Height and Depth in Black Literature

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Jessica Stovall, B.S.

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Jessica Stovall, MA Literature

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ADVISOR: Bill Salvage

This thesis discussed how motifs of height and depth in Black literature highlight Black characters' inability to form positive racial identities. The thesis uses three canonical pieces of Black literature, *Passing, Native Son,* and *Plum Bun,* to demonstrate that Black characters who try to reimagine White space are forced into crime, exile, or even death. Consequently, this thesis will discuss the ways in which cultural symbols of power force Black characters into inescapable roles, which suggests that characters must completely reimagine Black Space to reach their full human potential.

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Height and Depth in African-American Literature

Introduction

America represents its culture of power through its architecture as well as the way that different racial groups inhabit rooms, buildings, and spaces. Skyscrapers of big cities are the centers of the economic world, and so height symbolizes cultural and economic power. The wealthiest push the highest numbers on their elevators when arriving home. Among urban white people, penthouses, city views, rooftop gardens, and box seats signify places of high status. In contrast, in Black culture, height possesses quite the opposite connotation. People regard the high floors in public housing as the least safe and sanitary places to be, and "nosebleed" seats as the least desirable at sports events and the theater.

Several novels written by Black authors depict Black protagonists whom struggle with height in white spaces, and find that they have to modify or withhold aspects of their identity in order to fit into this culture of power. In Nella Larsen's *Passing*, for example, Irene can pass as white once she escapes to the rooftop of the downtown Drayton hotel. She meets her old friend Clare, who has rejected her Black heritage in order to join dominant white America. Yet Clare eventually symbolically fails to transcend her racial subject position as she falls several stories to her death. In *Native Son,* white men catch Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas on the rooftop of a building. Jessie Fauset's Angela Murray, in *Plum Bun,* gives up her comfortable "insider" status as a middle class Black woman in order to pass as an "outsider," as she becomes a lower class white woman who

must rely on a man for financial security. Ralph Ellison's protagonist, the Invisible Man, decides to reject the white dominant power structure by holing up *underneath* the city. The ways in which Black characters navigate literal and symbolic height inform the construction of their racial identities.

This thesis will discuss how the dominant white racial identity forms and creates Black American racial identities in order to interrogate this motif of height in several works of Black literature. I will examine three novels: Larsen's *Passing,* Wright's *Native Son,* and Fauset's *Plum Bun*, the narratives of which take place during the Great Migration, a period of time between 1900 and 1970 when approximately five million Black people migrated north seeking better opportunities (Wormser). Because the North had been a free space during the time of enslavement, even in the 20th century, the North symbolized socio-economic possibility to Black people. The Great Migration informs the motif of height, as Black Americans strove to rise within the white power structure, but found that "the promised land" did not always live up to expectations. In addition, these novels take place during a transformation in Black identity that Alain Locke deemed "The New Negro," where Black identity become more independent from white power norms due to the "rise from social disillusionment to race pride, from the sense of social debt to the responsibilities of social contribution" (Locke). Black writers depict this psychological crisis in Black characters who sense the pending changes, yet still struggle with fitting into the white dominant power structure. Therefore, these texts converse with a time where whiteness remains the crucial social capital, written and unwritten laws promote segregation, and the binary of insiders and outsiders, desirable and undesirable, becomes reified based on race, gender, and class. I will argue that Black characters

cannot change subject positions and become accepted into the white dominant power structure. More specifically, I will argue that since Black characters cannot successfully navigate height in white spaces, they cannot be truly free in the way that the white dominant culture defines freedom. Therefore, writers and intellectuals argue that for Black characters to experience freedom and a sense of pride in their racial identities, they must reject White Space and/or redefine Black Space.

Definition of Terms

Theaters exemplify the difference between what I will call "White Space" versus "Black Space." On the one hand, box seats can be most expensive (and therefore perceivably "the best") seats in a theater. Box seats reside above and slightly perpendicular to the stage, and their height coupled with their close proximity to the stage makes the people seated in these seats visible to everyone in the theater. In fact, those in box seats have a better view of the theater patrons than the actual stage, as they look out over the audience. White people have historically been the predominant occupants of these seats. According to J.E. Luebering in his article called "Theatre Design (Architecture)," boxes come from medieval tournaments, where royalty and prominent members of society would spectate, and Spanish and English theaters replicated this use of boxes as early as 1516. In fact, boxes used to be sold to finance the construction of the theaters, and were therefore a way for a theater company to show off its connections with people who had high socio-economic status and social power (Luebering). On the other hand, the least expensive and the presumed "worst" seats in a theater building during the Elizabethan times was the pit, the ground level in front of the stage. Corrine Glanville

writes that the occupants of this space were called "Groundlings," and they paid one penny to stand in an overcrowded, smelly section (Glanville). Today, the undesirable sections has moved to the upper balcony seats and standing room only sections, as seats have taken the places of where patrons used to stand for three hour plays. Even though the upper balcony in particular has height like the box seats, these seats are negative spaces for they combine being up and *away* from the performance. As a result, one can find a greater socio-economic diversity among people sitting there. Being near or on the inside, versus being far or on the outside, creates different connotations and consequently different perceptions of value. Height functions very differently in White Space than height in Black Space.

Even though issues of race do not exist solely in the "black and white" binary, I have chosen to use the terms "Black" to refer to people of African decent and the term "white" to refer to people of Caucasian decent. I believe, as Beverly Tatum does in her book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?,* in the more inclusive term "Black" because there are "Black people in the United States who are not African American—Afro-Caribbeans, for example—yet are targeted by racism, and are identified as Black" (15). Therefore, even though many people of African descent prefer the term "African American," I am choosing the more inclusive term. In addition, the terms Black Space and White Space coincide and parallel the social norms and expectations of what it means to be "Black" and "white."

In defining terms, it is also important to note that I am focusing on racial identity and not ethnic identity. Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton's field guide for racial discussions, *Courageous Conversations About Race,* distinguishes ethnic identity as

referring to one's culture or ethos, the values, beliefs, and familial norms that inform one's daily life. Racial identity refers to one's quantity of melanin in the skin, hair texture, and facial structure that others perceive and classify as inherent to a certain race (Singleton and Linton 167-172). Oftentimes people conflate the two in discussing racial issues. For example, when Teresa Heinz, Secretary of State John Kerry's wife, called herself "African American," some people expressed shock due to the confusion that occurs if one mistakes ethnicity for race. Her *ethnicity*, or her cultural background, *is* African American, but her *race*, how she is perceived to be in America, is white. In order to eliminate this confusion, I will focus on what dominant American society perception of Black characters.

I use Yi-Fu Tuan's definitions of "space" from his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. The spaces that the Black characters either inhabit—or are excluded from—possess historical and cultural meaning. Because White Space and Black Space are man-made spaces, Tuan's framework that "...the built environment clarifies social roles and relations. People know better who they are and how they ought to behave when the arena is humanly designed rather than nature's raw stage" leads to understanding what "architecture teaches" about the social construction of race (102). The idea that "architecture teaches" exemplifies the importance in thinking about how height in white spaces connects to racial development in the United States. Tuan argues that architecture teaches by its ability to "articulate the social order" and that the "modern built environment" possess "signs and posters" that "inform and expostulate" (116). One's built environment represents one's economic status, and more importantly, whether one exists as an insider or an outsider in the eyes of the White dominant power

structure. Therefore, a guiding question I often asked myself in my analysis is what does this architecture teach the Black characters about what it means to be Black? About what it means to be white? About oppression and racism? Tuan also points out that "People of different cultures differ in how they divide up their world, assign values to its parts, and measure them" (34). Values are different within Black Space and White Space. And yet, in American culture, dominant White Space has the power to define marginal Black Space. As a result of these different values and their power dynamics, analyzing how characters navigate height in both White and Black Space is integral to my argument that Black people can never be free unless they reimagine Black Space. Even though "Space is a common symbol of freedom in the Western Word," it is only a symbol of freedom in White Space (Tuan 54). Due to the fact that race and class cannot be completely disentangled, being wealthy (and more likely white) allows one to own more space. And having more space allows for more privacy. Thus, Black Space is often the antithesis of freedom. Without literal physical space, there can be no privacy, and hence little opportunity for Black people to define themselves apart from white people or other Black people. These novels wrestle with the notion that if Black characters continue to try to define themselves within Black spaces as defined by white dominant culture, then they cannot embrace themselves and their lived experiences with race and racism. Therefore, in order for characters to figuratively (and sometimes literally) survive, they must somehow reimagine and redefine the values and norms within Black Space. The characters must accomplish this new identity without worrying about the repercussions of rejecting the status quo norms established in white spaces.

Two of these novels feature Black female characters who possess the ability to pass as white. *Passing*'s Irene and *Plum Bun*'s Angela understand the social construction of race, and use their understanding, along with their middle class socio-economic status and the fact that they are attractive women, to manipulate racial boundaries in search of freedom. By passing from Black to white, the girls can shift from poor or middle class to rich, and yet this desire to reap the benefits of whiteness only serves to reinforce their subject positions—if they are passing as white, they must perpetuate a system that disenfranchises their racial group, and if they remain Black they must accept such subjugation. These novels represent how one can try to construct a self in a white dominated world. In contrast to these female characters that who can pass, *Native Son*'s Bigger Thomas embodies the antithesis of passing. His dark skin and large body make him hyper-visible in white spaces. His male gender and his unattractive appearance contribute to Bigger's inability to gain acceptance into white spaces as an equal. Bigger's fate contrasts with what happens when one cannot pass in a world where not adhering to or breaking White social codes means death. The juxtaposition of the ability to pass with the extreme inability to pass reveals that there is not much difference in the fates of Black characters. In then end, their attempts to reshape Black and White Space leads to crime, exile, or death.

Passing

Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* pivots on established height and depth symbols of wealth. Protagonist Irene Redfield, a light skinned Black woman, becomes reunited with her childhood friend and foil, Clare Kendry, who has rejected her Black heritage in order to enter into the more economically prosperous white America. *Passing* repeats vertical

notions of hierarchy, and juxtaposes the ways in which the two women navigate such vertical spaces. For Irene, in particular, when in a space that possesses literal height, she feels able to think about her personal and private thoughts, and also feels falsely superior to those below her, due to the hierarchical distance. In this way, Larsen creates notions of privacy through vertical separation. Often, Irene "passes" in these vertical spaces, sacrificing her true self and emotions in order to gain access to the culture of power she desperately desires to join. However, she always must come down literally and figuratively to face reality. Cheryl Wall, in her article "Passing for What? Aspects of Identity in Nella Larsen's Novels," claims that "the trajectory for these mulattoes is the impossibility of self-definition" (98). The repetition of Irene's behavior while in these lofty spaces, coupled with the juxtaposition of elevated illusions versus ground-level truths, constitutes Larsen's criticism of passing, and suggests that one must accept and appreciate one's own racial identity within Black Space to achieve success. To accept herself, Irene must reject elements of white culture that are overtly oppressive to her sense of self, even if it means to commit a crime.

Irene passes primarily for convenience. One of the initial depictions of Irene follows her escape to the rooftop of the downtown Drayton hotel, stating that the rooftop "…was like being wafted upward on a magic carpet to another world, pleasant, quiet, and strangely remote from the sizzling one that she had left below" (147). In this "other world," Irene can distance herself from the metropolis below, hot and sticky with racialized social norms. The remote world of the Drayton allows her to enjoy her ability to navigate cultural wealth otherwise kept away from her due to her race. As she has a drink in height of the Drayton, Irene reveals her inner most thoughts through her

judgments of the world below, as "She had been gazing down for some time at the specks of cars and people creeping about in the streets, thinking how silly they looked, when on taking up her glass she was surprised to see it was empty at last" (148). Not only does Irene possess physical distance from the people below her, but her observation of how "silly they looked" also demonstrates just how much this distance makes her feel "above" and superior to the people beneath her. Tuan argues that "Solitude is a condition for acquiring a sense of immensity. Alone one's thoughts wander freely over space. In the presence of others they are pulled back by an awareness of other personalities who project their own worlds into the same area" (Tuan 59). Being alone allows Irene the freedom to feel comfortable in White Space. She does not have to work keeping up a pretense by competing with the social norms or expectations of a white woman.

The symbolism that Irene meets Clare while on this rooftop, and while Irene is feeling her false sense of superiority, highlights just how removed from the cultural expectations of the city one has to be in order to feel comfortable passing. The long lost friends can only reunite in White Space, because Clare has rejected the associations and cultural spaces of her racial heritage. Wall claims that, "Larsen's protagonists assume false identities that ensure social survival but result in psychological suicide" (98). They can meet in this "strangely remote" place that has a cool breeze due to its altitude while the rest of the city boils. The women both coincidentally find themselves in Chicago, as Irene lives in Harlem in New York City and Clare mostly resides in Europe, but follows her white husband around on business. Although both women can pass, they each take different approaches on the subject. Irene married Black man and has a son whom does not pass, and they live a middle class life because her husband is a doctor. When asked

by Clare if she would ever seriously pass as white, Irene replies disdainfully that she would not as she had "everything" she wants, "except, perhaps a little more money" (160). Clare, however, climbed the social ladder from poor to rich, by going from an upbringing where her father was a janitor, to a marriage with a wealthy white businessman who does not know she passes. Clare only has one child because she "nearly died of terror the whole nine months before Margery was born for fear she might be dark" (168). Even though Irene feels disdain for Clare, she attracts Irene in this White Space above the city and agrees to meet her at a later date on a Tuesday. This acceptance suggests that Irene indulges in a desire not only to pass, but also to be seen as an equal to the eloquent and beautiful Clare. Only once Irene reaches the ground level, "far from the coolness of the Drayton's roof, away from the seduction of Clare Kendry's smiles…" does she realize that "certainly she had no desire or intention of making the slightest effort about Tuesday" (162-163). The cultural space of the Drayton literally forces her to play the role of whiteness, for if she entered as Black she would be excluded from restaurant service. The intrusion of Clare on her solitude forces her to keep her true emotions private and follow the expectations imposed on her in order to successfully play the role of superiority. Thus, this vertical space informs the personal sacrifices that Irene must make in order belong to the dominant, white, structure of power.

Height becomes a significant symbol of privacy again at Irene's luncheon with Clare and Gertrude. Clare invites the two to her posh apartment complex, the Morgan, in White Space. As the man-made structure suspends the three above the city, Irene must endure Clare's white husband, John Bellew. As John asserts his extremely racist ideology, "Irene's lips trembled almost uncontrollably, but she made a desperate effort to

fight back her disastrous desire to laugh again, and succeeded… This wasn't funny" (171-172). Thus, in the elevated status of Clare's apartment, the presence of John forces her to pass, as she must to access the rooftop of the Drayton. John's racist language devastates and hurts her, as suggested by her trembling lips. However, Irene has to play the game and use her knowledge of the social etiquette of the wealthy to pass as white to Clare's ignorant husband. She must assert false notions of white superiority to remain in this high physical space, as she must support her friend's decision to marry a bigoted man. Irene successfully navigates the situation, but after stepping into the elevator to descend to ground level, she regains her perspective. Larsen writes:

> plunging downward, they were silent. They made their way through the lobby without speaking. But as soon as they reached the street Gertrude, in the manner of one unable to keep bottled up for another minute that which for the last hour she had had to retain, burst out: 'My God! What an awful chance! She must be plumb crazy!' (175).

The truth of the situation can only be spoken when Irene and Gertrude are in public spaces, away from the vertical, white space of power. Irene and Gertrude need this space, as space "is to human beings also a psychological need, a social perquisite, and even a spiritual attribute" (Tuan 58). This public space accepts a diversity of people and experiences, and here they do not have to adhere to white cultural and social expectations and restrain their private thoughts. Irene does not have to falsely exhibit feelings of superiority over their own race. In public space, Irene can remain true to herself. Larsen uses the vertical relationship between being high with white and low with Black to symbolize notions of passing and code switching between racialized hierarchies. The

emotional release Irene feels each time she is on the ground level underscores Larsen's prioritization of remaining true and embracing one's own racial identity while rejecting the norms excluded from White Space.

Sometimes the motif of height and spatial white norms penetrate Black Space. This violation serves to underscore the need to reject racist identity development within White Space and reimagine race within Black Space. This need to reimagine suggests that America believes in an essentialist ideology and does not support passing and code switching between cultural and racial discourses. For example, Irene discovers Clare and her husband's affair while upstairs in her bedroom while Clare waits downstairs. As her husband Brian invites Clare to Irene's private party:

> Irene cried out: 'But, Brian, I—' and stopped, amazed at the fierce anger that blazed up in her… She made a little pretense at looking at him, managed a tiny smile, and turned away. Clare! How sickening! Behind her she heard the gentle impact of the door as it closed behind him, and knew that he had gone. Down to Clare (216-217).

This passage illustrates that within the presence of Clare's whiteness, even though a false whiteness, Irene yet again must rise above her situation in an elevated space. Even though privately she possesses "fierce anger," she must keep that thought to herself in this now white-defined space. Irene makes "pretense," diction that demonstrates she falsely displays her feelings and does not remain true to herself. The fact that she halts herself at the height of her anger emphasizes her need to retain control and maintain outward appearances of superiority over her husband. However, in the ground level of the party,

she cannot hide her true thoughts and maintain this false premise. Clare makes sure that Irene does not "pass," by having reality ground her. Irene cannot hide her private concerns from her party guests, as shown by her friend Felise's statement of, "Come out of it, Irene, whatever it is. You look like the second grave-digger" (219). In addition, Irene, usually the epitome of a well-groomed woman of class and etiquette, also promises herself to three different events that occur at the same time. Her inability to "pass" while separated from symbolic height peaks when her boiling anger causes Irene to break her antique cup. These examples suggest that the white dominant power structure can penetrate even private Black spaces.

The most significant of all elevations culminates in the ending of the novel, as during the climax Clare disrupts Irene's usual ability to maintain false superiority in a symbolic elevated space. In this instance, the characters must navigate genuine Black Space for the first time. When Irene, Clare, and Brian go over to Felise Freeland's home, Brian asks Clare if she has ever been up to the sixth floor before. Clare responds, "Why, of course! We are on the seventeenth!" to which John responds, "I mean, did you ever go up by nigger-power?" (236). Clare's initial response to John demonstrates her membership in the dominant class, as elevation directly corresponds to economic wealth. In addition, the fact that Clare immediately responds with her floor number reveals how indoctrinated into the white culture of power expressed by height she has become, and her need to reinforce those values. However, the fact that John references "nigger-power," or having to walk up the stairs, provides a cultural cue that the triad will enter Black Space. This use of language foreshadows that this particular space is radically different from the established raised spaces previously used in the novel. This place does

not possess high status or dominance. Instead, unlike Irene who uses elevation to hold her private thoughts and provide herself with a false sense of superiority, when Clare commits to trying to become a part of the Black culture, symbolized by her use of "nigger power" to enter the racialized space, Irene cannot navigate this intrusion. Felise's apartment cannot be a place of privacy, of false superiority for Irene, due to its status as Black Space, a place without entitlement. Therefore, instead of a place of privacy, it becomes a place where everyone becomes aware of Clare's passing, as her racist husband arrives and publicly discloses her secret of blackness. Larsen writes that "Clare stood at the window, as composed as if everyone were not staring at her in curiosity and wonder, as if the whole structure of her life were not lying in fragments before her" (238). This passage demonstrates the heightened energy as a result of Clare's exposure. Even though Clare can maintain the notion of keeping her thoughts private in an elevated Black Space, as shown by the fact that she is "composed," Irene cannot because Clare's humiliating exposure disrupts Irene's notions of privacy, and Irene cannot allow this disruption. As a result, Irene quickly and symbolically brings Clare down to reality, as "One moment Clare had been there, a vital glowing thing, like a flame of red and gold. The next she was gone" (239). Irene asserts power for the first time in the novel through an act of murder. She knows that with Clare's acceptance into the Black community, that Irene will continue to have her private spaces explicitly interrupted by the presence and the role of blackness. Therefore, for the first time, she accepts the importance of her community and her Black spaces, and breaks all cultural codes in order to protect that community. Anthony Dawahare disagrees with this notion, as he says that "Clare's passing for white within the Redfield home reinforces the devaluation of Irene's already commodified

blackness. Whiteness as the universal equivalent makes Irene recognize her relative form of value in relation to Clare" (36). Even if it is less about Clare's acceptance into the Black Space and more about how Irene cannot accept the social implications of the inferiority of blackness to whiteness, Dawahare demonstrates why Irene had to push Clare out of the window. This push reveals that Irene refuses to accept the white dominant norms and values over her own sense of racial pride. Therefore, as Irene stays behind while the rest of the partygoers descend the stairs to assess the gravity of the situation, she once again finds herself alone with her private thoughts. This time, however, Irene does not have to go down to ground level in order to express herself, as she has finally exerted her power and reclaimed her racial identity. Larsen writes, "Irene wasn't sorry. She was amazed, incredulous almost" (240). However, interestingly enough, the novel ends with the passage, "Her quaking knees gave way under her. he moaned and sank down, moaned again. Through the great heaviness that submerged and drowned her she was dimly conscious of strong arms lifting her up. Then everything was dark" (242). Irene ultimately both literally and figuratively gives in to her Black reality. She can no longer pass as white, as she must give in to her true sense of her Black self and feelings. A member of her own racial group picks her up, and she must accept this inclusion into her community. The last line of the novel, "Then everything was dark" can be read that she has finally accepted her Black community as "everything" around her now is pigmented. Irene will no longer possess jealousy of Clare's admission into whiteness, she will no longer suppress her true self and desires, and she will no longer play the game of passing for convenience. Instead, Larsen asserts that the women commit an injustice by passing, for they perpetuate a racist status quo that is oppressive to the

Black community. The crime of murder becomes less deplorable when thought of as less harmful than the crime of passing, as passing comes at the expense of subjugating an entire race of people.

Therefore, when symbols of dominant social and economic power elevate Irene, she plays the game, feels falsely superior to those beneath her, keeps her thoughts private, follows the social expectations of the dominant culture: she passes. She can have an in depth, albeit rather distant and impersonal, conversation about race with Hugh Wentworth, for example, as they stand in the balcony above the rest of the dancing party. But, Irene must always come down. She can try to pass in these spaces of economic wealth, and she can play the role of a put together, powerful women of class, but she must ultimately return to her reality. Public spaces, like the street, allow the intersection of race, class, and gender to mix. In such a multivalent space, Irene runs into John Bellew on the street when she is walking downtown with her Black friend Felise Freeland. Through the juxtaposition of walking with her friend, John realizes that Irene's true race, which causes his quest to unveil his wife's real racial background. Irene reflects on the encounter and the fact that she did not try to keep up the illusion of being white:

> That instinctive loyalty to a race. Why couldn't she get free of it? Why should it include Clare? Clare, who'd shown little enough consideration for her, and hers. What she felt was not so much resentment as a dull despair because she could not change herself in this respect, could not separate individuals from the race, herself from Clare Kendry. (227).

Irene presents an essentialist ideology, as she cannot think outside of the social construction of race. Even though she recognizes that she does not want to interact with the whiteness that Clare represents, she still desires to protect her because of Clare's true racial background. By killing Clare, Irene finally separates herself from Clare, as she can no longer tolerate anyone passing. Earlier in the novel, Irene tries to ignore this fact by passing when it is convenient to her, by ignoring her husband's desperate desires to go places where people are treated fairly, by even preventing her own children from learning about lynching and other racially motivated hate crimes. Through witnessing the firsthand oppressive effects of whiteness on her sense of self, Irene finally regards passing as a betrayal. As much as she wants to belong to the economically dominant white class and reject the disenfranchisement of her race, Larsen suggests that the crime of murder makes a smaller impact than the crime of passing on Black Space and the Black communities. Inside white and Black spaces, multiple barriers prevent Irene from exposing Clare, but by pushing Clare out the window and onto the public street, Irene can finally bring to light the true consequences of passing. As a result, as Irene symbolically falls into darkness, she finally comes into her own by accepting her own reality, reminding us as readers the importance of remaining true to ourselves and to our heritages.

Native Son

Richard Wright's *Native Son* reveals the devastating effects when White Space defines Black Space, as the protagonist Bigger Thomas resorts to crime much like Irene does in Larsen's *Passing*. However, very unlike Irene, Bigger does not have the option of passing because his dark skin and large male frame makes him hyper-visible in a

backdrop of whiteness. In addition, because Irene can pass for white, others deem her as innocent and do not assume her to be a murderer. Yet, Bigger's blackness causes him to be seen as guilty before he even commits a crime. In this novel, the symbols of height and depth emerge not only to represent the white dominant cultural power, but also to reflect Bigger's sense of his own status and self worth. Because Bigger cannot pass as white, he learns that power and capital show up not just in architecture, but also in his own body.

In an early scene, Bigger looks up at an airplane. Man-made to ascend to great heights, the airplane symbolizes economic and social power, which reinforces Bigger's feelings of disenfranchisement. Bigger knows that he cannot fly and possess the freedom that flight represents. Instead, white people keep him grounded on the earth because flying is only a possibility for white people. Bigger exclaims, "'God, I'd like to fly up there in that sky'" (Wright 17). This wish emphasizes Bigger's understanding of the freedom that comes with White Space. The idea of being able to fly, to have control over one's movements, is a privilege of whiteness. Tuan states, "Social status is designated 'high' or 'low' rather than 'great' or 'small.' God dwells in heaven" (37). Bigger's use of the word "God," even though an interjection, demonstrates an unconscious understanding of the parallel of height and status. Even though Bigger will later drive a car for the Dalton family, he can only drive in the direction where the white Mary and her boyfriend command him to go. Robert Butler says that "Richard Wright's heroes pass through an assortment of places which never satisfy them but they attach their deepest longings to open-ended movement" (6). Even though Bigger wants control over his own space and movements, he wants more than just freedom. He subconsciously wants to change the

very social structure that prevents him from having the freedom in the first place. This desire is symbolized by the fact that Bigger claims that "Maybe they right in not wanting us to fly…'Cause if I took a plane up I'd take a couple of bombs along and drop 'em sure as hell'" (17). This sentiment demonstrates that Wright wants to destroy the institutions and social norms that prevent characters like Bigger from being free. Freedom would in turn allow Bigger the ability to form a positive racial identity. As Bigger contemplates the freedom that comes with metaphorical height, Wright contemplates the impact that navigating racialized spaces have upon his character's beliefs, values, and actions.

In order to demonstrate the negative effects that stem from the inability to navigate racialized spaces, Wright creates a protagonist who is the antithesis of characters like Irene and Angela. By juxtaposing Black Space and White Space, Wright exposes the consequences of being unable to pass in a society unwilling to tolerate racial equality. The novel begins in Black Space, where Bigger shares a one-room apartment with his mother, sister, and brother. Wright describes how "The two boys kept their faces averted while their mother and sister put on enough clothes to keep them from feeling ashamed; and the mother and sister did the same while the boys dressed" (4). White spaces force the Thomas family to feel inferior even within their own home through segregation, exorbitant rent prices, and poor living conditions. Instead of feeling comfortable, lack of space emasculates the boys. Tuan writes that "A person assumes his full human stature when he is upright. The word 'stand' is the root for a large cluster of related words which include 'status,' 'stature,' 'statute,' 'estate,' and 'institute.' They all imply achievement and order" (37). The fact that the Thomas boys must avert their eyes even when upright in their own home in order to avoid shame stresses their low status. The four walls of a

single room enclose them, and this lack of space demonstrates that destitution correlates with lack of privacy. White people own and regulate these dehumanizing apartments, which create isolated Black spaces that lack the privacy necessary to possess a positive sense of self. Thus, when readers first encounter Bigger Thomas with his eyes averted, Wright presents a character who lacks a positive identity even when he is within Black Space. Bigger Thomas cannot truly accept or reflect on his own racial identity because "He knew that the moment he allowed what his life meant to enter fully into his consciousness, he would either kill himself or somebody else. So he denied himself and acted tough" (10). That he *denied* himself signifies. White spaces and dominant society made him a negative stereotype of what it means to be a Black male in segregated America. He exhibits great fear, anger, and anxiety when he first approaches the Dalton home and "stood before a high, back, iron picket fence, feeling constricted inside" (44). Bigger feels this anxiety because of the large, complex visual space the Dalton home occupies. Tuan suggests that the space one inhabits sets societal expectations and helps maintain that status quo. He writes:

> The rich and powerful not only own more real estate than the less privileged, they also command more visual space. Their status is made evident to outsiders by the superior location of their residence; and from their residence the rich are reassured of their position in life each time they look out the window and see the world at their feet. (Tuan 38)

Bigger's entry into White spaces gives him hyperawareness of his own low subject position, and he cannot deal with this awareness because he does not have the tools to reimagine his own racial identity. Instead, he must look at these visual depictions of

white dominance and reconcile with how these symbols affect his sense of self. James Miller writes that:

> "Bigger Thomas's quest for voice and audience has therefore little to do with his relationships with the black community, tension and conflict-ridden as they may be, but is inextricably connected to his perceptions of the white world. In other words, Bigger's quest for voice and audience is essentially Other-directed, defined by his need to struggle with externally determined definitions of the self" (503).

As a result of his perception of whiteness, Bigger maintains and reinforces the system of values in White Space as he walks into the Dalton house "with cap in hand and shoulders sloped" (Wright 45). Again, racism impacts his body. In many ways, Bigger's sloped body mirrors the symbols of high and whiteness and low and Blackness, as he physically shows his inferior status through his body posture. Images of height and uprightness also come into play as Bigger conducts his job interview with Mr. Dalton, Wright describes how Bigger:

> had not raised his eyes to the level of Mr. Dalton's face once since he had been in the house. He stood with his knees slightly bent, his lips partly open, his shoulders stooped, and his eyes held a look that only went to the surface of things. There was an organic conviction in him that this was the way white folks wanted him to be when in their presence; none had ever told him that in so many words, but their manner had made him feel that they did (48).

Everything about his physical stature makes him less than Mr. Dalton. His eyes "only went to the surface of things" because he still must deny himself in White Space. He cannot allow Mr. Dalton to see anything other than an unintelligent Black man stooped before him. Instead of acting tough, as he does in Black Space, he must act dumb, ignorant, and compliant in White Space. The phrase "an organic conviction" emphasizes how Bigger has embodied the pervasiveness of racism. In comparison, when Bigger is in Black Space, he is described as looking "straight at" characters (25). This juxtaposition between Bigger's stature in Black Space and White Space suggests that Bigger's physical stature and symbolic posturing reveal how much White Space prevents Bigger from creating an authentic identity that can break the cycle of oppression and subordination. Tuan writes, "The human face commands respect, even awe. Lesser beings approach the great with their eyes lowered, avoiding the awesome visage. The rear is profane. Lesser beings hover behind (and in the shadow of) their superiors" (40). The juxtaposition of Bigger's ability to look straight at his Black friends while he must avert his eyes when in the presence of Mr. Dalton, highlights Bigger's inferiority and subordination. Bigger's face cannot command respect from either Mr. Dalton or his own mother, as the dominant white power structure belittles and emasculates Black men.

Bigger's inability to stand upright intensifies as he resides in White Space. Unlike Irene and Clare who can navigate White Space due the fact that they are light skinned, beautiful, and female, Bigger's dark skin and masculinity puts him in stark contrast to white people in White Space. Therefore, Bigger cannot navigate these spaces, as his limited experience of being in White Space exacerbates his ability to understand their nuances. In contrast to his one room apartment, the Dalton home has several public,

semi-private, and private white spaces that Bigger must navigate. For example, there is the public space of the hallway where Bigger must pass the housekeeper Peggy and the blind Mrs. Dalton without touching them. There are semi-private spaces where he can enter if summoned, like the parlor, kitchen, garage, and Mr. Dalton's office. Finally, the Dalton home has private spaces that Bigger cannot under any circumstances enter, like Daltons' bedrooms. In addition to navigating these distinct white spaces, Bigger also inhabits Black spaces within the overall White Space, like the basement and his bedroom. Even though his bedroom has height, it remains isolated from the rest of the house, and it parallels his apartment in Chicago, for Chicago is a White Space that encloses Black Space, just as the Dalton's home encloses his own. This isolation defines Bigger, as the enclosure forces Bigger to constantly feel and act inferior to white people. For example, Bigger cannot take the most efficient way to exit his own bedroom; instead, he has to go "down the steps, through the basement to the stairs leading to the kitchen door" so that he does not enter semi-private or private white spaces (60). Bigger's unfamiliarity with the varying spaces and the protocol for the appropriate behavior in each makes him uncomfortable and puts Bigger in his place in this microcosm of white society.

Bigger has never been explicitly taught how to interact with white people because the values and norms within White Space are so powerfully reinforced in symbols of power that he does not need to be taught. For example, when Bigger leaves his apartment, he sees men pasting up a large poster to a signboard across the street. Bigger:

> […] looked at the poster: the white face was fleshy but stern; one hand was uplifted and its index finger pointed straight out into the street at each passer-by. The poster showed one of those faces that looked straight at you when you looked

> at it and all the while you were walking and turning your head to look at it it kept looking unblinking back at you until you got so far from it you had to take your eyes away, and then it stopped, like a movie blackout. Above the top of the poster were tall red letters: YOU CAN'T WIN! (13)

The poster's symbolization of white power follows Bigger as he traverses through space. He cannot escape its gaze or that fact that the "stern" white face threateningly points at people as they walk by. Bigger's incessant turning of his head to look at the poster suggests that Bigger cannot avoid the white man's focused gaze on Bigger, reminding him that the white man's world will always prevent him from winning. No matter how far away Bigger gets from the poster, the white man's gaze still watches and influences him, paralleling Bigger's lack of privacy or ability to create an authentic identity due to the oppressive White Space. Bigger must look away in order to avert the gaze, much like Bigger's denial of himself in White Space in order to suppress his fear of whiteness. Through symbols like this poster, Bigger realizes important lessons about his value and worth: if he cannot be the winner, he must be the loser.

Wright also recognizes that one privilege of whiteness is that white people can enter and define any space that they choose. As Bigger stands on a street corner reflecting on his place in the world, he sees a pigeon move freely through city life. Bigger reflects that Black people are "the only things in this city that can't go where we want to go and do what we want to do" (21). This passage suggests how White Space dehumanizes Bigger, as he feels that even an animal has more freedom than he does. The bird can not only have the freedom to fly wherever it chooses, but it also has the capability to achieve great height. The pigeon reinforces Bigger's innate desire to have freedom that he

expresses when he looks up at the airplane in flight. Yet again, Bigger can articulate and understand that whiteness prevents him from doing so. The pigeon is not the only animal that shows Bigger's low social status: the Dalton's white cat follows and haunts Bigger. The cat is free to go where it pleases, and can move through the public, semi-private, and public spaces that Bigger has difficulty navigating. As Bigger anxiously waits to learn if the white people will discover his murder, the cat "leaped with one movement upon Bigger's shoulder and sat perched there. Bigger was still, feeling that the cat had given him away, had pointed him out as the murderer of Mary" (202). In White Space, the white cat gains height by jumping on top of Bigger, mirroring how white people use Black people for their own socio-economic gains. Bigger is not a pigeon or a cat, but these animals have more freedom and status than him in white spaces.

In the Dalton home, the family places Bigger Thomas in Black Space of the basement to do a portion of his job. In "a house the working parts lie concealed in the basement"(Tuan 38). Subsequently, a house, even though it has more socio-economic status than an apartment or a condo, still has the low status, undesirable area that is the basement. Tuan writes that "People may work in the same building and yet experience different worlds because their unequal status propels them into different circulatory routes and work areas" (41). Peggy tells Bigger that he will be "just like family" (Wright 56). Yet, the "family" employs Bigger to burn their waste and rake the ashes of the furnace, which demonstrates that the White Space still regulates and reinforces racial and social norms even as it pertains to Black Space.

Bigger commits Mary's murder upstairs in her private bedroom, one private section of White Space absolutely forbidden to Black men. Bigger tries to help the

inebriated Mary to her bed, and, once there, considers taking advantage of her vulnerable state after Mary kisses him. Her accidental murder occurs after Mrs. Dalton enters the room, and Bigger presses a white pillow over Mary's mouth due his fear that Mary will betray his presence. After Bigger discovers his terrible deed, "The reality of the room fell from him; the vast city of white people that sprawled outside took its place" (87). Wright suggests that the space of the room signifies a microcosm of the world at large. He has not only transgressed against a white woman; to do so it to attack whiteness and the dominant power structure. Bigger's placement at the "bottom" of the social status through having to work in the lowest part of the house highlights the importance of the fact that he brings Mary's body downstairs after killing her upstairs. Bigger understands that he only feels like himself, his rational self, when in Black Space. Thus, in this basement, he puts in place the mechanism that:

> …formed for him for the first time in his fear-ridden life a barrier of protection between him and a world he feared. He had murdered and had created a new life for himself. It was something that was all his own, and it was for the first time in his life he had had anything that others could not take from him" (105).

Mutilating and burning Mary's body in a Black Space within White Space allows Bigger for the first time to bring the fears and anxiety that he felt in the dominant and powerful office and bedroom upstairs down to a space that he reimagines for himself. Because of his accidental murder, Bigger feels a false sense of power, and he can for the first time feel less anxiety in White Space. Bringing Mary to a place where she would not go if alive gives Bigger a new identity for himself and a feeling of freedom that occurs when conquering white spaces. Bigger realizes upon later reflection that "all one had to do was

be bold, do something nobody thought of" (107). He recognizes that if he continues to stay within the norms and values the white power structure imposes on Black people, that he will be forever doomed to deny himself. His transgression makes him see the spaces in an entirely different way, including his own home. After the murder, he returns there and:

> He looked round the room, seeing it for the first time. There was no rug on the floor and the plastering on the walls and ceiling hung loose in many places. There were two worn iron beds, four chairs, an old dresser, and a drop-leaf table on which they ate. This was much different from the Dalton's home. Here all slept in one room; there he would have a room for himself alone. He smelt food cooking and remembered that one could not smell food cooking in Dalton's home; pots could not be heard rattling all over the house. Each person lived in one room and had a little world of his own. (105).

Due to his experiences at the Dalton home, Bigger can, for the first time, consciously recognize the disenfranchisement and oppression that he could only previously feel. The juxtaposition of spaces symbolizes his feelings of oppression. At the Dalton home, each room serves its own purpose, and the purposes of the rooms do not mix a kitchen with a bedroom. The fact that each person "had a little world of his own" shows that White Space creates a sense of self independent of others.

Even though Bigger interrupts the white power structure and starts to create his own sense of identity and a world of his own, he cannot escape his fate. Book Two concludes with Bigger getting caught for his murder of Mary Dalton, as white men capture him on a rooftop in Black Space. Bigger tries to climb up a water tower to get a

better vantage point and to escape the white searchers below, and he thinks that "Whatever happened, he wanted to go down looking into the faces of those that would kill him" (Wright 260). Bigger desires to finally feel like a man, like he has power, and wants to show figurative spatial superiority by looking down at the white mob that wants him dead. This desire explains that even though he contemplates suicide by jumping to his death because "…deep down below was a sea of white faces and he saw himself falling, spinning straight down into that ocean of boiling hate" his pride does not allow him to embrace inferiority (265). However, even though Bigger stands above the white people in a literal sense, they use pressurized water to blast him off the water tank. The white mob therefore remains figuratively above him, using the water that is literally above him to bring him down to their level. As the water blast freezes him and sprays his gun from within his reach, "He turned over on his back and looked weakly up into the sky through the high shifting lattices of life. This was all" (268). Bigger's glace at the sky implies that he understands that he can never be free, echoing his earlier reflections of looking up at the airplane. The force of the water from the water tower above him causes Bigger to fall and land face down in the snow. Merkle says in his article, "The Furnace and the Tower: A New Look at the Symbols in 'Native Son'" that "As Mary is destroyed in the furnace, so Bigger is symbolically destroyed atop the water tower" (739). This action of "coming down" into destruction parallels Bigger accidentally killing Mary upstairs but doing the conscious hard work in the basement, as his capture occurs on the rooftops, but then the white men bring him down to ground level to be symbolically crucified and officially handcuffed. Bigger finds himself opening his eyes to "an array of faces, white and looming," and that "Two men stretched his arms out, as though about to

crucify him; they placed a foot on each of his wrists, making them sink deep down in the snow. His eyes closed, slowly, and he was swallowed in darkness" (270). This passage echoes Irene's conclusion of "Then everything was dark" (Larsen 242). However, instead of darkness symbolizing an acceptance of a Black identity, in Bigger's case, whiteness creates that absence. Snow surrounds Bigger, and the whiteness of the snow suggests that Bigger cannot escape racial oppression, for even the symbolic element of nature is white. Bigger only obtains the illusion of darkness, as his eyes merely close: the white faces and snow still surround him.

Even in jail and awaiting trial, White Space still restraints, surrounds, and tests Bigger. The justice system places him on the upper floor of the jail, for when they put on handcuffs and put him into an elevator "the doors closed and he dropped downward through space, standing between four tall, silent men in blue" (311). When he awaits trail, he must come "down to earth" to do so. The policemen reinforce their power and dominance over Bigger: "The policemen pushed Bigger into a chair…Standing with squared shoulders all around were policemen with clubs in hand, silver metal on their chests, faces red and stern, grey and blue eyes alert" (312). The police officers force Bigger to sit, and the posture of the men show their superiority. Bigger has to deal with the very real consequence that occurs when Black people attack the white power structure, and Bigger's fate involves the idea of height. For example, Bigger joked early in the novel that if he wanted to hang out with white debutantes "You can…But you'd be hanging from a tree like a bunch of bananas…" (32). This reference to lynching demonstrates that within White Space, even though height is a symbol of economic status, the only way that Black people can function or be accepted into this White Space

is if they *become* the symbol of white power. Hanging from a tree, the lynched Black male body becomes a reinforcing symbol of the power that white people have over Black people. Even as Bigger awaits his trial, his awareness of the lynch mobs grows as he realizes how much the angry white people desire Bigger to not only die for his murder, but also to be held up (quite literally) to the public eye as a justification of the white hatred of Black people. Lynching is yet another powerful example of what will happen if Black people resist the white power system. And Bigger violates the largest taboo—he allegedly raped and actually burned her young, "innocent" white female body. As Northwestern University professor Bill Savage write, "The white woman's body is the fuel that heats the construction of racism" (Savage). Bigger's burning of Mary's body in the furnace metaphorically justifies the white community's hatred of Black people, thus further perpetuating the objectification and oppression of the Black race. And the most powerful reinforcing symbol that tears at Bigger occurs after he has spoken to the preacher and accepted a cross to wear around his neck. Bigger accepts this gesture as one of hope. However, after Bigger leaves the inquest, he sees that "Atop a building across the street, above the heads of the people loomed a flaming cross" (337). This illuminated Ku Klux Klan symbol of hate burning above Bigger's head epitomizes the power and the prominence of racism. This use of the cross encroaches on his own brief embrace of religion, hope for his soul, and sense of his self. Bigger rips the cross from his neck, which suggests that Bigger does not want to associate with any cultural symbols of whiteness. If the cross around his neck and the cross upon the rooftops are the same cross, then to reject the cross altogether shows Bigger's rejection of whiteness.

However, even through all of these height-related symbolic reinforcements of the dominant power structure, as Bigger reads newspapers that condemn him and listens to angry white people threaten his life, he begins to understand his existential situation. For the first time, Bigger has a non-racialized and purely human reaction as he is alone in his jail cell. Wright describes that:

> He lay on the cold floor sobbing; but really he was standing up strongly with contrite heart, holding his life in his hands, staring at it with a wondering question. He lay on the cold floor sobbing; but really he was pushing forward with his puny strength against a world too big and too strong for him. He lay on the cold floor sobbing; but really he was groping forward with fierce zeal into a welter of circumstances which he felt contained a water of mercy for the thirst of his heart and brain. (310)

Here, for the first time, Bigger rejects the white dominant power structure and accepts his new existence and identity. Even though lying down—or being horizontal—in White Space demonstrates his subordination or inferiority, in Bigger's reimagined world, he can possess, for the first time, a genuine sense of humanity. Therefore, the juxtaposition of his literal lying down and his symbolic standing up presents a pivotal moment for Bigger. An outsider might think Bigger weak, but in actuality, this moment is Bigger's strongest hour. He realizes the monster that White Space and white dominance has created in him, and he desperately thirsts for mercy, for redirection, for a reimagined self. He later recognizes that:

> For the first time in his life he had gained a pinnacle of feeling upon which he could stand and see vague relations that he had never dreamed of. If that white looming mountain of hate were not a mountain at all, but people, people like himself, and like Jan—then he was faced with a high hope the like of which he had never thought could be, and a despair the full depths of which he knew he could not stand to feel. (361)

Bigger feels as if he can literally stand up for himself, which symbolically shows that he feels a new sense of ownership and pride in who he is. He now recognizes that White Space, symbolized by the "white mountain" transpires as a socially constructed abstract concept to keep him from realizing his full human potential. Wright also plays off of the word "stand" when he writes "stand to feel," which implies that Bigger is no longer going to endure the ways in which white spaces and white power creates him into a person that he does not wish to be. The fact that he does not want to face the "depths" of despair and instead has "high" hopes, suggests that Bigger has reimagined his identity. As Donald Myrkle argues:

> Bigger moves not toward Communism, religion, blackness, nor any of the other choices available. Instead, he moves toward the concept of self and individual realization[…] And it is this realization that Wright suggests as the solution: not black nor white, hot or cold, but each person coming to grips with his world on the basis of his needs and experience alone, which is the only real choice in the first place. (739)

This passage reinforces the idea that Bigger only succeeds and feels a sense of personal freedom and acceptance when he creates his own world with its own standards. He moves away form a dichotomous world that favors white winners and Black losers by rejecting the meaning of height and depth in white spaces. Instead, he recognizes that his own horizontal reconciliation with himself represents the heights of his own power and vitality.

As a result of Bigger's murders and subsequent gain of a new life for himself, he can analyze and reflect on how white society created him to think and behave as he does. He understands that whiteness does not always have to be synonymous with being right, as he recognizes the hypocrisy of Mr. Dalton contributing money to Black students he will keep in ghettos yet never employ. Bigger begins to recognize that Black people have been exploited in order to maintain a hierarchy that favors white people. As Bigger understands that his segregated world has created his identity, "For the first time in his life he felt the ground beneath his feet, and he wanted it to stay there" (361). Bigger earlier recognizes that "There was nothing to do now but go up" (257). Bigger understands that he needs to stop defining himself by the white dominant power structures. Miller writes "Having shaken the 'authoritative discourse' of the white world to its foundations and triggered off an ideological debate which seeks to define its place in the public sphere, Bigger Thomas, partly inspired by Max's rhetoric, chooses a position that places him decisively outside of the existing social framework" (506). Max's rhetoric stresses the importance Bigger's lack of self-actualization during the time of the murder, and its role in creating him in the first place. Max states, "Your honor,

remember that men can starve from a lack of self-realization as much as they can from a lack of bread!" (Wright 399). Max goes on to say that:

> "The consciousness of Bigger Thomas, and millions of others more or less like him, white and black, according to the weight of the pressure we have put upon them, form the quicksands upon which the foundations of our civilization rest. Who knows when some slight shock, disturbing the delicate balance between social order and thirsty aspiration, shall send the skyscrapers in our cities toppling?" (402)

Max emphasizes the consequences of using whiteness as social and cultural capital. Height imagery represents those with no consciousness of the system of dominance and its effects on identity; for Max, the marginal are the sinking foundation upon which the powerful build their cultural empires. "Skyscrapers" represent the white dominance built at the expense of the disenfranchisement of those who fall outside of dominant norms and identities. Yet, Max understands that with self-realization and the ability to accept fates outside of cultural expectations could come a new, revolutionized social order. Only when Bigger accepts that he must reject the white power structure can he really form a true identity. He recognizes that his murder gave him the freedom to stand for something and to be a real man with power. Where Irene's murder comes from realizing that an individual crime is better than subjugating a race, Bigger's murder of Mary comes from being Black in private White Space. Both murders allow the protagonists to feel pride and acceptance of their Black racial identities. Bigger, like Irene, realizes he must accept what he and a white dominant society created in him, so he can forgive himself as he has reimagined his place in a segregated world.

Plum Bun

The protagonist of Jessie Fauset's *Plum Bun* is a Black woman who can pass as white, as Irene did in *Passing*. However, very unlike Irene, Fauset's Angela decides to reject her Black racial identity altogether in order to begin a new life as a white woman, with access to white privilege as both a motive and a goal. The novel juxtaposes Angela's life experiences of trying to achieve happiness and love with her sister Virgina, who like Bigger Thomas, cannot pass. By using Virginia as a foil, the novel explores how happiness cannot be achieved through adhering to whiteness. Angela is the antithesis of Irene in that she believes oppressing people of her own race is worth the gain of status and wealth. In this way, Angela commits a "crime" against her people, and must learn through the ramifications of her decisions.

Like Larsen's *Passing,* the novel uses spatial symbolism in order to reflect Angela's transformative process of accepting her racial identity. Both Angela and her mother Mattie can pass as white women when away from mixed racial company, but her sister Virginia and her father Junius are inescapably Black. The family usually splits into homogenous pairs on their Saturday free day, which they claim to be solely based upon personal interests, and consequently Angela grows up with the luxury of passing, symbolized through her ability to visit white spaces like fancy restaurants, the opera, theaters, and museums. In addition, Mattie Murray did not grow up wealthy, but she worked "…with one of the families of the rich and great on Rittenhouse Square, out West Walnut Street or in one of the numerous impeccable, aristocratic suburbs of Philadelphia" (Fauset 27). Angela's mother lived experiences in the homes of the wealthy, which familiarized her with social cues, norms, and practices of affluent white people. Mattie

Warren's beauty and fair skin made her accepted into white spaces, as one can infer that she would not have had such insights into the white world if she were darker skinned. Mattie can then pass on this knowledge to Angela, teaching Angela from a young age how to navigate White Space. By learning how to act like one has money, Mattie can successfully pass as white. In turn, Angela uses her mother's implicit teachings to transform herself into successful replica of a young affluent white girl.

Yet, the novel shows how ideals of the older generation differ from those of the younger. Mattie "had known poverty and homelessness" while Angela is neither happy nor grateful for the middle class living her parents provide her (Fauset 12). Mattie likes to spend time in white spaces because it "pleased her to stand in the foyer of a great hotel or of the Academy of Music and to be a part of the whirling, humming, palpitating gaiety" but at the same time she had "no desire to be of these people" (Fauset 15). Mattie may love to sit in the orchestra seats of when alone, but when Black friends or her husband accompany her, sitting in the balcony pleases her just as well. Mattie does not actually reject her Black heritage (as Irene in *Passing* Irene does). For her, passing exists as a "game" or as "fun," but does not function the means to an end that it becomes for Angela (as it had for Clare). As Angela accompanies her mother on their Saturday excursions, she learns that "the great rewards of life—riches, glamour, pleasure,--are for white-skinned people only" (Fauset 17). And this dangerous realization solidifies when Mattie ignores her husband and Virginia as they pass by on the street. By not addressing her family, Mattie inadvertently teaches her daughter the acceptability—or even necessity—of neglecting family for the sake of socio-economic gain. This turning point event causes Angela to dream "excitedly of Saturdays spent in turning her small olive face firmly

away from peering black countenances" (Fauset 19). Spatially, Angela turns away from her Black identity and background in order to face forward for whiteness, white spaces, and all they have to offer. In contrast, Bigger slumps and shrinks within white spaces, as his body symbolizes white dominance. Irene uses White Space for convenience or fun, but once she reaches ground level she desires to avoid White Space altogether. When juxtaposing Angela with Bigger and Irene, Angela is the first character that fully embraces white spaces. As a result, Angela will discover that a Black identity is not the only subject position that has low social status, as Angela learns that her gender and class also influence her ability to be accepted into particularly affluent white spaces.

The novel also uses space in a different way than *Passing* and *Native Son.* Angela has to deal with issues of being an "outsider" versus an "insider." Angela tires of always being the outside of the privileges that come with the dominant white power structure. Instead, she constantly strives to be an insider. Even in secondary school, Angela struggles with making friends, and only when popular new kid Mary Hastings accepts her does Angela feel "it was gratifying to be in the midst of things" (Fauset 42). And yet, she immediately becomes an outsider again after Mary expresses shock at the discovery of Angela's Black racial identity. In addition, the concept of "inside" versus "outside" plays heavily into the deaths of Angela's parents. After a day of having tea, going to the "Y," and completing other errands passing as white, Mattie collapses in the street waiting for a car to take them home. In the public space of the street, "a small crowd formed, and a man passing in an automobile kindly drove the two women to a hospital in Broad Street two blocks away" (Fauset 58). In public, away from the racial connections of her husband and younger daughter, people assume Mattie's whiteness. This assumption gets her not

only a ride two blocks to the hospital, but also admission to the hospital "to which no coloured woman would ever have been admitted except to char" (Fauset 58-59). The diction "to char" reveals that Black people can only enter white spaces under the direction of white people, in this case as a janitor who cleans up after white people. Consequently, when Junius arrives to the hospital, he must be "equal to the moment's demands" as the attendant "did not believe that black people were exactly human; there was no place for them in the scheme of life so far as she could see" (Fauset 59). In order to ensure his wife's safety, he announces himself as Mrs. Murray's chauffeur, and he hates "the deception, but he would not have his wife bundled out too soon" (Fauset 59). Junius plays along with the subterfuge because he understands its necessity in obtaining the best care for his wife. His choice of chauffeur as a vocation creates him into the image of a Black man—like Bigger Thomas—who can only enter spaces at the will of a white person. Due to his presentation as such a subordinate outsider, the attendant forces Junius to literally stand outside of the hospital, drenched in the cold rain. As a consequence of his outsider status, Junius dies a few days later. The fact that literally being outside effectively kills him symbolizes racism, as whiteness and white spaces provide, in this case, the personal safety and security to maintain one's physical and emotional health, but only for someone perceived as white. Following Junius's death, Virgina witnesses Mattie "composing herself for death" because Mattie cannot imagine life without Junius. In this way, Junius's death gives a warning and a foreshadowing of what happens when one does not take pride in one's own racial identity, for if Mattie had not passed as white, perhaps she and her husband would not have died. Instead, this "play

acting" cost the both of them their lives, as they allowed white dominant society to determine their health and emotional wellbeing.

After her parents' death, Angela denies herself human emotion—again, much like Bigger Thomas—which is a symptom of white spaces that do not provide Black people with the means with which to foster and grown their own identities. She does not even cry after her beloved father's death. Instead, she repeats to herself repeatedly, "'I must get over this, I can't stand this. I'll go away'" (61). In Angela's eyes, Black spaces can never have the same status as white spaces, even if she sees similarities and parallels between them. Even before she moves to New York City, she hypothesizes that there may be affluent Black families. Yet she assumes that "their thoughts, their actions were still cramped and confined; they were sitting in their new, even luxurious quarters, still mental parvenus, still discussing the eternal race question…" (Fauset 67). Angela assumes that even though Black Space and White Space might be the same when comparing affluent Black spaces, the Black spaces would still be less than white spaces because they would not have the *mental* capacity to be the same. Angela so desperately desires the freedom to not have to consider one's own racial construct, to be free from the double consciousness of race, and yet she expresses her lack of racial consciousness through her rejection of her racial identity. She cannot accept any value and beauty in her racial background, and instead of studying and rejecting the power structures that keep her from having the same privileges as white people, she instead rejects her own racial identity altogether. Even when her Black friends become more racially conscious through intense race discussions, Angela retorts with, "I'm sick of this whole race business if you ask me…I don't think being coloured in America is a beautiful thing. I think it's nothing

short of a curse" (Fauset 53). This rejection of her racial identity and her belief in its curse foreshadows a destructive pathway Angela takes.

In order to successfully pass as white, Angela must allow others to assume her to be white. Therefore, Angela's pathway for this success has to begin when she moves from Philadelphia to New York, where "…she could by no chance be known, and launch out 'into a freer, fuller life'" (Fauset 80). Angela stays away from spotlights that might expose her real race. She allows others to project their assumptions of her background upon herself, and does not correct them when they assume she is white. By moving to New York, for the "…first time she would be seen, would be against her new background or rather, against no background" (Fauset 93). Being in New York allows her the freedom to blend into the established lives of the racially privileged, and the distance of her history allows her the freedom to obtain the most economic success. Angela Murray even changes her name to the French sounding Angèle Mory, which could sound like the "Angel of Death" (Savage). The fact that her name signifies "death" mirrors the fact that "passing" also means "death." Angela does not realize that her murder of her racial identity cannot be the sole catalyst for achieving the empty goal of being accepted into the white power structure. Kathleen Pfeiffer writes "when Angela moves to New York as the white Angele Mory, she cannot distinguish between her perceived absolute freedom and a more elusive meaningful liberty" (81). In order to maintain her economic success, Angela must adhere to whiteness and must grow accustomed to the fact that white people will construct her reputation and identity. This necessity causes Angela to lose sight of herself—an identity suicide—and she must rethink her desperate desire to possess economic and social capital through passing for white.

Therefore, when Angela moves from Philadelphia to New York City in order to reinvent herself in White Space, she initially believes that she has achieved her goal of individual freedom. However, this move symbolically makes her an outsider from her own family: "She ran down the steps, and glanced happily back. But her sister had already closed the door" (Fauset 83). As Angela descends out of Black Space to ascend into White Space, she must deny her ancestry and become rejected by her family. Susan Tomlinson writes, "After her parents' deaths, Angela relaunches herself on a racialized New York landscape that emerges as a metaphor for her splintered identity" (91). The city reinforces the symbolic power of height, as she enters white spaces where height is economic entitlement and power over people, whatever their race. Angela enters such white space: "Fifth Avenue is a canyon; its towering buildings dwarf the importance of the people hurrying through its narrow confines" (Fauset 87). Important people may walk the streets, but tall buildings symbolize power. Because a canyon is a depth, and depth has a negative connotation, Fauset suggests that one obtains status in the city by being above the masses. Thus, the transition from Angela's middle class upbringing in Philadelphia to her desired upper class life style in New York highlights that she has entered White Space and will have to navigate an entirely different set of norms and values that she has only previously only dabbled in. However, Angela is not immediately drawn to Fifth Avenue, but instead to Fourteenth Street, where she sees a lot of "drooping, discouraged down and outers" (Fauset 89). The fact that the homeless "droop" shows that they have less status than Angela, and she finds herself feeling superior to them, giving her a sense of being alive. She thinks to herself, "A great picture! … I'll make a great picture of these people some day and call them 'Fourteenth Street types"

(Fauset 89). Angela recognizes the homeless as being "down and out," suggesting that they are both beneath her as well as outside of the dominant social structure. Angela very much wants to be "up and in," as she wants to possess not only the wealth and privileges that whiteness can offer her, but also the "insider status" of being socially recognized as an equal to white people. Angela desires to paint the "types," as she recognizes that occupying the subject position of Artist gives her cultural capital—she can demonstrate her "up and in" status through distancing herself from her "down and out" subjects in art. Angela trivializes the people of the square into a stereotypical and objectifying "types," which is exactly the short of discrimination and belittlement that she herself tries to avoid. Yet, it appears that Angela seeks such superiority, that sense of entitlement that comes with being white, and being of greater status than the drooping homeless man accomplishes just this desire.

Angela's lack of growth shows her inability to see the genuine similarities between Black Space and White Space. Instead, Angela continues to feel her superiority when she makes trips to Black Space when in New York. She can see that "In all material, even in all practical things these two worlds were alike, but in the production, the fostering of those ultimate manifestations, this world was lacking for its people were without the means or the leisure to support them and enjoy" (Fauset 97). The fact that she can see the likeness of the two worlds, but still stresses the superiority of one over the other demonstrates just how engrained and indoctrinated into the ideology of white supremacy she has become. Tomlison writes, "Fauset locates her protagonist both geographically and psychologically on the other side of town from this Mecca of the New Negro" (91). She even sees Harlem as being far richer than her White Space on

Fourteenth Street, but she gets back on the "Elevated and went back to the New York which she knew" (Fauset 96). The symbolic element of her taking the "Elevated" instead of the subway reinforces that fact that she believes herself "above" the Black people of Harlem. She refuses to claim her racial heritage, as this Black Space is not *her* New York, the New York that she has lied her way into. Angela does not even claim Harlem as her New York as she calls it a "city within a city" and she feels "glad" that she "had cast in her lot with the dwellers outside its dark and serried tents" (Fauset 98). Angela claims that her own place of residence lies "in" New York, while she considers where she does not reside "out" of New York. This naming of her insider status suggests that Angela has begun to use her white privilege to designate what counts as "inside" a desirable physical area. In addition, Angela's claims that she feels relief and content at her outsider status in Harlem demonstrates her unwillingness to accept her racial identity and reimagine Black Space. She does not understand that these spaces can support and encourage racial identity exploration, thus better representing her genuine identity as a mixed race individual.

Instead, Angela desperately wants her own space within White Space, which is a symptom of having others constantly label and stereotype her in her childhood. She "had the complete egoist's desire for solitude" (Fauset 100). At the same time, Angela expresses desire to break free of the privilege and ignorance that come from the norms and values of white spaces as well as from the inferiority and limitations that come from Black spaces. She finds herself "Wondering what it would be like to conduct one's self absolutely according to one's own laws" (Fauset 107). However, as she lives in White Space, Angela slowly realizes and recognizes that she will have to reject her actual racial

identity in order to be accepted in the dominant white power structure in the city. Angela meets a white marriage prospect, the wealthy and flirtatious Roger Fielding. As Angela dates Roger, she constantly has to perpetuate the white dominant norms in order to sustain Roger's assumption that Angela is a white woman. For example, as Angela and Roger dine on the inside of a fancy East Tenth street café in White Space, Roger publically forces a Black family to leave. Roger humiliates the family of three and then goes on to recount "instances of how effectively he had 'spoked the wheel' of various coloured people" (Fauset 133). In reaction to this racial hatred, Angela can only be "silent, lifeless," which Roger assumes to mean that the Black people had made Angela sick to see them (Fauset 133). Angela finds herself forced to silence her feelings of disgust at Roger's behavior because of her comparatively low subject status: she is female, lower middle class, and secretly Black. Even though she feels pity for the humiliating long-term effects of this incident on the family, relief that she will not have to endure this same hardship becomes her dominant emotion. She reflects on the incident as "In a country where colour or lack of it meant the difference between freedom and fetters, how lucky she was!" (Fauset 137). Angela can reject her racial background for her own gain, but this rejection becomes a price she has to pay to maintain herself as an insider in white spaces. By remaining silent and lifeless, she agrees with the racist proclamations of Roger and accepts his values as normal and appropriate.

Angela justifies her dismissal of her Black racial identity by thinking that after she has high status and wealth, she will go back and help the Black community. She often reflects that "she'd look up all sorts of down-and-outers and give them a hand" (144). Angela makes the assumption that all Black people remain "down," assuming their

inferiority to her, even though the examples she sees of Black people in Harlem, and even back in Philadelphia, reinforce that her Black peers actually live stable, happy, and satisfying lives. And even though she describes wanting to help people that seem "down," she does not say that she wants to give them a hand "up." Angela instead wants to maintain her racial superiority and her high status, and only wants to help her Black friends on a superficial level; she does not want to challenge the very status quo that prevents equality in the first place.

In this way, Angela goes against the current of growth that the Black community follows during this historical period. For example, Roger has to leave Angela for a period of time in order to help his father try to sustain the family saw mill because he says, "'the damn niggers have started running north'" (150). This racial slur highlights that Angela matures in a time of great change and for Black people, as the "running north" refers to the Great Migration and its consequent labor shortages in the south. She also cannot identify and acknowledge the budding development of the Harlem Renaissance and the fact that this was a pivotal and essential time period to be a Black American. Instead, Angela figuratively goes "south" with Roger to stop any intellectual and economic growth from Black people. She realizes she plays "a game against public tradition on the one hand and family instinct on the other" and the stakes "were happiness and excitement" (146). Angela chooses public tradition instead of her personal racial identity and growth. However, when Angela thinks that she has won Roger's heart and solidified her future, she has a physical reaction to her pretense to be white. Angela leaves Roger and "Weary but triumphant she mounted the stairs almost stumbling from a sudden, overwhelming fatigue. She had been under a strain!" (151). Angela goes up stairs in

White Space, which symbolizes that she has achieved cultural and economic wealth. Yet she has a negative physical reaction to this elevation, symptomatic of the fact that accepting these white spaces as her norm threatens her bodily identity, much like it does in Bigger Thomas. She almost stumbles and falls, which foreshadows what pretending to be white will do for her physical and emotional well being in the future. Directly after this event, she sees a stack of letters, with one from Virginia on the bottom. The fact that her sister's letter rests on the bottom suggests how low of a priority she has made her family and racial identity, and also indicates how much Angela claims whiteness and rejects blackness.

The culminating moment in which Angela cuts ties with her familial heritage and her racial identity comes when she goes to pick up Virginia from the railroad station. She hides her racial heritage by wearing "unobtrusive clothes" and a hat with a "modish veil" because "The curious porters should never be able to recognize her" with her Black sister (-156). This veil alludes to W.E. B. Dubois's concept of the veil in his book *The Souls of Black Folk.* Dubois writes:

> the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with a second sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's self through the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (9)

For Dubois, the veil of race forces Black people to only see themselves through whiteness, making this "double consciousness" a unique ability to only see the world filtered through the judgments of white dominant norms and values instead of judging one's self based on one's own merit. The veil Angela wears symbolizes her conscious understanding that if white people see her with Virginia, that they will judge Angela's own race and character. In the terms of white spaces, Angela tells Virginia about the "two troublesome staircases which lead from the train level of the New York Pennsylvania Railroad station to the street level" (156). As Angela waits for Virginia in between the two staircases in order to best spot her sister, she runs into Roger returning to New York. Angela must literally choose between Roger and her sister, either give up her ruse and claim her racial heritage, or humiliate and cut ties with her sister in order to keep white privilege. Angela chooses Roger, symbolized by the fact that she decides to "thrust up her veil to see better" (157). The fact that she no longer hides her face suggests that she must face her choice head on, and that she no longer wishes to possess the double consciousness that comes with being Black. Instead, she chooses to take on a subject position that subjugates and oppresses Black people. This conscious choice to take off her veil requires her to humiliate and reject her sister Virginia in front of Roger. Earlier in the novel, Angela at least considers the impact of her decisions on others, but after relieving herself of her veil, her behavior makes her no different from white supremacist Roger.

After choosing Roger over Virginia, Angela assumes and expects that she will finally be on the inside of the white dominant power structure. Yet, Roger very much attempts to keep her on the outside. For example, when Roger goes to propose his big plan, he takes her "out of the city limits" so they "could talk" (179). He shows her a

cottage, where he hopes to "keep her" as his mistress. The cottage and the discussion occur outside of the wealth, vibrancy, and socio-economic status that brought Angela to the city. Angela would again be outside of the privileges of whiteness that she so desires and would also be an outsider to the perks that come with the institution of marriage. Angela realizes that "her little world, judging it by the standards by which she was used to measuring people, was tumbling in ruins at her feet" (193). Angela finally realizes that if she desires to successfully function in White Space, she cannot uphold standards of moral code that she has created for herself. Pfeiffer writes, "Contrary to Angela's belief that Roger represents freedom, his presence in her life proves far more inhibiting than liberating" (88). Her pride and egotism in journeying for a more privileged life freed her from Black Space, which she condemned for not living up to her desires. At the same time, in white spaces, wealthy white people still perceive her as inferior due to the fact she is a woman and not upper class, making her something to be hidden, and morally corrupt—all things that would remain true if she were open about being a Black American. Angela discovers to her dismay that even if she claims to be white and perpetuates a racist status quo, she still does not gain access to full freedoms and privileges because of her class and female identity. In addition, if upper class, she would not need to date Roger in the first place, but she finds herself needing Roger to gain the full access of white privilege. This realization allows Angela to see that race cannot be the only factor that prevents her from obtaining her dream of wealth and high status, as her middle class background and femininity are also large factors.

Even after things go poorly with Roger, and she finally understands that she will not marry him, Angela cannot let go of her white privilege. Even in "this mingling of

shame and reproach she found herself consciously striving to keep their relations on the highest plane possible in the circumstances" (224). This passage demonstrates that Angela still denies herself, as she acts a role instead of revealing her true feelings. She still tries to be of the "highest plane," as she cannot be vulnerable or try to embrace her own identity. Through all of her efforts, she realizes the discrimination she will encounter as a woman will prevent her from enjoying white privilege. Whiteness by itself does not make her exempt from all prejudice, and this fact begins to make her reconsider her journey in life. Angela begins to recognize that "New York, it appeared, had two visages. It could offer an aspect radiant with promise or a countenance lowering and forbidding. With its flattering possibilities it could elevate to the seventh heaven, or lower to the depths of hell with its crushing negotiations" (239). Angela realizes that the role of the city, the place where she goes to start a new life with new possibilities for herself is not a place that automatically bolsters her possibilities. Instead, the metropolis represents a place in which that creates clear winners and losers, and some become accepted in symbolic high areas of socioeconomic power in white spaces and some will be forced into symbolic low areas where they have less status and consequently fewer opportunities for economic growth and gain. Kathleen Pfeiffer argues that:

> In New York, Angela mistakes alienation for independence; moreover, she discovers that while whiteness imparts the kind of social freedom that comes from her newfound anonymity, such freedom does not guarantee a meaningful identity. Instead, she views freedom as an end in itself rather than the means to an end—that is, as a means to establishing a rewarding identity—her experience of freedom is characterized by estrangement, drift and alienation. (87)

For Angela, going to New York from Philadelphia represented a great change that would offer her a new life. However, once she is there, she realizes she does not like to be at the mercy of the ups and downs of the city. Instead, she discovers that she would like to have "roots," as she thinks that she would like to be "rooted" again and later states "'Of course I wouldn't give up New York but life seems more real and durable down there. After all it's where my roots are'" (241). As Angela spends more time in white spaces, she learns that she would like to be grounded, and that she would like to have a familial heritage to call her own. Angela's reminiscence about her roots shows her wrestling with her racial ethnicity and understanding that her accomplishments in life will be genuine if she does so, possibly because *she* has become more genuine and has dropped the playacting. The idea that things are more "real" and "durable" underscores New York as a city of games, of winning and losing, and of success measured by those who have familial ties heavily steeped in the white dominant power structure. Angela's life is unendurable because it cannot be life sustaining to have a whole life built upon a lie. And yet, even with this recognition, Angela does not yet understand why Virginia can successfully change her life and depart from her roots and be successful, but Angela cannot. Virginia was "established in New York with friends, occupation, security, leading an utterly open life, no secrets, no subterfuges, no goals to be reached by devious ways. Jinny [Virginia] had changed her life and been successful. Angela had changed hers and found pain and unhappiness. Where did the fault lie?" (243). The juxtaposition of the two sisters emphasizes the importance of maintaining pride in one's racial identity. Virginia embraces her Black identity, and lives in the reimagined Black Space of Harlem, adapted and claimed in the middle of the White Space that is Manhattan. And because of

Virginia's pride in her Blackness within a vibrant culture of enlightenment and re-imagination of what it means to be Black, she can find love, support, and honor. In addition, because Virginia cannot pass, she does not have to have the same existential identity crisis that Angela has. Instead, Virginia can focus purely on accepting herself and her race, and then work for happiness and economic success. Angela's disgrace does not come because of her staying within the norms of White Space, but because she does not accept her own racial identity. By accepting white spaces, she must witness and accept the degradation of Black people, reinforcing her misconceptions about her Black racial identity. As she gets further and further away from her Black identity, she must deny herself and her humanity in order to exist and look herself in the mirror. She cannot succeed as a person if she does not really have a true self to begin with. Passing for white creates an identity crisis in which Angela must choose between blackness and subjugation, and whiteness and racism. These choices create a dilemma with two flawed choices, and consequently Angela cannot experience peace with either, for she constantly debates the lasting consequences of each choice.

In the end, Angela finally fulfills her racial identity growth through choosing a relationship with Anthony Cross, a man she initially assumes is white and middle class. Angela recognizes that with Anthony she can still reach some of the figurative heights that she so desperately desires. She admits that "Together they would climb to happier, sunnier heights" (Fauset 272). As she embraces her desire for Anthony, she realizes that he represents a "place not merely in society but in the world at large" (Fauset 275). This thought process reveals just how much Angela discovers that she wants a place and not just a space. Tuan states that "Place is a type of object. Places and objects define space,

giving it a geometric personality" (17). When Angela entered New York, she wanted her own space, her ability to roam freely from one place to another, to use her putative whiteness to allow her to enter any space of her choice. Yet, after further reflection based on her experiences within those different spaces, Angela realizes that she actually wants a place, some place of deep symbolic meaning in which she feels a sense of belonging. In this way, Angela no longer holds mere "freedom" as an ideal. Instead, she wants acceptance, belonging, and a "home": she wants "roots." This desire later intensifies as she discovers that Anthony has also been passing for white, yet demonstrates great pride and loyalty to his Black heritage. White men brutally murdered his Black father because his white, Brazilian mother did not properly respond to a white man's flirtations. The white people in the town expressed their inability to accept a Black man's new role in society, as Anthony's family had accumulated great comparative wealth, so they called him to the window and "The body fell over the railing, dead before it could touch the ground, murdered by the bullets from twenty pistols" (289). This symbolic falling of Anthony's father's death parallels Anthony's decision to not allow whiteness befall his racial identity or his manhood. As a result of Anthony's racial pride, Angela starts re-examining her own lack thereof.

Through her relationship with Anthony and the rekindling her relationship with Virginia, Angela starts to perceive and evaluate Harlem in a different way, symbolizing her racial growth. Whereas before she saw it as a city with in a city that was not as grand as Manhattan, by the end "Harlem intrigued her; it was a wonderful city; it represented, she felt, the last word in racial pride, integrity and even self-sacrifice" (326). The biggest breakthrough comes when she recognizes that the White Space of Manhattan not only

forces Black Space to define itself, but also that Harlem in turn influences and reimages White Space. She thinks that Harlem has a "hidden consciousness of race-duty," and that if Harlem could talk, she would say, "Perhaps you do pull me down a little from the height to which I have climbed. But on the other hand, perhaps, I am helping you to rise" (326). This metaphor suggests that although white spaces can enclose and negatively define Black spaces (as in Chicago and the Dalton home), that the vibrant culture of Harlem positively influences the white spaces of Manhattan. Her realization of the power of Black Space causes Angela rethink the status and influence of the Black community.

In the end, Angela's deep indoctrination into the pervasiveness of racism and the white power structure cause Angela to leave the United States. Angela initially win a fully paid trip to Paris through the John T. Stewart Prize for her "Fourteenth Street Types," but decides to give up the award after a white committee forces her Black friend Miss Powell to remain in the U.S. even after she wins the Nehemiah Sloan Prize. Angela publically reveals her Black identity when she decides to stick up for her friend, something she could not do for her sister (357). Yet, this declaration and acceptance of race brings Angela and her sister back together, ending in Virginia offering to subsidize her travel to Paris. As Angela claims her blackness in the United states, she looks forward to the fact that she will not have to be so racially bound into social expectations of race in Europe because in "France or Italy she would speak of her strain of Negro blood and abide by whatever consequences such exposition would entail. But the consequences would not engender the pain and difficulties attendant upon them here" (340). Because she cannot combat and rethink Black American Space, she decides that she needs to leave America in order experience both the acceptance of her race as well as the freedom from

her race she has been seeking. Tomlison writes, "As she develops an artistic vision and concomitantly a self-definition, Angela changes role and moves from the front of the canvas to behind it, from subject to artist, from the gazed upon to the gazer, the visionary" (93). Angela initially used art to create depictions of subject positions she wants to distance herself from. Now, she wants to come out from other the scrutiny of others' perceptions of her identity, and create her own vision of herself. This change of role from "subject to artist" suggests that Angela has finally gained some of the power and freedom she has so desperately sought. In order to maintain this power, she removes herself from America's realm of privilege based on skin tone and enters a space where she can see the social constructions that have bound her more clearly and can create a vision of herself worthy of pride. The decision to reveal her true self and remain true to herself, regardless of the consequences, demonstrate her ability to now love truthfully. This recognition explains why at the end of the novel, Virginia breaks off her relationship with Anthony for the Black Matthew, causing Anthony to seek relationship with Angela—each skin tone matches up with a similar skin tone. In all, even though Irene and Angela have capital as white women, they still cannot achieve great economic success. Instead, Angela can only find real love and freedom of expression when she reimagines her own space and becomes true to herself and her racial identity.

Conclusion

As Black Americans gained new access to social, political, and economic power during the early twentieth century, they had to reconcile expectations that were not necessarily inclusive. Black people had to adapt, assimilate, and conform to white spaces in order to succeed. Such cultural acquisitions could often oppose one's own identity and

values, stunting positive racial identity development. The studying of the protagonists in *Passing, Native Son,* and *Plum Bun* reveal that the issues of navigating the heights of White Space matter in Black novels. The novels use the motifs of height and depth, which function very differently in the interrelated Black and White Spaces, to symbolize these issues. Because each character meets some sort of debilitating hardship in literal height of white spaces, he or she must reimagine white spaces in order to succeed. For Irene, she must reject passing and embrace her fortune; for Bigger Thomas, he must forgive himself and accept that there is goodness in him; for Angela, she must get away from the American white dominant power structure in order to accept her racial identity.

The concept of space and how it is symbolized through height and depth connects to the idea of freedom. Place becomes synonymous with the freedom to have a private, owned space where one can be one's true self. The Black literary tradition origins from the quest for freedom and the request for a place in the white dominant society. Because Black people have not yet achieved equality, Black authors still create protagonists who still directly or indirectly look for freedom and space. Bernard Bell writes in his book that "Our African American literary tradition begins with the irony of appeals by African peoples for freedom from the oppression of white British colonists" (76). Place and space will continue to be a dominant theme in Black literature. At the same time, Locke writes of the New Negro that “the Negro today wishes to be known for what he is, even his faults and shortcomings, and scorns a craven and precarious survival at the price of seeming to be what he is not” (Locke). The protagonists of *Passing, Native Son,* and *Plum Bun* deal with the desire to be unapologetically themselves, despite whatever flaws they might possess. The novels consequently teach that Black people cannot fight the

unfairness of the white dominant power structure while working within it, which is symbolized by the fact that they cannot find success even with the access to high places that passing provides. The protagonists cannot succeed in white-defined and white-created Black spaces either. Instead, they must find their own space independent of Whiteness. As Tuan says, "Space is a common symbol of freedom in the Western world" (54). Thus, creating this new space is integral to achieving freedom. They must not only combat institutionalized racism and stereotypical expectations, they must also possess pride in their own racial identity in order to reach their greatest human potential. It is only within such a reimagined space that the protagonists can experience true freedom and expression of their identity.

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