose is set in the year 1847 in the Slave States. Sherley Anne Williams writes from a different perspective every other chapter, beginning with the main character, a slave woman named Dessa Rose, and moving on to the perspective of a white woman named Ruth. These two characters are brought together by fate. Dessa escapes from a coffle and is caught by white men who spare her life until the birth of her child. Later she escapes imprisonment once more after forceful rehashing of events surrounding her escape by Nehemiah, a white novelist

hoping to cover the coffee murders in his novel. She eventually finds herself safely recovering from childbirth on Ruth's farm. Dessa and Ruth are equally cautious toward each other, and their impending reliance upon one another seems an impossibility at this juncture. Dessa, having been a slave her entire life, has cause to be distrustful of white people, who in her experience have done nothing unless for their personal gain. Ruth, however, has peculiarly close relationships with specific people of color, which is demonstrated through her mourning the loss of Mammy, her enslaved maid. Dessa and Ruth are forced to rely on one another in a mutually beneficial ploy to get rich quick and escape their current situations. For Dessa, this is the general South where slavery is legal, and for Ruth it's the farm in which her husband left her to run in his absence.

Dessa's distrust of Ruth stems from being born into slavery and treated as property rather than a person except by other black people. The few interactions she'd had with white people led her to feel a great deal of emotional and physical pain, from the loss of her lover Kaine at the hands of their white Master, to the lashes, starvation practices, and beatings slaves received as punishments. Ruth's distrust, however, is not entirely grounded on legitimate principles but more based upon her idea of white supremacy. Ruth would talk aloud ceaselessly, not to Dessa or anyone in particular, about her life in Charleston with Mammy before she'd married Bertie. Dessa, still recovering from childbirth, eventually validated the reasons Ruth found her distrustful by yelling at Ruth. Out of confusion Dessa claimed that mammy, her mother, was the same individual Ruth kept referring to as her Mammy. Ruth's Mammy was dear to her, even though a slave, and her idealistic view of Mammy before she'd passed away was an illusion now tarnished by Dessa's harsh words. The remainder of the time Dessa spent on Ruth's farm, the two came to openly dislike one other.

During the time that Dessa slept after childbirth, she was not only recovering from giving birth but also from the whippings and violent mistreatment by her original mistress. Once she was sold, the trek on the coffle took its toll on her and worsened her condition, as she was heavily pregnant. When she awoke, Ruth was the only woman available to nurse Dessa's newborn son, and she was distraught at the sight. Ruth's maternal and instinctual reaction to the hungry newborn was immediately to feed him, and only afterwards did she question her instincts, as seen in the following passage:

The new baby suckled with insistent shallow pulls. "Your mammy will have a time when she start nursing you," she chided him, speaking aloud as she often did when she nursed the babies alone. Sometimes this one stared at her with eyes as bright as new brown shoe buttons and almost lost in the brown folds of his face. Rufel [Ruth] had taken the baby to her bosom almost without thought, to quiet his wailing while Ada and the other darkies settled the girl in the bedroom. More of that craziness, she knew; but then it had seemed to her as natural as tuneless crooning or baby talk. The sight of him so tiny and bloodied had pained her with an almost physical hurt and she had set about cleaning and clothing him with a single-minded intensity. And only when his cries were stilled and she looked down upon the sleek black head, the nut-brown face flattened against the pearly paleness of her breast, had she become conscious of what she was doing. A wave of embarrassment had swept over her and she had looked guiltily around the parlor. (Williams 101)

The closeness of Ruth and the newborn and also Ruth and Mammy's relationship implies that although Ruth's family were slaveholders, she was not and is not naturally tuned in to the

color line. Mammy was family as far as Ruth was concerned, and because of this she grew to believe that Mammy loved her wholeheartedly. From other passages in the novel it could be argued that Mammy did indeed love Ruth without abandon, but the idealistic version of Mammy that Ruth had created was far from the truth. Mammy was a slave, and this was the truth that Ruth had neglected to acknowledge in the eleven years Mammy spent by her side. The closeness of black and white that is demonstrated through Mammy and Ruth's past relationship is again discovered through Ruth's and the baby's relationship. Ruth is, at least with these two black people, not fully aware of their differences until she *thinks* about it; until then she is naturally and *instinctually* loving and caring for another human being other than herself.

Bertie, Ruth's husband, saw color; this was shown through Ruth's initial treatment of the runaway slaves. After Bertie left, their slaves had run away to flee Bertie's cruelties, and in their place other runaway slaves took refuge and kept up the farm for Ruth. Ruth learned the concept of white supremacy as a child, but within her marital relationship she concluded that white supremacy motivated her husband's mistreatment of black slaves on the farm. She showed tendencies of the progressiveness she once showed in Charleston by not allowing Bertie to whip the slaves, but her experiences on the farm had hardened her. Ruth learned white supremacy by growing up in a slaveholding household and then in taking on Bertie's opinions as his wife, so she believed in it herself until one day she was led to reevaluate this position. Through her relationships, first with Mammy, then Dessa, Ava, Nathan, and other runaway slaves taking refuge on her farm, she reached an understanding of the equality of races. Ruth's transformation took place alongside Dessa's transformation from hating and fearing the power of white people into understanding that cruelty is not practiced by all whites. Both women learned that their judgements should be made per the individual person.

Ruth's true nature was not easily recognized by the main character, Dessa, who found fault in almost everything that she did. First she convinced herself that Ruth was a crazy white woman, claiming that only crazy people talk out loud to themselves as Ruth so often did. Then, when this was not enough to justify her hatred of her, Dessa found Nathan and Ruth lying together and shunned them both. With the impending return of Ruth's husband Bertie, Dessa felt that Nathan engaging sexually with a white woman was a death sentence for all the fugitives on the farm. She was disgusted that Nathan, someone she had grown through friendship to love and trust, and was shocked that he would hurt her so deeply by placing his trust in the hands of a white woman. In Dessa's opinion, Ruth was irrational and unintelligent for placing herself and everyone at such high risk. If Ruth and Nathan were caught by Bertie, his wrath would be beyond her control. Dessa and everyone on the farm knew the consequences could prove fatal, so her conclusions were reasonable.

Just as tensions between Ruth and Dessa came to a head, Nathan and a handful of the other runaway slaves had concocted a plan to secure their freedom and the financial means it took to travel West, where it was rumored slavery was non-existent. Their hope was that, with the help of Ruth posing as their owner, they could run a scam that would earn themselves thousands of dollars' worth in a matter of weeks. Ruth would sell them to other slaveholders, raising their prices on false pretenses, and the next day they would run away from their new owners to meet Ruth at a rendezvous point. From there, the group would move on to the next town, the next slave auction, with the money in tow. This plan, thought through with caution, was readily accepted by Ruth, who trusted Nathan and the other fugitives. Dessa, however, resisted their proposal for fear and continued mistrust of Ruth's intentions.

Ruth's almost immediate reaction to hearing the plan was to agree to it. She not only needed the money if she ever hoped to return to Charleston, but she trusted the plan's success and the people involved. The relationships that Ruth had created with the people on her farm and their mutual trust in each other nourished the plan, and Dessa was not in full agreement. Ruth, in Dessa's eyes, was dimwitted and sneaky, and this led to several weeks' postponement of the plan. At this point in the narrative, Ruth was comfortable with Nathan as her lover and considered Cully, Harker, and everyone else to be friends. Finally, Dessa reluctantly agreed, but only after Harker took her as a lover and convinced her this plan was best for their future as free people.

On the road to the first auction, Ruth spotted a plantation and suggested they stop to stay for the night. Dessa, still angry with both Nathan and Ruth, was playing as Ruth's daughter's Mammy, and accompanies her in the house. The plantation owner, Mr. Oscar, welcomed them in. Nathan, Harker, and the others were now slaves and had to play the part, so they found rest in the slave quarters. Mr. Oscar proves that women, white or black, are susceptible to the same violence by attempting to rape Ruth. It wasn't until now that Dessa realized that Ruth is a woman just like her, with the only exception that she was white, as the following scene unfolds:

I was awakened by some muttering and it took me a minute to realize it was him and her [Ruth] in that bed. At first I was embarrassed and surprised. If she'd wanted to do that, I could have slept in the kitchen. And glad, too, cause this would show Nathan just what kind of old thing he'd taken up with... Then I realized she was trying to get him *out* the bed; she was whispering but she still sounded angry, and scared... "Dessa," she called. "Odessa, help me get this man out the bed." (Williams 200)

Ruth, as a married white woman, was in the same compromising situation as Dessa and other slave women; the possibility of being raped was constant if you were a woman, no matter what color or race. Dessa's realization was a turning point in the novel, and stems from the following reflection: "The white woman was subject to the same ravishment as me; this the thought that kept me awake. I hadn't knowed white mens could use a white woman like that, just take her by force the same as they could with us" (Williams 201). From this point forward, Dessa and Ruth have a mutual respect for one another. Ruth's respect was hard-earned, and Dessa finally learned that Ruth was not all that different from herself. She assumed that Ruth's experiences as a white woman could never reach the same lows of a black woman, but Mr. Oscar proved her wrong.

More as equals than ever before, Dessa, Ruth, Nathan, Harker, and the others continued their travels onto their first town, expecting their first slave auction within a few days. They needed to work together to pull off the scam, as it was large-scale and would be successful according to Ruth's performance. Ruth shocked Dessa yet again, hiking up the prices on white buyers and making a name for herself at the auctions. Ruth displayed a cunning edge that Dessa doubted she'd had; on many occasions Dessa hinted that she found Ruth to be crazy and simple-minded. Ruth played the buyers better than expected, and as they moved from town to town, her stories changed and her methods improved.

Their travels finally brought them to the last town and the last auction they'd planned on attending. Dessa crossed paths with Nehemiah, a white man who knew her as one of the slaves who escaped from the coffle, an event which ended in the deaths of five white men and the surrounding white population catching and hanging the slaves who managed to escape. Dessa was caught and sentenced to death, but only after the arrival of her unborn child. During this

waiting time, Nehemiah interviewed Dessa with the intention of including her murderous escape story in a pro-slavery book. Nathan and Cully helped her escape once more and she woke up on Ruth's farm, but months later Nehemiah recognized Dessa. Nehemiah dragged her to the jailhouse, where he tried to pin her as the escaped slave woman.

Ruth, summoned to the jail, was able to outwit Nehemiah by claiming Dessa could not be the escaped slave woman from the coffle. Dessa's word would never be taken over that of a white man's, but Ruth's could as a white woman claiming Dessa as her property. Nehemiah was enraged by the white woman's betrayal, and Dessa found out then that Ruth was willing to put herself in danger in order to help her black friends. This selfless act, and Dessa's recognition that Ruth had endangered herself right alongside each of the runaways, finally won Ruth Dessa's trust. Dessa came to see that Ruth had put herself in compromising situations throughout the duration of the trip, and if they had been caught Ruth would have paid severely for her crimes, possibly even with her life. When Dessa finally recognized that she and Ruth were on equal ground, she gave Ruth the trust she had rightfully earned.

Ruth's intentions were not impure, but were misplaced for a short time. She grew up in a slaveholding family, but she believed slaves, such as Mammy, to be like family. Later, she let Bertie's influence lead her to believe in white supremacy. Only with the absence of Bertie, and the arrival of Nathan and Dessa, did Ruth have reason to reevaluate her stance on white supremacy and slavery. She found, through her initial love of Mammy, and soon her love for her friends Nathan, Cully, Dessa, and the other runaway slaves, that she disagreed with the inequality of the races. Ruth and Dessa were not destined to be friends to begin with, but their relationship evolved into friendship eventually. Ruth realized that her husband would not return,

and with that realization, his hold over her was lost. She matured and was open to equality with black people, which led to her to return to her original idea of slaves: that they were like family.

Ruth's change was for her moral betterment, leading her to experience equality of the races, through the execution of the plan Nathan and the others had created. Ruth and the runaways eventually led separate lives; she went to New York and the others went West. However, Dessa never forgot what Ruth had sacrificed for them and gave Ruth credit for her freedom. Ruth was an example of a white person who learned what it meant and how to practice white supremacy, but eventually chose to oppose it. In her experiences and through her newly formed relationships, Ruth came to recognize that black and white people are more similar than they are different. Because of this she found a way to overcome her prejudices. Ruth also provides an example of a white character who is originally nonprejudiced, implying that racism, white supremacy, and slavery are learned ideas and practices. If they are learned ideas and practices, then they can be forgotten or changed, and Ruth changed willingly.

Part 4: Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*

The Underground Railroad, a neo-slave narrative written by Colson Whitehead, places the main character Cora in the early 1800s United States, wherein slavery was legal in the South. Cora was born into slavery in Georgia and found herself abandoned by her mother at a young age. Beginning the day after her mother ran away from the plantation, she was an outcast among the slaves and was sent to live in the outcasts' cabin. Cora's very few encounters with white people remained on the plantation; her Master, James Randall, was rarely seen along with his brother, Master Terrance Randall. The cruel slave overseer they employed, Connelly, worked the

slaves hard. Later, as a fugitive, Cora's relationships with white people varied as she was forced to put her life in the hands of the railroad's white conductors on her escape to freedom.

The first white abolitionist Cora met was Fletcher, a shopkeeper originally from Pennsylvania. He met Caesar first, an enslaved young man that asked Cora to run away with him, and as they got to know one another, Fletcher promised to help him attain freedom through the use of the Underground Railroad. Fletcher accomplished this without his wife's knowledge, and because he was harboring and helping fugitives to escape, his life was in as much danger as Cora's and Caesar's were. The journey to Fletcher's house had been interrupted at least once, and in the struggle with white hog trappers, Cora accidentally killed a twelve-year-old white boy. The stakes were made even greater by this; "Caesar and Cora were as good as murderers in the eyes of the country. The white men wanted blood. Caesar covered his face and Fletcher placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder" (Whitehead 63). Fletcher was not happy with these circumstances, but: "The story of the escape and their own account of the fight in the woods did much to alleviate Fletcher's dismay... They would proceed" (Whitehead 63). Although Fletcher was scared for his life in ways not much unlike the runaway slaves, he proceeded to help them escape Georgia.

Before they had even left the plantation, Cora had already questioned Caesar of Fletcher's true intentions, "'How we know he ain't tricking us?'" (Whitehead 53). Caesar vouched for Fletcher's authenticity, "'He is not.' Caesar had thought it out already. Just talking to Fletcher in his shop provided enough grounds to string him up. No need for elaborate schemes" (Whitehead 53). From this moment on, Cora trusts and follows Caesar's judgment wholeheartedly and without question, as he turns out to be right about Fletcher. Fletcher and the white conductor to whom he delivered Caesar and Cora, Lumbly, were each courageous through

the continuation of their rescue, which threatened the lives of all involved. For the first of many times yet to come, Cora had no choice but to trust her life in a white man's hands.

Fletcher's importance as a character in the novel is stressed because he provides Cora's initial path out of the general vicinity of her Master's plantation and delivers her to her first taste of freedom. He is also the first example of a white abolitionist in our protagonist's life. Without Fletcher, followed by Lumbly, Cora would never have had reason to reconsider her wariness of all white people. Through their sacrifices, Cora first learns that not *all* white people are evil slave drivers or owners. This opens Cora's eyes to the possibility that there are decent white people in her world, although she had not found or seen one until she met Fletcher.

Up the line on the underground railroad, traveling by train through elaborate underground tunnels, Cora and Caesar meet Sam, the next railroad conductor. Sam is a white young man born in South Carolina who is sympathetic to the abolition movement. He is a barkeeper in a white bar, and his duty is to inform Cora and Caesar of the next oncoming trains after receiving news, in case they wished to move northward out of the Slave States. Sam explains to the fugitives that although only a state away, South Carolina moved in the direction of progressivism, and was in the process of integrating free blacks into society. He provides them with false identities, papers that claimed them as free blacks, and they were introduced into South Carolinian society. Soon each of them were working and earning their own wages, and months later, they chose to stay in South Carolina permanently.

Sam, in working as a barkeeper, stumbles upon some information a half-drunken doctor blurts out: that the entire South Carolinian operation of freeing people of African descent is merely a ploy to limit their growing population. Part of the local white population were involved in an elaborate scheme that placed the unknowing newly freed blacks in danger as walking

medical experiments, through purposefully infecting them with diseases and rendering them infertile. Sam's interests, as the only link to this information and to the underground railroad, are clearly in favor of anti-slavery efforts because he warns Caesar and Cora before they are entangled in the mess.

In addition to receiving this information, Cora and Sam learn that the slave hunter whom Randall employed to capture and return Cora and Caesar, Arnold Ridgeway, just arrived in town. Sam's house was burned down after an anonymous white person claimed to see Sam conversing with Cora and Caesar. Cora made her escape on the underground railroad, after hiding in the tunnel for days, bound for North Carolina. Caesar, leaving job at the factory, was arrested and killed by locals when they learned he was wanted for murder in Georgia. Sam narrowly escaped, although this was unknown to Cora, on a boat bound for the North the next morning. Sam's sacrifices, in risking his life, home, livelihood, and his hometown, were all made in the name of the abolitionist movement. Through these sacrifices, Cora is able to continue her journey towards freedom, still as a fugitive, but without meeting an end similar to Caesar's. He further reassured Cora that conductors she comes across along her journey on the underground railroad would be white men and women fighting alongside her for her freedom.

Cora's next stop on the underground railroad was in North Carolina, which unbeknownst to her, had recently outlawed black people, whether slaves or freemen, to remain in the state. For weeks, North Carolinians had murdered and run off thousands of free blacks and slaves alike, selling slaves that remained in the deep South and replacing them with poor white workers, usually Irish settlers. Along with the mass murders of blacks, white people harboring blacks were hanged on the spot for doing so. Cora had stepped off a non-scheduled maintenance train at the North Carolina station that was otherwise closed due to the new laws, but it was too late, and

there were no other options left for either her or the station's conductor. Under the cover of night, she had no choice, nor did he, but to take her to his home and stow her away in a crawl space.

The North Carolina conductor, Martin, and his wife Ethel, inherited the position from his father. Their position on the railroad was newly appointed and also newly discarded, but not before Cora came along. Now, with Cora hidden away, and an Irish maid hustling about their house in addition to regular house checks by the patrollers, Martin and Ethel's lives, and Cora's, were in constant danger. Martin and Ethel are not like the usual conductors. Martin is terrified, as is Ethel, but Ethel refuses to acknowledge Cora's presence in person for most of her stay in their home. Neither Martin nor Ethel were practiced in hiding away fugitives, and because they weren't careful, their maid turned them in to the authorities upon suspicion they were harboring a slave.

Colson Whitehead's narrative shows the difference in motives between the good characters along the course of the underground railroad. Fletcher, Lumbly, and Sam each had purer intentions when compared to that of Martin and Ethel. Fletcher and Lumbly were caught and their fate unknown, but they supported the abolitionist cause and hoped that Cora and Caesar would reach freedom. They ran underground railroad operations knowing fully they would be endangering themselves in the process. Sam, whom Cora encountered again later in the narrative, also had pure intentions, and his relationship with Caesar and Cora took on the role of a mentor. His life was turned upside down by the underground railroad, but even before his position was found out, his idea of his home state of South Carolina was crushed. Sam believed that South Carolina was moving in the right direction, towards progressivism, but he was wrong. He escaped in the nick of time and did not suffer the consequences of being a railroad conductor, but

if he had, he could have been killed for it. His relationship with Caesar and Cora was genuine friendship, and his intentions were pure. Later when he and Cora meet again, Sam reveals that he is still working for the underground railroad by posing as a slave catcher and freeing slaves that were captured during their pursuit North. Sam's change of circumstances was hazardous and the changes in frame of mind heartbreaking, but for his moral betterment. His stance in support of the abolition movement inspired him to risk his life again and again in order to help hide and eventually free runaway slaves.

Martin and Ethel had the same intentions as the other conductors, but their motives were misplaced. Martin inherited his position as conductor from his father, and with the new law in North Carolina, had shut down his station of the underground railroad. Cora's arrival was unexpected and dangerous for both of them, but he managed to smuggle her into his house to hide her for what would come to be several months in their crawlspace. Martin's intentions were purer than Ethel's, but even then he was scared of his own demise. He did not take the position of conductor to heart, and because of his lack of commitment to the job, he lived in fear. He was simply taking over his father's role as conductor without the desire to do so. However, he was kind and caring to Cora, whereas Ethel lived in fear and did not associate with Cora during her time in their home. Ethel eventually came to reveal her thoughts on slavery while she nursed Cora back to health in her illness: "Slavery as a moral issue never interested Ethel. If God had not meant for Africans to be enslaved, they wouldn't be in chains" (Whitehead 195). In addition to this, Ethel claims her dream of fulfilling mission work included Africans praising her for her selflessness and their gratefulness of her saving them from their savage ways through the Holy Word. Ethel thought of Africans, and their descendants, as savages in need of saving, and herself as the savior. Ethel's character embodies the idea of white supremacy.

Martin and Ethel had different personal reasons for taking Cora in, but neither was pure in their motivations. Martin's relationship with Cora existed, but was approached carefully. Ethel did not have a relationship with Cora until the end, where she attempted to bring her back to health when she had fallen ill. However, Martin and Ethel, from the outside, seemed to be living selflessly by caring for and harboring Cora when they were not. Fearing for their own lives, and without much practice in harboring fugitive slaves, Martin and Ethel made little mistakes that led to their demise. They were hanged on the spot for harboring a slave against North Carolinian law.

Conclusion:

The questions I asked when investigating the good and helpful white characters ultimately led to a better understanding of the character's motives, intentions, and purity of intentions in relation to the main black characters of each narrative. The white characters' relationships with the narrators evolved over time, some unravelling negatively, like Sophia Auld's and Frederick Douglass's relationship, and others flourishing, like Dessa's and Ruth's relationship. These relationships across the color line portrayed throughout the two slave narratives and three neo-slave narratives were complicated, some of them even dangerous. The evolution of the white characters' and narrators' relationships revealed each character's true nature, and because of this the ideas that the authors hoped to illustrate were easily examinable. How the white characters changed, and whether their changes were ultimately for their moral betterment or detriment were crucial to the portrayal of white characters in the narratives as a whole. All the characters, white or black, were maturing in differing ways. The African American authors of these narratives each hoped to emphasize certain ideas about racial relations

through the creation of their narratives, which leaves us with the main question and subject of discussion. Investigating the white characters in each narrative led to answering the main question: How are white characters in the slave and neo-slave narrative tradition portrayed?

White characters in the slave and neo-slave tradition are portrayed as legitimate, complex, biased, and flawed human beings. The African American authors of these narratives portray the white characters just as they do the black characters. The authors of these narratives believed that people on opposite sides of the color line were capable of resolving their differences in order to coexist despite the legacy of slavery. Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, who experienced mistreatment and injustices at the hands of cruel white people, each knew that not all white people were the same. They met white people who loved them, were inspired by them, and did all they could to support them when they were in need. Having been slaves and having seen the ugliest, darkest portions of humanity that existed, Douglass and Jacobs found reconciliation with the whites that proved they were different. From the point of view of former slaves, it seems unlikely that Douglass and Jacobs would have anything complimentary to say about a white person. However, they each included the good, bad, and ugly in their narratives, and even managed to praise certain white people for the positive impacts they made in their lives. The neo-slave narrative authors, Octavia Butler, Sherley Anne Williams, and Colson Whitehead each closely followed Douglass's and Jacobs's examples. Their narratives examined all angles of humankind as well, addressing the varying degrees of both cruelty and kindness that humans are capable of possessing, whether they are white or black. They each accurately depict characters who are neither entirely good nor bad, but possess qualities of a little of each.

The mistrust that slavery created between the races is real, and the narratives all address this issue in their own way. However, each narrative also address the ways that characters overcame their flawed ways of thinking. For example, Kevin in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* realized that he had never given African Americans in the 1970s the understanding they were due; slavery was dehumanizing and the worst kind of cruel, and the slaves' descendants lived in a world where oppression based upon race was still an issue. Kevin, a considerably progressivist man, had to travel back in time and see slavery for himself in order to understand it fully. He'd married a black woman who had endured the lasting effects of slavery for her entire lifetime and he still didn't have the slightest clue just how demeaning and dehumanizing slavery was. Ruth in Sherley Anne Williams's *Dessa Rose* overcame white supremacist attitudes and beliefs that she absorbed and came to practice as an adult. Sam's character in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* saw the dehumanizing manipulation tactics to which slaves had become accustomed with his own eyes, and because of this his desire to help slaves to freedom was stronger than ever before.

These five authors encouraged the races to bind together through the trials and hardships inflicted upon them through slavery in the antebellum South and also through the ongoing oppression and prejudices of the races in the modern era. Their encouragement and their accurate portrayals of varied humans of differing races indicates that each author believes in relationships of coexistence between races. The authors' message is just as important in the present day as it was when Douglass and Jacobs published their narratives in the nineteenth century. The white characters in the two slave narratives and three neo-slave narratives were purposefully characterized as both elaborate and flawed people, but most importantly, as people capable of change.

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