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The Imperative That African-American Authors Define the Nature of African-American Heroes in Literature: or Uncle Tom to Jedediah West

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THE IMPERATIVE THAT AFRICAN AMERICAN AUTHORS DEFINE THE NATURE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN HEROES IN LITERATURE

or

UNCLE TOM TO JEDEDIAH WEST

A discussion of the issues addressed in the novel,
"Cowboy, the Saga of Jedediah West,"
and the place of the novel in an effort to redress the effects of the propaganda war waged against the humanity of African Americans

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Culminating Project
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Lindenwood University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science in Mass Communications

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ABSTRACT

This document will demonstrate the need for African-American authors to define the essential and fundamental characteristics, disposition and purpose of the literary heros of African Americans by way of an analysis of the novel, *Cowboy, the Saga of Jedediah West,* which I wrote between 1995 and 1998. The creation of a distinct literary heroic tradition for African Americans is necessary, I contend, because the culture virtually has been deprived and devoid of literary, imaginary heroes. Because people of every culture require heroes for healthy evolution, African Americans have weighted their heroic tradition with living heroes exclusively who are accepted by the people as heroic and whose lives are worth honoring and emulating, which is expected but leave the culture incomplete.

The literary heroic tradition, I'll demonstrate, fell prey to racialist propaganda that began with the introduction of slavery into the United States. The propaganda arose from a campaign to manufacture an image of blacks as inferior and suitable for slavery. This propaganda campaign became so successful because blacks during slavery had no economic or legal means to respond. As a result, what I'll demonstrate literally was a propaganda war cemented abhorrent images of black people in the minds of Americans, an image that outlived slavery and supported slavery's byproduct, white supremacy. The propaganda war not only taught whites to despise blacks, it taught blacks to despise being black.

Reversing this byproduct is the foundation for the need of a literary heroic tradition for African Americans. The image that blacks have of themselves turns out to be more destructive to the black community than racism because the lack of a good cultural self-image destroys the spirit, enthusiasm and ambition of the group.

For any culture, a strong folk hero or mythic hero tradition is an integral part of building the self-image of its people. Therefore, to reverse the effects of the propaganda, the African-American community must first develop and nurture the ingredients that fortified other cultures. In the context of the propaganda war, the most valuable tool is a healthy and vigorous literary heroic tradition. While living-legend heroes are good for the culture, they symbolize and demonstrate who we are. Literary heroes, on the other hand, are who we want to be and how we want to see ourselves.

Cowboy Jed, the hero of the novel, *Cowboy,* is such a literary hero. He fits into the structure of what makes a classic hero, what would make an American hero, and especially, what would make an African-American hero.

Introduction

What's the Point?

Cowboy is the story of something that never happened to a man who never lived in a place that never was. My paper is about why the story needs to be told and why I am best equipped to tell it.

The novel chronicles the saga of Cowboy Jed (Jedediah West) who is the product of my imagination. But the need for his existence is not. Jed exists because he has a job to do, a job that transcends the entertainment of readers. His job is to set standards and constructs for the culture that spawned him. In other words, while he is a literary figure, he also must be a literary hero.

Jed is human, but he's on a superhuman quest. Jed is the author and architect of a code of honor that is good enough to emulate. Jed perseveres beyond human endurance. And Jed is the best type of American in that on his own, he conquers despair to achieve freedom. Frankly, he's not so rare a breed of literary being, unless you take into account that he's black and that I, his creator, am black.

Jed and I are rare by virtue of our crusade to fill a void in African-American cultural development: the African-American literary heroic tradition. Black people, for practical purposes, have no clear literary heroic tradition. Certainly, blacks have a literary tradition, as well as a vigorous tradition of heroic accomplishment by living legends. But

the third part of this triad, a tradition of heroic literature of culturally generated heroic figures, is nearly nonexistent.

To understand the absence of the literary heroic tradition is to understand its roots. Key elements of the African-American humanity were eviscerated from the cultural mosaic of African Americans by the proponents of the institution of slavery and their heirs, the proponents of white supremacy. The missing elements were those that would validate the humanity of African Americans.

One of the purposes of this paper is to recognize that the void exists because defining a problem is the first stop to solving it. In this case, the problem is the lack of a literary heroic tradition for African-American people. To understand how that happened this paper will demonstrate that the lack of a literary heroic tradition for blacks resulted directly from the propaganda war waged against blacks that began when proponents of slavery needed to make slavery palatable to whites. The propagandists attacked the humanity of blacks -- intelligence, family structure and the like. By doing so, they made blacks appear subhuman and suitable as beasts of burden. The propaganda campaign was not only successful, but so extreme for so many generations that it established debilitating archetypes that African Americans even today still must battle.

My use of the term, "archetype" — a term used in many ways by many disciplines — will perk some ears. In this paper, I use the definition established by Dr. Carl Jung. Jung explains that archetypal images, expressed to a large part in dreams, are, instead of realities, psychic expressions of ego development. By ego development, Jung meant

traversing the ego's journey from birth to adulthood. Every element of heroic existence is a part of the human ego structure, he says, which accounts for his theories on "collective unconscious." It is collective because ego development, he contends, is consistent for every culture, every "race," every group, every individual.

Maybe.

I will demonstrate that Jung's theories are valid for normal cultures with normal evolutions. But for a culture with a thoroughly disrupted cultural genesis, in this case, African-American culture, there is no reason to say that the ego development of African-American individuals would not be equally disrupted. Unfortunately, no available research speaks to this. Therefore my premise of a disrupted ego development for African Americans will be at least murky, but through my reasoning and evidence at least demonstrable. For instance, a dictionary definition of archetype isn't so murky: "an original model or type after which other similar things are patterned; a prototype; an ideal example of a type; a quintessence." But my reasoning will show the dictionary definition as too weak to satisfy what I contend has occurred with the African-American archetypes consigned to the unconscious mind of Americans and the world. The perception and reaction to blacks in America, I will demonstrate, are the result of work by propogandists who created the images of black people that have become embedded in the consciousness perceptions of Americans both black and white. By being embedded it creates instant perceptions that blacks must overcome.

Obviously, I'll need to prove that literary heroes are necessary, and ubiquity may not be a good enough reason. I anticipate more than a small amount of debate over whether living legend heroes are adequate for the African-American culture. I contend that they have too many vulnerabilities to do the total job of motivating and constructing the black culture.

So to show that the necessity of African American literary heroes is an imperative I'll need to pull together information on the influence of literature on the psyche, and the influence of the unconscious on literature. To discuss why a fabricated figure can affect a culture one way or another will be a delicate task, when I show why he is as important as a figure who actually lived. And it's just as delicate to discuss the matter within a culture that has since it's first days on this North American continent lived with a narrow literary tradition and clung jealously to its living legends.

I'll attempt to do this keeping in mind that the primary effort of this paper is to show that my novel, *Cowboy*, is necessary to rebuild the black heroic tradition and to rebuild and redefine archetypes of the African-American culture, because to rebuild the image is to rebuild how black people view and define themselves. The cause is necessary and the goal lofty.

Chapter 1

The Origin of the Hero

The world needs heroes. The proof? Everyone in the world has heroes. And those who don't have enough seek out more. Heroes are vital elements to the humanity of a culture. The hero is more than the star of a tale placed on paper, more than part of a story told around the campfire. The hero is the abstract of what a culture wants its people to be; the capstone of the culture's humanity; the custodian of fundamental values; the champion who vanquishes the true enemies of a culture, be they monster, spiritual or moral or composites — and then set the rules as to why.

Scholars define three fundamental types of heroes: the mythical hero, the folk hero or literary hero, and the living hero, or living legend, which includes people who have lived or are still alive. All gain status basically the same way; members of a culture embrace them because they do what the culture has defined as good for the culture.

The history of heroes is as old as humankind. In the earliest civilizations, heroes of folklore more often than not fell from the tree of sacred legend, when humans had only their myths and fables to explain natural phenomena, to add order and meaning to the mysteries of their environment. The heroes of folklore provided answers about things corporeal and existential. They purveyed the surrogate science, explaining the origins of pretty much everything: the world, the animals, the plants, earth, wind, fire. Sometimes they explained by example such things as birth and death. They acted out the fables that

linked mortality with immortality and delved into the human concepts of emotion and passion. They championed religious concepts such as the experience of the soul.

They were exciting, too, which is why they held the interest of their audiences. They went on gallant quests that would take them unimaginable distances over inconceivably protracted times, outside the boundaries sometimes of even life itself. They were born of gods or of woman or both or one. They died and resurrected. They were born and never died.

Dr. Carl G. Jung in *Man and his Symbols*, wrote that the creation of mythic heroes, the first heroes of emerging civilization, was driven by "collective images," or "archetypes" nested in a collective unconscious of humankind. These archetypes are the result of ego development — personified stages of individual growth symbolized by the stages of growth through the fable of the hero. The heroes and their adventures, Jung says, are expressions of dreams or visions of storytellers who recount them in the literature of the day. The people respond to the literature as heroic because they are equipped with the same unconscious catalysts that motivated the storytellers. (Jung 67-69,110-114). While I have my doubts that his work applied to everyone on the planet, he still validated the need and pervasive presence of heroes in cultures globally.

My doubts surround Jung's focus on ego expression in the hero traditions of conventional cultures, for instance the slaying of the dragon as a symbol of man killing the young tiger within himself to free the mature adult. But Jung says next to nothing about what happens when the ego needs of a population with disrupted ego development

as they were for the children of slavery.

The Evolving Place of the Hero

The hero's place has evolve as cultures have evolved within time and civilization. Science displaced the heroes of myth with empirical scientific method. New mythic heroes have been displaced by technology and the assassination of imagination by Hollywood and television. Scholar Joseph Campbell stated in his classic work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* that "... the invention of the power driven machine and the development of the scientific method of research have so transformed human life that the long-inherited, timeless universe of symbols has collapsed," and with it the need for the myth and its champion, the hero. But heroes and their stories remain the "literature of the spirit" for cultures where they still provide feeling, meaning, vicarious experience and answers to the unanswerable questions about life (Moyers 3-5).

The heirs, then, of the mythic tradition, are the literary heroes and living legends who are so popular that the stories that surround them begin to take on a life of their own. People need literary heroes, so they continue to create them or, in the case of living legends, embrace them. The principles of the heroic mantle established by the heroes of myth, however, remain the same. Their heirs, the literary heroes, continue as necessary cultural icons realized by scholars and laymen alike to be vital members of any culture. A culture creates heroes — mythic, literary or living — as prototypes for their definition of humanity (Van Deburg 2). The literary hero is the pinnacle of a culture's definition of manhood, womanhood, the best of humanity for the culture, "...a projection of dreams

and as a model for emulation," radiating a larger-than-life "mythic aura" (Van Deburg 3).

In America, this hero image may range from seemingly small to enormous in his effect on the culture. He may be Howard Rourke, the man of unshakeable integrity. He may be Nick Adams, who searches for his true meaning of manhood. He may be John Wayne, the quintessential patriot, or Robert Young, the father. He may be Ishmael, the witness, or even Jesus Christ, the perfect man. They all were the standards by which to judge members of this American culture.

All of these figures have a lot to offer other than being at the center of a good story. They offer coping strategies and standards for behavior. They inspire people to dream and imagine and react. How many real heroes in war or even personal or public crisis reached into the attics of their memories or the cellars of their unconscious of their minds to find John Wayne or Audie Murphy or Jesus Christ as a guide for what to do next? How many Roman soldiers turned to Mars or Apollo for inspiration? How many African-American children reached into their cultural bank of answers, searching for a dream, looking for a hero only to find the account empty.

Who or What is a Hero?

Campbell stated that a hero is someone who has done something spectacular for his culture, for his people, and usually at a cost to himself or herself, the cost often being as high as his life, but in doing so, has earned a form of immortality. "The hero ... is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms" (21). The literary hero achieves

heroic stature by helping his family or his community in a way they want to be helped. He reaches mythical stature by defining his people; supporting and validating a social order (38).

Living legends operate on much the same level but at a lesser intensity working within the boundaries of reality. People embrace living legends because they have appeared to have shared the burden of the people and done something to defeat the enemies of the culture.

By defining a culture, Campbell appears to mean that the hero provides answers when a culture needs answers. On the other hand, the next level of hero, the literary hero — the folk hero or what Campbell called the fairytale hero — tends to work within established parameters. In my own shorthand: The mythic hero creates the world; the literary hero saves it. When the mythical hero finishes his job, the world is different; when the literary hero finishes his job, the world is better.

William L. Van Deburg, a professor of African-American studies at the University of Wisconsin and author of *Black Camelot: African-American Cultural Heroes in Their Times, 1960-80,* wrote primarily about living legend heroes, those who lived, but were embraced by the people of a culture. Van Deburg noted that for people to embrace and anoint a hero, the aspirant — willing or otherwise — must first satisfy some prerequisites.

> The heroes both reflect and influence societal mores ... the personification of predominating ideas, the embodiment of a people's ineffable desires. Even if their deeds

> are impossible to duplicate fully, these metaphorical representations of culturally sanctioned achievement may serve as behavioral models (3).

Paradoxically, his statement is both constant and a variable. A hero in principle must do what the people of his culture demand in order for the hero to be accepted as a hero. But since cultures differ, the job must differ. This would explain why one culture's hero is another culture's demon. General George Armstrong Custer, who gained his heroic reputation as an Indian fighter, is hardly the hero of any North American aboriginal people — or to a lot of thinking people, for that matter. Still America names things after him at the same time that Native Americans use his name to frighten their children into eating their vegetables.

The New Hero, Made in America

Jung and Campbell agree that the heroic tradition follows universal patterns. The Western heroic tradition — the tradition of Europe — like most heroic traditions, began with mythical heroes who were anchored to a sacred center. The original heroes tended to be agents of a king, a religious leader or a god. They would embark on a heroic quest or confront a heroic cause. The entire "hero adventure" surrounded the going out on assignment from the center, and returning to the center successfully regardless of the obstacles, often including death. Take, for instance, the search for the Holy Grail, or the most famous hero journey of classical literature, the saga of Odysseus in *The Odyssey* (Wills 301).

Most cultures had a central place, says Wills, which was the Alpha and Omega of

the hero, whether they were heroes of history, who gravitated to and from the crown or to and from Rome, or the heroes of myth who gravitated to and from Asgard or Olympus or Camelot. The heroes sought their validity from the approval of the center. They got their strength and acclaim from their ability to stand firm in their fidelity to the doctrine of the center. The hero's quest began when he left, and ended when he returned. (Wills 301-302) The quest produced and depicted the human values. Perseverance and the resistance to temptation of distractions were the ultimate honor, and honor was its own reward.

But with the arrival of Europeans in the New World, that changed dramatically. The new brand of Europeans that spawned America spawned an American hero who detested a sacred center — still does. The American people, as they grew here, embraced heroes who opposed the sacred center. The further from authority and closer to total independence a hero got, the more of a hero he became. No wonder that the cowboy — wandering and free of all encumbrances — became the blueprint hero, and the West — open, free and untamed — became his place. The embodiment of the American myth, the archetypal American, "is a displaced person — arrived from a rejected past, breaking into a glorious future, on the move, fearless himself, feared by others, a killer but cleansing the world of things that 'need killing,' loving, but not bound by love, rootless but carrying the Center in himself ... Other cultures begin with a fixed and social hearth, a temple, a holy city. American life begins when that enclosure is escaped" (Wills 302).

In the new pattern of American literature, the hero does not wait for an authority to

send him on a quest. He sends himself on a quest. He is driven by his own passions and not the will of something greater, other than his own personal code. I can only hypothesize that those who settled here were running from the central power and as a result created a progeny that resented it. Even the American system, based on representative democracy, was first and foremost a move away from an all-powerful center — although to many it seems to have failed at that in the long run. America embraced heroes who better matched the free nature of the new Americans (Wills 302-304)

Where It Began, Whether I Knew It or Not

I recall that my days on the school grounds were fairly normal, except for times when the little boys divided up folk characters: Hopalong Cassidy, Roy Rogers, Kit Carson, Sky King, the Lone Ranger. When they got to me I chose my favorite character, Lash Laroue, the short-lived hero who used a whip instead of a gun (a weapon that got him snatched off television after the myriad of injuries he inspired among testosterone challenged young boys). I attended an integrated parochial school through third grade, by the way. Immediately and unanimously the boys all agreed, Harry can't be Lash Laroue. Lash Laroue was white. At the time, I didn't have an inkling of what they were talking about or why. Now, I see the principle. Lash wasn't my hero. He was theirs. They told me to be like "Lightnin'," a stereotypical black fool, one of the servants or employees of, I think, Roy Rogers, or Wild Bill, or someone else. Or, they wanted me to be the wild man from the Our Gang comedy who chased the children while grunting, "Yum yum, eat'em

up." When I didn't understand, they tried to imitate him so I'd see how to play the part of a wide-eyed, slur-speaking, comedic fool. For this discussion, the greater metaphor was not that I was being demeaned or mocked. I'm fairly certain these youngsters were not performing some Klan initiation rite. Instead, white kids were trying to get a black kid to imitate a white kid being black — and their concept was of a negative stereotype. Of any further nuance, they didn't have a clue, not having the slightest notion that their view of black people had been stuck in their minds long before they knew what had infected them — just like their parents who passed on the congenital illness of ignorance.

Nevertheless, when it came time to be a playground hero, I had nothing to grasp. I refused to be Buckwheat or Lightnin'. I thumbed through the hero department store and found Superman, Batman, Captain America, and came up with the same answers — not that I was in search at that time in my life for someone to help my community or my future. In retrospect, no ingredients from these characters gave me an ounce of improvement; not one provided an anchor to tether my development.

What's clear now is that a vital part of my culture had never germinated. My people seem to have never created imaginary heroes for themselves — for me. And I've learned further, that the absence was through no fault of their own.

It's More Than Just an Absence of Good Reading

What's fairly obvious is that something in the African-American cultural mosaic is missing, borne out if by nothing else than every other culture has heroes born of imagination and unconscious yearnings (Moyers 11-25). Other groups have heroes in

their folklore who perform superhuman feats, provide templates for manhood and womanhood, for children to emulate, for conduct under trying circumstances, who communicate the contrivances of politics, morality, philosophy and values, who embody their abstract selves while defining their cultural weights and measures, who formulate their coping strategies and demonstrate proactive responses to life's challenges and give clear-cut paradigms for right and wrong by living in stark contrasts with no tolerance for compromise. These beings exist because they're vital, and therefore should exist for the African-American culture.

> Every race that has counted for much of its history has had heroes ... Every nation that has helped to build civilization got its inspiration from within ... Negro achievements must be taught to the young men and women, if they are to learn to labor and achieve, to do and to dare (Van Deburg 39).

Critics, incidentally, differ on the significance of the absence of literary heroes. I fall on the side of scholars who believe that the lack of heroes generally is a sign of deeper problems, and I generally lack respect for the opinions otherwise because they tend to be grounded in philosophical presupposition. Van Deburg notes, that, "For any person or group not to have heroes suggests cultural stagnation and a deficit of imagination and, perhaps, signals the onset of what Martin Luther King Jr. once referred to as "a death of the spirit" (2).

But the lack of a literary heroic tradition is just as bad in its immediate

implications. During an interview about the importance of literary heroes to black people, Professor Gerald Early, director of the African-American Studies department at Washington University, addressed the absence of heroes and the "immature" literary heroic tradition. That the African-American culture is virtually devoid of literary heroes is, in fact, the evidence that the culture needs them.

> That's one of the reasons we have the trouble we have today with young black men. Adolescents, juvenile delinquency ... Everybody blames it on single mothers... and I guess that to some degree single parenthood is the problem. But I think that to some degree we don't have sufficient socialization mechanism for these young men and part of it is providing them with fantasy black hero figures that you can look up to, you can admire and say I want to be like that. That you see these larger-than-life people who sacrificed, who fight against oppression and stuff like that. People need that stuff. I think, especially young black boys, growing up, you need those kind of fantasy figures (Early interview).

Micah L. McCreary and Richard C. Wright noted in an article for the *Journal of African American Men*, "... African-American adolescents who reported holding more negative stereotypes about African Americans tended to report more problem behavior and lower self-esteem than their counterparts (27). While the lack of a heroic tradition seems like a small issue, I can only wonder, how many bricks can you remove from the wall before the building crumbles.

Where Have All the Heroes Gone

In all of the world, the African-American culture seems to be the only group that is devoid of the myths and heroics associated with its beginnings, its triumphs and successes and its survival. The irony is that the very importance of this cultural element is why it doesn't exist.

Meanwhile, the tradition of highbrow literature for black Americans has been until very recently one of mournful tales of the effects of racism on blacks and how racism eroded black people from the inside out. And while the primary characters in a novel were protagonists, they were mainly tragic figures portrayed to draw attention to the plight of blacks in America. Bigger Thomas, for example, from Richard Wright's *Native Son*, was no hero by a long shot (Appendix A). *The Invisible Man*, Ellison's character and novel, survived some of the most demeaning treatment only to realize that in the end, nothing outside himself would change his status. Even though Toni Morrison's novels carry mythical spiritualities, her work deals with the individual finding the spiritual center within himself (*The Song of Solomon)* or herself *(The Beloved*) or suffering the consequences (*The Bluest Eye*).

The literary ardor against racism is understandable considering the legacies of slavery. The unique origins and challenges of a people, a culture, spawned in slavery naturally bring about unique responses. Not surprisingly, therefore, the literary response to the black cultural origins have been weighted to expose the horrid effects of racism. But the consequence of the emphasis on fighting racism is that other areas of cultural

development have been left wanting, in this context, the development of the people into a vital group using heroic models as one of the tools.

The Propaganda War

The reason the tradition is all but non-existent dates back to before the proponents of slavery removed the original Africans from Africa. Slavers cut the people off from their own culture and then denied them access to the culture in America. But before that began, they waged a propaganda war meant to make the system of slavery palatable by maligning the humanity of black people to that of subhumans in order to make them seem strong, dangerously chaotic and inferior and, therefore, especially suitable for slavery (Fredrickson 101). The slave-keepers had to do something to make sure that the humanity of Africans was never a consideration in evaluation of slavery (Appendix B).

Hugh Thomas said in his book, *The Slave Trade,* that the Portuguese went out looking for gold and came home with Africans. But even then, the loathing of the system of keeping human chattel threatened the earliest commerce in African slavery.

But the propaganda war in the West already had begun. Missionaries, explorers and traders returned from African excursions with stories of cannibals, bare-breasted she-devils haunting the forests and godless heathens who populated a "dark continent" in chaos. Then, as the New World developed, Europeans found that blacks made extraordinary workers.

The Africans proved to be admirable workers, strong enough to survive the heat

> and hard work on sugar, coffee or cotton plantations or in mines, in building fortresses or merely acting as servants; and at the same time, they were good-natured and docile. Many black slaves had experiences of agriculture and cattle. Both indigenous Indians and Europeans seemed feeble compared with them. (Thomas 792)

In order to quell or at least dilute the mounting debates and societal indignities about the morality of slavery, the propaganda war successfully presented blacks as virtually "anti-white" [in the context of anti-matter] (Fredrickson 101). Through journalism, fiction, theater and public policy, the white American culture over hundreds of years and scores of generations, embraced the black stereotypes as truth. "With virtually no political or legal power for blacks in the earliest days of slavery, the propaganda war has worked tirelessly to maintain a negative image of blacks" (Van Deburg 39).

But the propaganda war had an even more insidious repercussion than instilling racism. While it taught whites to hate blacks, it also taught blacks to hate themselves. Carter G. Woodson, scholar and historian, noted in *The Mis-Education of the Negro* that "... the races were described in conformity with the program of the usual propaganda to engender in whites a race hate of the Negro, and in the Negroes contempt for themselves" (17).

The propaganda war and its effects outlived slavery. And, because it had no antithetical forces opposing it for nearly 300 years, the propaganda war surmounted such force that it, in fact, created the archetypical images of the African-American man and

woman and with it, a malignant lesion in the black cultural fabric indicated not only with the dangerous effect of whites hating blacks, but worse, with the destructive effect of blacks hating blacks. "The lack of confidence of the Negro in himself is what has kept him down. His miseducation has been a perfect success in this respect" (Woodson 109).

Van Deburg catalogued the most insidious archetypes: the noble savage, the tragic mulatto, the loyal servant, the comic minstrel, the black coward and the brute, which served in white-American literature and theater as "disincentives to both heroic conceptualization and action ... As a result they [blacks appeared] far better suited for the denigration than the elevation of black American's self image" (37-38). All of the stereotypes that plague blacks today stem from these.

- **The Noble Savage** — Heroic only in their ability to live in Africa, but totally inept and dependent in America. "Noble and contented while in Africa, weak and wretched in America, these literary children of sorrow encouraged reform-minded whites to view African-Americans' plight as pitiable, but they also affirmed the notion that blacks were weak-willed, hothouse transplants to the white hero's domain" (30).

- **The Tragic Mulatto** — Blacks who had white blood, some diluted enough to pass for white, often in literature found themselves unmasked and disgraced because he or she would have to affirm the wretched millstone of black blood (31).

- **The Loyal Servant** — The mammy, old black Joe, Aunt Jemima, Uncle Wabash and "unctuous octogenarians graced the labels of our syrup bottles, coffee cans, peanut butter jars and soap powder boxes" and old stories depending on this figure, such as

Uncle Remus, have been one of America's "most enduring cultural icons." They embraced servility and subservience as their place in life (31).

●**Comic Minstrels** — Sambo, Tambo, Jazzbo Jim, Rastus, Topsy, Zip Coon, Stepin' Fetchit, Willie Best, Lightnin' and Rochester Van Jones were all variations of this pop-eyed, rooster-strutting, ill-dressed, pearly-toothed, chuckleheaded, king of niggerdom. He was always good for a laugh if for no other reason than his love of big words that he knew nothing about. *("Judge, I resents de allegation and I resents the allegator — George Kingfish Stevens of Amos and Andy)*. But there was a sinister side to these buffoons: "Their humorous antics camouflaged a hidden agenda that ... served as mechanisms of social control and agents of white psychological security" (34). Not only did they put themselves down, they put other blacks down, referring to them as fools and "niggas" and then, they made whites along side them look especially good.

●**The Black Coward** — "Cowardly black literary and theatrical characters were terrified of graveyards, haunted houses, funeral parlors and any other locale where one was likely to experience a brush with mortality occasioned by an encounter with an unfriendly spirit. ... Cowardly blacks made loyal slaves in part because they were too weak-willed to test the waters of the mysterious world beyond the plantations" (35).

●**The Black Brute** — Controlled by external forces, these were the "savages" that everyone feared lay beneath the black skin of the large black men. They were primitive, apelike and barbaric. They reacted to normal life with violence, craved brutal sex with white women, products of nature over nurture (32).

Obviously, that group of archetypes was aimed at males. Women, too, suffered a similar onslaught. California psychologist Gail Wyatt noted three primary archetypes generated for women: The permissive woman, mammy, the workhorse and the she-devil (Wyatt 29-39).

- **The Permissive woman** — The black woman is seen as sexually loose, indiscrete and promiscuous. The image was created both to belittle black women and to excuse the rife and unrestrained rape of black women by white slavers, rapes so prevalent that they changed the hue of Africans to the multi-colored group called African-Americans.

- **The Mammy** — Obese, domesticated, asexual, the mammy was, "a world of wisdom, the patience of Job, the heart of gold and the willingness to breastfeed the world." Hattie McDaniels played an archetypical mammy in "Gone with the Wind." And the image is maintained because she adorns syrup bottles and cookie jars even today.

- **The She-Devil** — She typifies the most negative characteristics attributed to African women before and during slavery, "...the immoral, conniving seductress who loves sex anytime, anywhere and will do anything to corrupt a man, disrupt his family and take his money." The myths of black female as born prostitute grow from this archetype. She is the opposite of the mammy and the picture of being worthy of disrespect and control.

- **The Workhorse** — "... Through hard, backbreaking work, she developed useful skills." A tower of strength, she worked sun up to sun down in the fields and could stand up to rape and physical abuse and nothing would bother her. She's the predecessor to the

modern "superwoman" stereotype who sacrifices her life to her occupation and duty. Overall, the workhorse was just another slave, this time, though to nothing more than expectations.

With these images stuck in the unconscious of the American mind, and tragically, in the minds of blacks; little wonder that black progress in any arena of American life has been retarded.

Black: Something to Wash Off

The pro-slavery community established these images long before emancipation. So it's not so amazing that in the earliest days of emancipation and even before, neither blacks nor whites ever saw a need for blacks to develop their humanity, regardless of the years spent taking it away. Beneath the looming black archetypes, both blacks and whites left slavery believing that being black was something to overcome, not something to develop.

Woodson noted that the effort to train blacks to enter the mainstream was doomed because the effort strove to make blacks throw off any vestige of their blackness and transform into white people. The resulting stew served up a deep self-hatred. It sent the message that being black was something to overcome, not celebrate.

> Their [educators'] aim was to transform the Negroes, not to develop them. The freedmen who were to be enlightened were given little thought, for the best friends of the race, ill taught themselves, followed the traditional curricula of the times which did not take the Negro into consideration except to condemn or pity him (Woodson 17).

Regardless of how well trained black people would be, Woodson said, they'd still suffer the residue of self-hatred. "... To handicap a student by teaching him that his black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching" (3).

Black intellectuals from Frederick Douglass and his predecessors through W.E.B. DuBois and beyond waged a resistance against the propaganda war, but too often got sidetracked and swallowed by some ridiculous, albeit contextual, debates. The debates went this way: The propagandists said that blacks were inferior, the intellectuals answered, "We are not inferior," and then blacks allowed the burden of proof to shift to them to validate the equality of black people. The resulting protracted debates never touched the real issue of racism by oppressors. Blacks fought in wars, waited for time to change the racial climate, lightened their skin, straightened their hair and embraced values never intended for blacks. This left totally unexamined the real issues. For instance, what motivated whites to commit such atrocities on other human beings; what kind of fears motivate the violent racism that led to scores of lynchings, white riots, the rampant rape of black women? Instead, the power of the propaganda filtered out everything except for debates ostensibly on whether blacks were or were not human. Because of that — I term it kindly — oversight, the African-American literary tradition has been able to do little to fight directly against the propaganda war.

The black American literary tradition grew first from the slave narratives that told of the horrors of slavery. They were buttressed by the abolitionist press that later evolved

into the liberal press. Overall, abolitionist, liberal and black literature, both fiction and non-fiction, strived generally to illuminate the plight of black people and to emphasize the effects of racism by presenting the black plight as pitiful and worthy of sympathy and reform. But the target was white guilt, not black emancipation. Virtually nothing ever attacked the propaganda itself or the people who spread the propaganda.

William Lloyd Garrison was an exception, known to speak of and print accounts of black heroism along the Underground Railroad — which he called of a heroic stature worthy of Greek fable. Otherwise, much of that literature rarely got outside of the black community or did little else than preach to the converted. Even the daunted Harlem Renaissance of the early 1900s was a movement patroned by rich, liberal whites and philanthropic organizations that supported blacks who generally wrote and rewrote the same moaning story that said, ostensibly, *woe is me, nobody knows the trouble I've seen.* By the 1970s, African-American literature and history continued a struggle to become a part of the academic and cultural landscape for black people both to — whether they knew it or not — negate the propagandist stereotypes and to rebuild the self-image of black people.

Some of the most vigorous criticism of authors' conduct occurred during and after the Harlem Renaissance, including Zora Neal Hurston who called the ilk the "niggeratti," because the more they wrote and achieved some acclaim, the more distant they got from the issues they championed and the more chummy they got with their financiers. Even author Richard Wright noted the same, and in some harsh terms.

> ...Negro writing in the past has been confined to humble novels, poems, and plays, prim and decorous ambassadors who went a-begging to white America. They entered the Court of American Public Opinion dressed in the knee-pants of servility, curtsying to show that the Negro was not inferior, that he was human, and that he had a life comparable to that of other people. (Norton 1380)

Meanwhile, since emancipation, and even before, the African-American culture has had to rely on the culture that held it in slavery to provide its traditions and values for determining manhood, womanhood, parenting, religious principles, morality, ethics, logic, material values. DuBois noted that black men imitate white men not taking into account that part of the white male stature is dependent on a comparison to the inferior black male as stated in Van Deburg's archetypes. As stated before, much of what African Americans do is imitate white people, an effort that fails because neither the traditions nor the conduct evolved with the needs of blacks in mind.

> Even if the Negroes do successfully imitate the whites, nothing new has thereby been accomplished. You simply have a larger number of persons doing what others have been doing. The unusual gifts of the race have not thereby been developed, and an unwilling world, therefore, continues to wonder what the Negro is good for (Woodson 7).

Are Living Legends Enough?

Frankly, no research seems to exist on why no literary heroic tradition emerged in

the African-American culture. Other than the devastating onslaught of the propaganda war, which I'll deal wish further, would seem to be that few outlets existed to deal with anything other than the atrocity of slavery. Slaves in their narratives and literate freed men later had little time to deal with anything other than fighting slavery or surviving Jim Crow and racial violence. Who in that era had time for visions of knights and warriors and sacred quests. Even today, I personally believe that publishers may be reluctant to print fictional stories about African-American mythic-level heroism, an issue I'll deal with in a later chapter.

Still the people needed heroes. And as a result, African Americans became especially adept at building living legends into cultural and pop-culture heroes. Certainly, cultures have heroes who live — a winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor, a citizen hero who braves unbelievable conditions to overcome adversity, a young boy who drives a runaway school bus to safety, or a firefighter who pulls a child from a burning building. But the accomplishments of living legends are measured by yardsticks, real terms.

They are social activists like the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, Huey Newton, Rap Brown, or Minister Louis Farrakahn. They are war heroes, like the pilots of the Tuskeegee Airmen. They are athletes like Michael Jordan. Or they are film stars like Denzel Washington. They also are black people whose life mocks racism, such as Jack Johnson and his public affair with a white woman in the 1920s; or Muhammed Ali who rejected war and Christianity in the name of black people; or Adam Clayton Powell who played the "white man's game" to scale the ladder of power in

Congress only to be booted out when he got too powerful.

But unlike other cultures, virtually all African-American cultural heroes are real people who live and die after accomplishing something that the culture finds important. Sometimes, the accomplishment is making a statement. Sometimes, it's only the achievement of celebrity.

Van Deburg explains that the African-American culture has embraced as heroes individuals who successfully and publicly opposed racism either with their lives, their accomplishments or their words and seemed to do it in the name of improving the black culture. That accomplishment which seems to be explicitly or symbolically in the name of black people, is what Van Deburg calls in *Black Camelot*, the "it." The "it" is the ability to raise a plethora of passions: emotion, imitation, lust, and most importantly, pride not only in the hero, but in one's self. "The most committed followers ... tended to narrow the gap between themselves and their champions, conceptualizing the hero as a culturally sanctioned representative" (41).

Van Deburg offers Marcus Garvey as an example of the heroic "it." The "it" was that special element that led black populations to accept or favor a person as a heroic figure (39-41). I contend, for instance, that for my generation, Huey P. Newton, minister of defense for the Black Panther Party, had that "it," maybe even more than Malcolm X.

> Motivated by these compelling displays of heroism in support of group advancement, black Americans expanded their field of vision ... seeking out contemporary figures for honorific treatment. Utilizing their

> considerable powers of discretion, they anointed current favorites as living legends. (Van Deburg 41)

And these living legends still were those who the population could relate to for another reason that is more important: People felt that heroes they anointed shared the burdens of the plight of African Americans and conquered them. Powell, for example reached a hero status because he remained close to his constituency while never becoming too close to the power structure he conquered in Congress during his tenure. Huey Newton was a resident of the neighborhoods he protected. This is why even celebrities, who don't seem to do anything brave or life-threatening, can be called living legends. They break through a construct designed to limit black achievement: Michael Jordan became the most famous athlete in the world rather than the most famous black athlete, and he was incredibly wealthy, versatile and articulate; Denzel Washington has been dubbed the sexiest man in the world, not just the sexiest black man, and he plays mainstream parts.

Still, the problem with living legends is their accessibility, their vulnerability and their limited scope — they are human. And being human, the contributions made by living legends tend to be limited in scope, possess natural fallibility and they're vulnerable to figurative and literal assassination. "People, folk, often bemoaned their heroes' humanity as ... encumbered by certain of the same weaknesses and imperfections which plagued other mortals (Van Deburg 46). So the tendency to depend on living legends is to precariously risk the regular occurrence of watching propagandists belittle or destroy

African-American cultural heroes.

And there exists the imbalance. The African-American culture has had to make due with heroes always in a precarious situation of vulnerable to being shot down with the next expose or character assassination — for example, King as an adulterer, Jordan as a gambler, Washington as a womanizer, Powell as corrupt politician, Malcolm X as unpatriotic. Living legend heroes never deal with the stark questions that linger in any culture: what is good and what is evil; when is it time for violence and when is it time for peace; what is love; what is hate; what is moral and ethical? And, ironically, when the culture tries to hold their living legends up to imaginary standards, they, being human beings fail, and more because of the untenable expectations than because of their humanity.

This is why every culture has imaginary heroes along side their living legends: Imaginary heroes have no faults except for those needed to teach a lesson or make a point. That's what the African-American culture doesn't have and that's why literary heroes must be designed: to accomplish cultural goals, but on larger-than-life quests that we can only imagine. For black people, that means the hero must confront and do battle with the unique challenges and enemies of the black culture and defeat them, and do it in a manner that would feed the needs of the black imagination and passion for life and remain impenetrable to the darts of racist propaganda. The living legend is who we are; the literary hero is who we want to be. The living legend defines the day; the literary hero defines the future.

And that's why I wrote *Cowboy.*

Cowboy Jed

Cowboy Jed, the hero of *Cowboy*, was born and reached manhood as a slave on a ranch in southwestern Arkansas. When the Yankees burned the ranch and the old slave holder died in the fire rather than give up his land, Cowboy Jed mounted his favorite horse and embarked on a quest to find the family sold away from him during his years in bondage.

During his search, he becomes a skilled wrangler, a feared gunfighter, and a fierce bounty hunter — driven by an obsession to put his family back together and a bloodthirsty depression driven by hatred of the people who broke up his family. He's plagued by nightmares and is only able to sleep in nods or with extreme doses of whiskey. His deep pain is relieved only as he pulls his family together.

His challenges are many. He obviously must find his wife and son, then his mother, brother and sister. But when records prove nonexistent, he must rely on the memory of the son of his former slave owner. He must civilize himself or endanger the lives of his family and friends. He must vanquish his debilitating hatred for the former slave owners — not easy, considering the damage they inflicted on people from birth to death — because the blind rage that he can demonstrate against oppressive whites could endanger his family and friends, and, also, never allow him to enjoy his triumphs. And in that same context he must know to use his strength to defend his family and friends from the forces of evil — and in doing so learn to defend and do battle without hatred.

This doesn't seem so rare. Stories of wayward cowboys have filled the bookstores for decades. So why is Jed so important? Because he's unique. Other than an anthropomorphic imaginary rabbit named Br'er and a semi-imaginary labor hero named John Henry who just happened to be black, the heroic literary tradition if the strict definitions of Jung and Campbell and the principles by Van Deburg are followed, in America is virtually non-existent for African-Americans. Jed is also important because he takes on a uniquely African-American challenge: repairing the damage done to his family by slavery. It's a hero quest that no other cultural folk hero could address, and every African-American family can embrace.

Right now, blacks who want to embrace heroes of literature find more often than not, a few caricatures and others whose tales were hidden in the coded language of the slave communities. "Each character had important didactic and wish-fulfillment value" (Van Deburg 47). And, with due respect to Br'er Rabbit, they also carried codes about escape plans as well as cryptic insight into their resentment of the slave keepers.

Jed is neither a rabbit nor any other type of animal. He's a man. But he still conforms to Van Deburg's paradigm in that a folk hero demonstrates a "... typically proactive response to life's challenges encouraged behaviors that were antithetical to white-determined norms and expectations. The black folk hero made it clear that he would accept no hierarchical order or value system that was not a reflection of his own cultural identity" (Van Deburg 47).

Why African-American Writers Must Define The Nature of African-American Heroes

Even though the white American culture caused the damage to the African-American culture, it's the job of African-Americans to repair it, even if the only reason is that they can prove to themselves that they can do it. During the propaganda war, white literature made vain and even laughable attempts to neutralize the negative images portrayed by proponents of slavery. But they, too, got sucked into the debate on whether blacks are or are not human.

Consequently, even the most benevolent and well-meaning effort for the white culture to help tell the story of African-Americans falls short unless it is done in purely academic and non-fiction terms. But what I'm discussing here is not who chronicles history, it's who defines the culture. Honorable men are perfectly able to chronicle history, and, in fact, several of my research sources were written by white historians, for example, probably my best source, Van Deburg. Literature is not a view of history. Instead, it's a portrayal of the experiences in the history of the people and of their dreams.

In virtually all cases when white fiction writers attempt to attack the problems faced by blacks, one of two characterizations take place. Whites elevate their characters to the heroic levels and neglect the black participation, or the whites create black characters who aren't black at all, but have dark skin with values and conduct the African-American culture would not embrace as its own. Not that this is bad. For whites to portray their characters as saviors and blacks as sympathetic victims is perfectly

natural. In any type of folklore, authors, publishers and playwrights (I consider screenwriters as playwrights) will tell the story from the point of view of their own experience. In America, that more often than not, means white terms. *Ghost of Mississippi,* to use a film venue, was about the assassination of Medgar Evers, but was told from the perspective of a white lawyer who pursued the case at the urging of Mrs. Evers, the pathetic victim. In the film, *Amistad,* the brilliant depictions still were of the only major story in 300 years of slavery that had a relatively happy ending. And still, the story essentially was about the fight waged by John Quincy Adams, the moral white guy, and his moral white associate, to save the pathetic victims. On the other hand, Cinque, who led the slave revolt aboard the slave ship La Amistad, embodies the noble savage — muscular, bare-chested, voiceless, sorely in need of good white people to save him.

In his book, *Hero Tales from American History* Henry Cabot Lodge wrote about the heroism of Civil War Col. Robert Gould Shaw, while giving little attention to the men of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, an all-black regiment of soldiers who stormed the wall of Fort Wagner in South Carolina. More than half of them died in the battle.

Author Robert Patterson has written a series of detective novels that feature a black detective, but in none of the portrayals can one of his detectives be distinguished by anything that is peculiarly black, meaning he never uses the solutions that might come from an African-American creativity. The protagonist never displays the fine points of the black character. Basically his characters are white, and identified as having black skin.

On the other hand, writer Walter Mosley makes sure his characters relate well to

the black culture, and he even pays attention to heroic characterizations creating a hero-type that no one white would ever attempt. Easy Rawlins, the primary character in the series of novels by Mosley, is a protagonist, but he is not the hero of the series. Says Mosley, "The hero of the world that Easy inhabits is Mouse" (Belton 238). No author other than a black author could dare portray a man of Mouse's character in the way that Mosley so freely and skillfully portrayed him.

> For a group of oppressed people, a man like Mouse is the greatest kind of hero. He's a man who will stand up against bone-cracking odds with absolute confidence. He's a man who won't accept even the smallest insult. And for a people for whom insult is as common as air, that's a man who will bring joy (Belton 239).

Still, the best example of what happens when the white culture attempts to define the humanity of blacks involves the first African-American hero of American literature: Uncle Tom of *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Life Among the Lowly.* (Incidentally, Beecher Stowe submitted the manuscript as *Uncle Tom's Cabin, the Man Who Was a Thing,* but the abhorrence by the publisher of calling a slave a man led to the alteration in the title.) Harriet Beecher Stowe, in a wholly benevolent effort, attempted to define the human nature of the black man through the hero, Uncle Tom. Ironically, her being off target in her portrayals of the African-American nature, increased the white sympathy and guilt. That, coupled with the bad taste left in the mouth of the North by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, instilled a deeper hatred of slavery that eventually helped spark the Civil War.

But that's because the story was told in white terms that affected white sensibilities.

The message in her effort to discredit slavery consisted largely of telling her white brethren of the gentle and pure nature of the black man, a nature that had no business in slavery. Beecher Stowe was a proponent of a ludicrous principle known as "romantic racialism" which undergirded one rarely discussed element of the abolitionist movement — an insidious part of the movement that cared much for freedom, but little for equality; much for the white immortal soul, and little for the black humanity.

Historian George M. Fredrickson notes in his essay, "Uncle Tom and the Anglo-Saxons: Romantic Racialism in the North," that whites romanticized white superiority even attributing governmental systems such as democracy to natural proclivities of white males (100-101). Blacks on the other hand were portrayed at every opportunity, therefore, in a way that allowed whites, "... to accept a stereotype of the Negro which made him a kind of anti-Caucasian" (101). Romantic racialism in this vein, said, that blacks were naturally docile, forgiving, happy, loyal, loving, gentle and sacrificial, in effect, perfect Christians — the meek who would inherit the earth. Whites on the other hand were naturally aggressive, analytical, materialistic and mathematically logical (126). As a result, says the doctrine, whites are condemning themselves to damnation if they continue to mistreat God's perfect children (emphasis on children). The Negroes, therefore, should be freed, and even returned to Africa, observed and emulated so that whites could learn to be more in touch with the Negro's perfect, innate Christianity.

All of this was part of a Calvinist, anti-slavery platform that Beecher Stowe used to construct her "pure black" character, "Uncle Tom." Other "pure black" characters also were docile and servile. The blacks with white blood became more aggressive and disruptive the more white blood they had. John William Ward of Amherst College, in a commentary about *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* noted:

> From the perspective of our own present, Mrs. Stowe seems condescending, to say the least, toward the Negro. Not only does she make her lovers, Eliza and George, so white they can easily pass when the need arises, or that her black Negroes usually are there for rollicking, chuckleheaded fun, but that she praises them constantly because they are patient, timid and unenterprising. (492)

Some version of this is what blacks can expect from attempts by the white culture to craft and tell tales of black Americans. They'll follow their nature to draw on their own cultural predilections — consciously or unconsciously — in the portrayals because that's all they have to draw upon — not that this is a bad thing, it's just not beneficial to the black culture.

The conclusion is that Beecher Stowe's purpose was benevolent, abolitionist and to a degree, even honorable in the context of her time. But be assured that her ultimate purpose in penning *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and other later works, was less to fortify or even help the black slaves, and more to save the souls of the slave keepers. Even Uncle Tom seemed to care more about the souls of white slavers even more than he cared about his own life. Consider when Legree vowed to kill him for not betraying the escape of Cassy

and Emmeline.

> Legree drew in a long breath; and, suppressing his rage, took Tom by the arm, and, approaching his face almost to his, said in a terrible voice, "Hark 'e Tom! — ye think, 'cause I've let you off before. I don't mean what I say; but, this time, I've made up my mind, and counted the cost. You've always stood it out agin me; now, I'll conquer ye or kill ye! — one or t' other. I'll count every drop of blood there is in you, and take 'em one by one, till ye give up!"
>
> Tom looked up to his master, and answered, "Mas'r, if you was sick, or in trouble or dying and I could save ye, I'd give ye my heart's blood; and, if taking every drop of blood in this poor old body would save your precious soul, I'd give 'em freely, as the Lord gave his for me. Oh, Mas'r! Don't bring this great sin on your soul! It will hurt you more than 't will me! Do the worst you can, my troubles'll be over soon; but, if ye don't repent, yours won't never end!" (Stowe 440-441)

This soliloquy obviously has nothing to do with the suffering of Tom, and everything to do with warning whites of their mortal sin.

Nevertheless, discussions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* still seem bent on characterizing Tom as a Christ figure. Adjectives such as great, wonderful and triumphant, even in his death, are bantered around like ping pong balls. The debaters, however, fail to recognize that in this debate, Tom is a characterization meant to wrench fear and guilt from white Christians.

Cowboy Jed, on the other hand, doesn't give a damn about the souls of slave keepers any more than do I. Jed is designed to qualify as a literary hero. He fights the battles of black people of the past and present and no one else's. In the case of African Americans, those battles are unique and apart from other cultures and need a special attention that only African-American writers can afford.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The objective of this paper is to explain why I wrote the novel, "*Cowboy, the Saga of Jedediah West*" and do it in a way that is relevant to the most creative expression of mass communications. I am doing so from the platform that Cowboy Jed is a black literary hero of which there are very few in the African-American cultural mosaic. However, if the African-American cultural mosaic is to develop and evolve, literary heroes are an imperative that must be developed for many reasons which I am attempting to illuminate here.

The problem in researching this paper has been that so little literature exists on the topic. Volumes and volumes cover the real life African-American heroes and even African mythic heroes. Numerous books use "Hero" in the title, but they all deal with pop-culture heroes or historical figures. The job, then is to create a linear extrapolation from existing information in order to draw the conclusions. So the task went horizontally from the thesis: For practical purposes, there is no African-American literary heroic tradition. But the African-American culture needs one. And the people who are exclusively equipped to create it are African-American artists.

The detective work would have to begin with gathering the ingredients to cook up this hero stew.

- What or who is a hero?
- How is a modern hero structured?
- What happened to the heroes for African Americans?
- If blacks have no literary heroes, do they need them?
- So where do they find them?
- How does a culture build a hero?

Establishing the need for literary heroes required empirical sources which would lay a foundation for my conclusions. An immense amount of literature exists on heroic traditions, but the three sources that fit my purposes were Dr. Carl G. Jung, with *Man and His Symbols*; Dr. Joseph Campbell with *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*; and a third book, *The Power of Myth*, a set of interviews by Bill Moyers with Campbell. They set down the boundaries for heroes. Solidifying a definition was necessary because the word, hero, is tossed around so casually that it has lost its meaning. They set down the following boundaries.

- Both heroes of legend and living heroes are established by a culture in much the same way.
- All cultures have them, and in principle, they all look alike.
- The degree of effect on the culture by the hero of literature determined their heroic stature. Affect the culture and the hero is mythical; affect the neighborhood and the hero is literary.
- As for real people who become heroes, if someone does something within

parameters set by a culture, that person would be dubbed a hero and treated as such within the culture. But in most cases a real life hero has no more power over the culture after the triumph than he had before, unless changing the culture was why he was elevated to heroic stature.

- True heroes are not action figures. Protagonists and pop-culture celebrities are not heroes unless they do something heroic, such as in engage in an endeavor that requires courage and life-threatening selfless sacrifice.

Jung and Campbell were not totally persuasive in their demonstrations that a hero appears to be the incarnation of an archetypal impression that rests inextricably in the human unconscious and subconscious. The archetypal image, by touching that target in the unconscious, is able to inspire, motivate, captivate and even manipulate the human consciousness. When elements of this archetype appear in stereotypes, human beings address them in positive and negative ways and often have no idea why they do so. For example, a man like Moses is automatically accepted as good and a being like Satan is automatically accepted as bad, even though the actions of Moses and Satan sometimes are hard to distinguish. The most persuasive argument he proposes is that each stage in the live of a hero is an expression of the development of the individual ego-structure. "That is to say, the image of the hero evolves in a manner that reflects each stage of the evolution of the human personality" (Jung 112).

The mythical hero tends to fight symbols of what the culture considers important. So when he slays a dragon and frees the damsel in distress, for example, he is less killing

a fire-breathing animal and instead killing a negative character trait in order to free a positive character trait for his own personal growth. And as a mythological hero, his personal growth is the growth of the culture (Jung 120-121)

I was frustrated to find that neither Jung nor Campbell explained how archetypes become embedded in the unconscious other than they were there when humankind decided to walk upright and form societies. However, what I read in Jung's *Man and His Symbols* and Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* demonstrated that the process they dealt with worked within cultures that underwent normal evolutions. So while their concepts of ego development in the hero process were valid generally, they were less valid for African-Americans.

And that is where I wish I could grill Dr. Jung personally. The definitions that Jung and Campbell put forth were the result of a process that is adapted culture to culture, and all of the processes follow a consistent pattern that eventually end with the hero vanquishing the enemies of the culture: human, superhuman, supernatural, moral or ethical. The process of creating heroes seemed to have no color, creed or patent.

Except for African Americans.

The African-American culture did not have a normal cultural evolution. A normal cultural evolution is simple: Sentient creatures one day walked upright then got together as a group — if they weren't already a pack — developed language, societal skills, rules, laws, legends, economics and all of the amenities of a culture. The African-American culture, however, was created by a unique form of slavery never practiced before or

since. Africans were already civilized when brought to America. Different cultures were mixed together with no determining reason for mixture other than skin color. They were cut off from their civilization, denied any benefits within the new civilization and then brainwashed generation after generation to believe their own inferiority. This lasted at one stage or another for roughly 300 years. That could add up to four to seven generations per lineage per century. The only logical conclusion is that while no one knows how it happened, or even when it happened, that the hundreds of years and scores of generations of consistent stereotyping of Africans in America embedded a malevolent archetype into the minds of Americans — black and white. These perceptions have so marred the normal social development of blacks that Jung's principles very well may no longer apply beyond the basic need for a heroic tradition as a part of a vital culture. The vitality of a heroic tradition means that the people are still dreaming; they envision a future; they generate ambition. But what if those elements are non-existent? This is the tragic nature of this argument. While the heroes of other cultures are striving to better men, the hero of the black culture must demonstrate that he is a man.

The hero of reality is the validation of the past; a certification of what we are. But the literary hero is what we want to be and who we want to strive to be. Can the lack of a heroic tradition indicate the opposite? Considering the Jungian explanation of ego structure expressed in the development of the hero, take into account, then, that the system of slavery was designed to destroy the ego structure of blacks. And if Jung's principle of the "collective unconscious" is the backbone of his definitions of the

development of a hero, what of the collective nature of a people who were constantly divided by a force of evil that profited from the division?

William L. Van Deburg's *Black Camelot* dealt with those issues as an introduction and in the earliest portions of his book on the process of how black people selected pop-culture heroes between 1960 and 1980. What is fascinating in this analysis is that he didn't write exactly about how the heroic tradition was built. He instead addressed how black cultural morale was systematically ripped apart through a propaganda campaign waged by proponents of slavery and white supremacists. For the most part, he demonstrated that the anti-black elements of America virtually created what Van Deburg called "white inventions," about black character. But in fact what he laid out were principles where racialists get their stereotypes to demean blacks — archetypes (30-36).

Van Deburg's work not only showed what had happened to the heroic tradition of black Americans, he also, inadvertently, and for my purposes, set apart the difference between the African-American cultural evolution and the evolution of other cultures typified by Jung and Campbell. Not one of the cultures examined by Jung or Campbell had anything other than a normal beginning. And not one spent its entire existence subjected to negative brainwashing enforced by law.

This onslaught of negative characterizations needed a name. Several sources used the name often, but Carter G. Woodson used it best in, *The Mis-Education of the Negro.* What happened to blacks, he said, was a propaganda war against the basic humanity of African-Americans. Woodson, known primarily as the author of Negro History Week,

savaged the propaganda war throughout his work by demonstrating its existence and then demonstrating the long-term effects.

And this is where it all came together. After the propaganda war imbedded the negative impression of blacks into the unconsciousness of both blacks and whites, thoughtful logic in the rehabilitation of blacks fresh out of slavery became a bizarre and illogical deformation that has since skewed the quest for black identity. The entire American society saw black as a burden. Even blacks. As a result, any education, training or other efforts by educators, no matter how benevolent, re-enforced the feelings of inferiority among blacks, Woodson said. Both Woodson and Van Deburg used the term "propaganda war" to describe the attack on black humanity. But neither calculated the long-term damage that it caused.

Some scholars will be troubled by my use of the term, "archetype" in describing the effect of the propaganda campaign on African Americans. However, the social evidence speaks for itself. Just check the dictionary to find how American language has treated the term "black," and how it has treated the term, "white." Just as the instant reaction is to light and darkness, neither of which has any intrinsic goodness or evil, so is the reaction of people to the terms black and white. They create contrast of the most extreme sort.

Woodson outlined several solutions needed to reverse the black feelings of inferiority, although he addressed nothing about how so many whites could get over their misbegotten feelings of superiority. His conclusions, in an off-handed way, agreed with

Jung and Campbell: that a culture builds and defines itself, top to bottom. In fact, no culture can rely on another to do the job properly because the other culture will tend to elevate its own members to the status of heroes while ignoring the accomplishments of others (Woodson 192).

Which brings us to both Harriet Beecher Stowe and George Frederickson . They entered the discussion in order to demonstrate that no matter how well-meaning the effort, whites can neither define nor put forth a literary or heroic tradition for blacks, even if the effort is to help blacks. Beecher Stowe, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Life Among the Lowly,* created ostensibly the first black hero of American literature, and for practical purposes, she screwed up.

Beecher Stowe attempted to demonstrate the sorrowful life that blacks suffered at the hands of slavers. Frederickson, in his examination of her work, illuminated her motives in the principles of her religious foundation, revealing what became quite obvious in her books. Beecher Stowe, in her creation of Uncle Tom — the stereotypical, happy Negro slave, the noble savage, the black male mammy — was not trying to save blacks from slavery. She was instead trying to save whites from eternal damnation brought on by the sin of being slavers. The book never truly portrayed black character except in terms of skin tone. Darker blacks were more docile. Lighter blacks were more unmanageable and aggressive the lighter they were.

However, Frederickson's essay on the principle of "romantic racialism," of which there was evidence that Beecher Stowe may have been a proponent, shed the most light

on her motives. The principle romanticized racial differences — romanticizing being, as usual, superimposing supposition over fact, the supposition being an avenue to support an agenda. He wrote that in her case, the agenda was to see that black people were natural Christians — the meek who would inherit the earth. Whites, on the other hand, sinned by keeping them enslaved. In other words her agenda was to save whites from damnation, not blacks from slavery.

Other writers and characters would have been sufficient for my purposes of demonstrating my thesis. For instance, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain was another attempt to demonstrate the sorry plight of slaves, but still presented Jim as a character secondary to the lad Huckleberry, whose growth was the center of the story, not Jim's plight. But Uncle Tom's cabin, and its many demonstrative passages, coupled with the narrow focus of Beecher Stowe provided more a more obvious demonstration with the least necessary analysis.

Frederickson also provided much fodder for my argument about both the propaganda war and the sullied motivations of even benevolent whites trying to help blacks by defining the black identity for blacks. One example is Fredrickson's essay, "Negrophobia." It delineated the propaganda war as something to be opposed by the many forms of abolitionism. Even though I didn't quote this essay, I did find it useful as another re-enforcement of my conclusions from what was set forth by Woodson and Van Deburg.

The next step, then, would be to set forth a conclusion and to show how my novel, *Cowboy, the Saga of Jedediah West,* conformed to my findings. And this is where all of

the gloomy details I've outlined came together during an interview with Dr. Gerald Early, director of the African and African-American Studies Program at Washington University. Since the African-American culture got a different kind of start, the hero process would need to accommodate that start. And logically, while the propaganda war was highly successful, it was not totally successful. During slavery, blacks fled, formed and participated in the Underground Railroad. When the Klan burned down a home, they built it back and replanted the crops. When slavery ended, most blacks embraced freedom and tried to make the best of it.

Early, said that knowing blacks were never happy with slavery is where the process of creating heroes begins. Blacks need to "... make mythology out of their resistance. It's very important. I think that's the only way black people are going to come to grips with being in this country, being Americans, being able to live with other people in this country. Is to make a mythology out of our resistance. I think it's very important," he said.

So, as I said in the previous chapter, blacks left slavery with one primary skill being the ability to survive slavery. Part of that principle is the ability to use what's available to sustain life. For example, soul food, as it's fondly called, is little more than table scraps from the garbage of slave owners. And the folk tales and songs handed down from slavery, are vehicles for coded messages for planning escapes and other subterfuge.

What I'm leading to is that to apply the principles of Jung and Campbell in the process of building African-American heroes, some adaptation of their theories must be

applied to make them relevant to African Americans. In addition, blacks also must adapt, in that in the midst of all of this cultural chaos, blacks in America must accept that they are, for better or worse, Westernized, and this is not only in the form of being products of Western values.

Dr. Larry Davis, professor of Social Work at Washington University, touched on this when he recognized Westernization as one of the problems inherent in using African folklore as a folklore for black Americans. Blacks would not connect, he said. I found that valid by applying Van Deburg's work, where he said that heroes must oppose the enemies of the culture. In fact, the enemies of the African-American culture are not the enemies faced by the cultures in Africa.

Early, who holds a doctorate in English, agreed with Davis' assessment. But again, he called for more adaptation in order incorporate African folklore into African-American heroic literature. "Redo it. In such as way that those kids can connect with it," Early said. "You just change it. I don't believe in any such thing that something gotta just stay the way it is. It's like language or anything else. You adapt; you change; it's just like anything else.

"It's like white people do with Greek myths. Norse myths, all that other kind of jazz, what Wagner was doing with those Teutonic myths ... It's the same old stuff ... People just decide, I'm going to take this and I'm going to whip it around; I'm going to tell the story.

"If the kids don't like it because the person doesn't have clothes on, we'll just

change him and put some clothes on this person. You can still get the same idea across. Just change it. There's no law that says you can't adapt it to what people's needs are now" (Early interview)

So if black Americans are Westernized, then the first connection with a literary heroic tradition must be through Westernized American folklore. Garry Wills' *John Wayne's America, the Politics of Celebrity,* outlined a number of definitions for the American-style hero that would relate to Westernized people. And I chose to add that to the soup of creating an African-American hero. Wills gave some tremendous insights into the nature of the Americanized system of the heroic model. In his book, he examined how John Wayne ended up being the most politically powerful cultural icon in America. Part of this involved explaining what Americans embraced, and then how John Wayne gave them what they wanted (Wills, incidentally seemed by no means a fan of John Wayne any more than a scientist is a fan of a new bacteria.) explaining that Wayne's entire persona, including his name and history, were fabrications.

Wills explained that John Wayne was the perfect example of my conclusions: a hybrid of a living legend and literary hero. For practical purposes, John Wayne never existed. He never did any of the things people believed he did, in or out of a movie. He never stood for any of the principles, social or political, that he espoused. John Wayne wasn't even his real name. He was a fabrication created by both his own zeal for an image and the need of the American public to embrace the type of image he offered. Had America been honest to its hero selection, James Stewart would have been a genuine

movie hero instead of John Wayne. Stewart actually fought in WWII, he actually stood against the Senate Un-American Activities Subcommittee. He married and stayed married for decades. He was a good American. But Wayne, on the other hand, serviced the people's fears and loathings, with patriotism and demagoguery with more manufactured image than substance in front of responsibility to the democracy he said he loved.

Wills' discussion of the penchant for freedom, wide open space, independence and an abhorrence of central authority gave me further ingredients with which to fashion a true American hero who addressed the needs of the African-American population.

Following are the other books and authors that played a part in my research.

***The Hero and the Blues,* by Albert Murray**. Murray is a respected author and literary critic who was able to validate many of my premises about the needs of heroic literature to a culture. The best contribution he made to this paper was his page on the "happy ending" and its value to certain types of literature which became applicable to my work. The happy ending, he said, showed that the culture had learned how to live, while the tragic ending showed that their plight had ended in death because they did not know how to survive.

***The Writings of Frederick Douglass,* by Frederick Douglass.** Douglass' works, from his slave narratives to his essays for the North Star, his abolitionist newspaper, and other venues documented my statements about the overall problems caused by slavery. But like most writers of his time, most of his work stated its case in the form of concrete examples that couldn't be used as definitions. So I could quote him but not much.

Nevertheless, I know where to turn when someone looks at my words on slavery and says to prove it. Also, Douglass was another advocate for human rights who often got caught up in the debate over whether or not blacks were human.

***Black Red and Deadly, Black and Indian Gunfighters of the Indian Territories,* by Art Burton.** Burton presented an account more valuable to my novel than to the research paper. It told the true and historic story of the nature and methods of violence in the Indian Territories, the area now called Oklahoma. The accounts named many of the legendary people of the territories and separated legend from reality. For instance, he established that the six-shooter was not the favorite weapon of this part of the Old West. In fact, the shotgun, rifle and ax were favored even when the Colt .45 became a mainstay of Old West legend.

Burton's book also chronicled the level of racism in the territories as a backstop to the reality of a black man being a rough, tough cowboy without being lynched. The fact is, in that part of the country, it was very possible for a black man to pull off what my hero, Jedediah, does, although not probable. But, then, that's why *Cowboy* is a novel.

***Spooks Spies and Private Eyes, Black Mystery, Crime, and Suspense Fiction of the 20th Century,* edited by Paula L. Woods**. In my effort to disprove a part of my thesis — that true heroes of mythical stature were missing from the African-American historic tradition — I read this historical anthology of shorts stories, mainly detective, police and mystery fiction written as far back as pre-Civil War. I found that in early cases, blacks wrote about white characters and kept their own race secret. The earliest stories and the

latest stories, even those where authors went deeply into cultural intrigue, had one thing in common: They offered entertainment and cultural vitality, but, still, created no heroic superstructure.

***500 Nations,* by Alvin M. Josephy Jr.** I used this simply to review the cultural background of Native peoples of the North American continent and the Western Hemisphere to compare their experience with that of Africans imported to the continent by slavers. While discussing my thesis with many people prior to the writing, I got lots of comments that Native peoples suffered equally at the hands of white Manifest Destiny as did blacks. Reading the chronicles of the suppression of the red man in this hemisphere, I finally decided that the debate is ridiculous to the point of absurdity.

The degree of suffering is not comparable, nor is it relevant. In the Western push for wealth, wealthy whites stole freedom from blacks, land and life from Indians and weren't much kinder to poor whites and immigrant Asians. I can only say that this demonstrates the creativity that oppression can take. Different people suffered differently depending on the use the oppressive system had for them. Anyone in the way of a gold rush, a need for farm land, a railroad, or simply opulent wealth were exterminated or placed in concentration camps. If they were useful, they were slapped in chains and forced into slavery. Several unsuccessful attempts were made to enslave Indians, starting with the efforts of the Spaniards. But the Indians knew the land, were never disconnected from their cultures and therefore presented more problems than profit. A more accurate comparison would be with the Indians and the Asante of the area now known as Ghana.

The British never fully suppressed the Asante people and had the same problem in Africa with them as the oppressors had in the Americas with the Indians. Similar stories surround the resistance to slavery in the area known now as Angola. I still see that the African-American situation was much different. Had the Indians been transported to Africa and forced into slavery there, the comparison might have been more valid.

Does this make the African-American plight worse and the Indian plight easier? No. *500 Nations* the two books in the following passage, say to me that the plights were different yet both unspeakably cruel. But to correlate their circumstances takes away from the discussion of the need to address the unique problems of each group in the effort to rebuilt what was lost to the savage period of American Capitalist expansionism.

***The Slave Trade,* by Hugh Thomas and *The History of Slavery* by Suzanne Everett.** Both of these volumes served the same purpose. They told of the horrors of slavery and illuminated the cruelty and satanic level of torture that the Africans endured during and after their trip to the new world. Thomas' book, however, discussed the issue with a wholly white point of view. Not one significant anti-slavery black person from either America or African is quoted in Thomas' book. But it still is objective to the best degree it can be.

The Encyclopeadia Britannica. For obvious reasons I used this research material. I'm including this in my review of research only to distinguish what I used from other encyclopedia, as in computerized or other publishers.

***Speak My Name, Black Men on Masculinity and the American Dream,* edited**

by **Don Belton.** This anthology of essays provide "The Black Man: Hero," by novelist Walter Mosley who wrote short but to the point that "Heroism is survival," or the story of an attempt to survive (Mosley 235).

***Brotherman, The Odyssey of Black Men in America — an Anthology*, edited by Herb Boyd and Robert L. Allen.** This was another anthology I examined to find some evidence of heroic fiction. However, examination of the writing re-enforced my thesis that African-American heroic literature is virtually non-existent.

***Effects of Negative Stereotypes on African-American Male and Female Relationships,* by Micah L. McCreary and Richard C. Wright.** This essay turned up in the Journal of African American Men, Volume 2, Issue 4, Spring 1997. (Actually, the date should have been Spring 1998, but the publisher erred on the cover.)

***Stolen Women, Reclaiming Our Sexuality, Taking Back Our Lives,* Dr. Gail Elizabeth Wyatt.** Her book explained the archetypes used to do to women what Van Deburg's book explained about those that belittled black men.

***The Promised Land — The Autobiography of John P. Parker, Former Slave and Conductor on the Underground Railroad,* Edited by Stuart Seely Sprague.** Parker's story was the foundation for my final chapter and for the short story presented in Appendix B.

***Black Spark, White Fire — Did African Explorers Civilize Ancient Europe?* By Richard Poe.** Poe's brilliant work not only investigated the cultural origins and conduct

of Egypt, but supplied fodder for further heroic tales and gave names and motivations to some villains I pinpointed in Appendix A.

The Oxford Companion to African-American Literature. This provided an immense amount of reference material to verify items in my research. It is an alphabetical listing of achievements, achievers, issues and elements of African-American literature.

Richard Wright, Early Works. A collection of his early essays and novels, including *Native Son*. I examine Wright's work above the work of other authors because he not only wrote literature, he wrote about literature. (See the next entry.)

The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. This provided a search for obscure writings on this issue by classical African-American writers, especially Richard Wright's, "Blueprint for Negro Writing."

Novels that I read (or read at) over the years proved valuable resources for this paper, although I did not reread them: *Native Son* by Richard Wright, *The Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, *The Beloved, Song of Solomon* and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, assorted works by WEB Dubois, *Imaro* and *Imaro, the Quest for Cush* by Charles R. Saunders, *Notes of a Native Son* by James Baldwin.

Chapter Three

Selective Review of Literature

While Jung and Campbell are accepted as gurus of heroic genesis and evolution, they tended, like most Western philosophers, to be detached from the possibility of dealing with aberrant situations that could affect the ego and cultural development of human beings. Simply put, what they decided associated primarily with normal people and individuals who experienced normal cultural development.

Campbell, in some instances cites models among living or historical individuals, literature, pop-culture and mythology as if they all were the same. And in so many words said so. However, none of his examples addressed the unique needs of the one group that had a thoroughly abnormal cultural development.

This is why Van Deburg's *Black Camelot* became my most valuable piece of literature in this research. Van Deburg addressed the factors in the African-American struggle for self-definition to dwell on the hero process as a vital segment of cultural development. Van Deburg addressed the issue of shared struggle and consciousness in the process by blacks of selecting their heroes. In doing so he explained why African-Americans have seemed to embrace so many anti-heroes as cultural icons.

The film, "Superfly," for example, was heavily criticized by black activists who believed, and correctly, that the character of "Priest" was an arrogant drug pusher whose glamorous lifestyle seduced a generation of youngsters. The fact, though, is that Priest

presented many of the elements that cultures demand for their heroes, and blacks, especially the young, bare of mythic hero types, embraced him — the underdog, forced into crime in order to conquer the enemies of the black community the way his fans wished to:

> ... they conceptualized themselves as underdogs — disadvantaged outsiders struggling for survival against corrupt, hypocritical agents of white power. In this context, to follow their own race-specific code of conduct was to approach the heroic. (143)

By the end of the movie, Priest confronts a corrupt white police administrator (a key negative figure in a lot of black heroic movies), snorts cocaine in the policeman's face, and threatens him in front of several of the white guy's thugs. Then, he walks away with a half-million of the corrupt police commissioner's money.

Still most of Van Deburg's discussion did not deal with heroes who were heroes first and last. Most were marginal, people not obviously heroes. Many of his examples, in fact, were characters who had elements of heroic nature, but none had the entire package. The claim to fame for most of the black heroic characters was that they spit in the face or or made fools of opressors. But none ever flatly won the fight.

In the chapter, "Heroic Hustlers and Daring Detectives," Van Deburg recognized that, as with the bad men of black exploitation films and literature of the late 60s and 70s, the reason so much of the black community accepted criminals as heroes was because the

criminals had more in common with them than the mainstream cultural agents of law enforcement. Black criminal heroes went into crime to run businesses and make money, and knowing that they wouldn't win, they flaunted it with flamboyant lifestyles. But the subtext of the messages from the "good" criminals was that they were better at what they did than all of the competition. They abided by the code of racial ethics on the street. For instance, the character, Goldie, in "The Mack," every week went to the playgrounds and handed out money to children and gave them bonuses for staying in school. Goldie, incidentally, was a pimp who became so big and powerful that the local crime syndicate attempted to take over his business and force him to sell drugs, which he refused to do. Meanwhile, he flaunted his his riches and eventually killed two corrupt police officers as well as the syndicate leader who attempted to take over his business. Still he left town broke and in hiding.

> ...why not utilize these primal drives and organizational skills in more traditional pursuits? Why would such clever, talented individuals choose to ply a trade in a shadow land world where the term "cutthroat competition" was not hyperbole? For some, the choice was easy because they believed there was no choice. (Van Deburg 142)

These criminal types were perceived by the audiences as pinnacles of black manhood. The characters were always kind to innocent black people, especially children. They were at worst brutal and at best insulting and condescending to so-called black

traitors— those blacks who "sold out" to white values such as working as police or bankers or the like. They were uncompromising, and some even began their criminal life only after being rejected by the white world and having to find a way to support their families (Van Deburg 143). And while Van Deburg didn't address the issue, the criminal-type heroes were very much cowboys, seeking the ideals of Americans: personal freedom from a center of oppression. And just as vivid is the comparison between black criminal heroes and resistance fighters, revolutionaries of the same ilk as Zapata or Crazy Horse.

For my purposes, I found that the range of hero types that Van Deburg outlined in his book a helpful array for my novel, *Cowboy.* Combining the incumbent requirements for the hero set down by Jung with the race-specific requirements set up by Van Deburg would produce a hero who wouldn't be an anti-hero but still would have the charisma and resistant nature of the popular black criminals of movies.

This method of combining the ruthless nature of the criminal with the necessary elements of the mythic hero has been tried. Van Deburg noted the African-American culture's embrace of the black revolutionaries in the 60s and 70s with the likes of Huey P. Newton of the Black Panthers, Stokely Carmichael of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and others. I ran into a literary character, "Freeman," from Sam Greenlee's *The Spook who Sat by the Door.* Greenlee's story is about a black CIA agent fighting racism during the upheaval of the 1960s. Freeman was under fire for no other

reason than he was a black "spook," the name given to deep cover intelligence agents. In one scene, he learns the intensity of the racism when a practice in hand-to-hand combat with a racist white agent, nearly erupts into a life and death battle (Woods). Freeman — his name, I would think, is no more accidental than the bipolar term, "spook" in the title — learns that the hatred descends a lot deeper than skin color. All of these entities — criminals on the wrong side of morality, revolutionary criminals on the right side of morality, and fighters outside of and immune from the law — were embraced by the black community as heroes. The key to these individuals and characters ever being recognized by black people as heroes, says Van Deburg, is that they attached their heroics to helping black people fight for freedom by vanquishing black enemies ranging from police to poverty.

Still, I notice that none of the heroes or hero-types picked out by Van Deburg or noted in my on literary experience, had all of the elements that make up a consummate hero, that is the elements identified by Jung and the specific elements identified by Van Deburg. So despite all of the good tries and near misses, the gap remains — at least until *Cowboy* is published.

What this has to do with my novel is that after a few hours with Jung and Van Deburg, I have a strong blueprint of what Cowboy Jed must be to be a hero. The better news is that he already is all of those things. He has the mythic aura; that essence of heroism that comes from the elements pointed out by Jung and Campbell. Combining the

elements of the stages of development associated with birth and growing up and achieving life to adulthood, with the heroic elements associated with the black criminal of popular fiction and film, but without him actually being a criminal, would, and did produce a genuine hero.

Chapter Four

The Fashioning of a Black Literary Hero

Now, to cook up a hero who'll appeal to black Americans.

The first ingredient is to make sure he's an American hero. Any hero in America must operate within some narrow boundaries, if for no other reason than heros tend to be warriors or people who are forced to be warriors to do battle against the enemies of the culture. He will fight battles inside himself or outside, but most likely, both. Therefore he's going to take the form of what the individual cultures will deem as warriors, whether organized, mercenary or freebooter.

In America, all American heroes, real or imagined, adhere to a form. It doesn't matter if they are athletes who fight for the acclaim and resources long withheld from people of humble beginnings, war heroes who kick the enemy in the butt or the heroes of literature who fight against evil in the name of good. Wills made it clear that to be an American hero, the keyword is freedom. Even when American groups fight, they fight for their collective right to be individuals, regardless of ethnicity. So the hero's goal must be to escape the norm, break free of congestion and interference with personal expression, and he must have a consistent sense of morality and ethics, regardless of where he develops them. And he must be uncompromising; he must live life in rigid contrasts: yes-no, right-wrong, good-evil. And justice must be his primary value.

W.E.B. DuBois wouldn't find Americanized heroes instantly honorable. He said once that blacks are so hurried to be American yet rarely stop to wonder what an

American truly is. Personally, if I may dabble in conjecture, blacks still seem to maintain the romanticized view of America regardless of the country's true history. That means that blacks continue to believe and continue to want to believe that merit and hard work are the keys to success — all sorts of success, from securing resources to morality. And this must be part of the black hero's inventory of values.

Ironically, America has not always reciprocated this romanticized view. General Sherman during the Civil War, for example, didn't believe that blacks should be allowed to fight against whites. And, personally, I'll never forget the disappointment I felt on the day that I heard John Wayne say during a speech he was delivering at a cattle ranch: "These are white-faced herefords. We trucked 'em in. If they'd have been black angus, we'd have had to bus 'em."

Minor episodes such as these have added to the daily occurrance of being insulted by my heroes, but they've made one thing clear. Those heroes belonged to someone else, not me. But when my heroes finally appear, they'll be for me, but they'll stand for justice. How evil it would be for Cowboy Jed to grow into the literary superstar stature that Michael Jordan is for the pop-culture, and for an innocent white kid to read from him the words of a bigot, or to watch him enforce the rules of an oppressor.

As for skin color, Jed's hero status does not come from opposing whites. It comes from opposing oppression. The ultimate aim in my creation of Cowboy Jed is that one day, when the kids are on the playgrounds, a white kid will pick Cowboy Jed, and a black kid can pick whomever he wants, like Lash Laroue.

Imaro and Charles E. Saunders

A stark proof of the words of Dr. Larry E. Davis that African-Americans may have little response to heroic models that aren't American because "... the masses of blacks just won't connect ..." with African cultural icons may be the "Imaro" trilogy written in the early 80s by Canadian author Charles Saunders. Saunders' novels, *Imaro, Imaro, the Quest for Cush,* and *The Trail to Bahu*, fashioned an African hero of mythic stature with all of the elements set down by Jung and Campbell. The hero, Imaro, embarked on a quest that took him across a mythical, magical Africa.

Cush (or Kush, depending on what you read) was said to be a real Nubian kingdom that existed parallel to the Roman Empire, possibly responsible for Rome's inability to get deeper into Africa than the Mediterranean rim. At least that's the tale. Imaro was a loin-cloth-wearing, sword-wielding, hero who battled warriors, wizards and beasts in order to complete his quest. As far as I know, his is the only true mythic heroic model following Jung and Campbell's precepts that has entered the American bookstores.

Still, the books didn't sell well. In fact, they flopped. Only a few obscure copies remain in a few libraries. It only hit the market in paperback by DAW publishers, which isn't known for marketing its list very well. The obscurity of these novels most likely was due to poor marketing. But I have my suspicions. The black community has a way of getting the word out on it's literature, which explains the fame and fortune of *Mama* and *Disappearing Acts*, by Terry McMillan long before the mainstream discovered

McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale*. Also, some very successful anti-hero books by Iceberg Slim were quite popular, as were the escapades of Superfly and the last of three Shaft movies despite anemic marketing.

So why the failure of the dignified Imaro trilogy? My feeling after constructing this paper is that when the author embarked on Africanizing the black hero, the hero was too distant from the needs of African-Americans to attract any more attention than Conan the Barbarian. The only thing Imaro had in common with African-Americans was his dark skin and our shared ancestors. His exploits had nothing to do with the problems or even the folklore of the African-American readership and nothing he did was applicable to the African-American experience.

Remember what was established in Chapter 1: A culture embraces a hero who confronts and does battle with the enemies of the culture. An African hero even in ancient, mythic Africa will not confront the enemies faced by American blacks. Imaro did not face the Klan, racial discrimination, lynching, systemic disrespect and propagandic belittling. Even the villains in Saunders' books were black and hated him as an individual, not because he was a member of a group. And the character did little to add any more to the African-American consciousness. For instance, it didn't purvey any lessons in morality or ethics and by being a fantasy creation of an ancient land that existed, but not nearly in the form as Saunders crafted, the readers walked away with nothing other than a few hundred pages of entertainment — albeit, good entertainment. I loved the two novels I could get my hands on. But in the long run, they were little else than entertaining books,

not part of a heroic tradition. And the lack of response by a vigorous black readership is a good indication of its limited appeal.

Why Jed is a Cowboy

Shortly, I'll discuss the elements of the "mythic aura" noted by Van Deburg and Campbell. Meanwhile, I must classify the three primary hero structures peculiar to American folklore of literary figures and living legends. These are not black heroes or white heroes. They are part of the American umbrella of heroes that fit into the constructs compiled from the precepts of Jung, Campbell and Van Deburg. All American heroes fall under one of these three categoreis. And if I had the credentials, I'd challenge anyone to provide any hero from any culture who could fall outside of one of these three categories. Notice, that all three categories are in one form or another, warriors, which is the nature of the hero, that he can defend. Incidentally, don't look for references. These are all mine.

- **The Pirate** — The pirate represents total freedom, but he is total freedom without regard to mainstream ethics, morals and basic human respect. He creates his morals and ethics for himself and from them his personal sense of justice, albeit harsh and rigid. He'll have one trusted friend. One friend will be a counselor who advises the pirate on issues dealing with everything. The friend is closest thing the pirate has to a conscience. Anyone else is in mortal danger if he gets between the pirate and his profit. The pirate makes his own rules and laws and only follows convention when necessary for stealth. To be a hero, though, he must fill a need. One of those needs is that he has a spark of good that

everyone knows is there. He often will abandon his evil ways to take on a worthy quest of good, such as, for instance, the historical figure Jean Lafite. Freedom, again, accounts for his attractiveness. Americans admire the pirate because of his total lack of encumbrances. But his most attractive virtue is that he carries out the culture's need for vengeance, albeit vicariously. Along with his brutal independence, the pirate in American folklore ravages those who deserve to be ravaged, mainly the filthy rich, the comfortable and their puppets — for instance, military officers or bankers. In literature, the hero pirate will do evil only to those who Americans consider morally bad, even if they are legally good.

Among the most beloved pirates: Vikings. Mouse, the bloodthirsty sidekick to Easy Rawlins in Walter Mosley's series of mystery novels is a pirate. Mouse kills anyone who makes him angry, and he will seduce any woman regardless of her marital status. Oddly, he won't commit a rape. He won't hurt a child and he'd give his life for Easy. Clint Eastwood's Man with No Name character in the three spaghetti westerns, *A Fist Full of Dollars*, *A Few Dollars More* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* was a pirate (regardless of how much he looked like a cowboy). This classification accounts for the likes of John Dillinger, Jesse and Frank James, Billy the Kid and that ilk reaching at least celebrity at large and hero status to the victims of the oppressive systems that spawned them.

● **The Soldier** — The heroic soldier is the most common and ultimately the most popular of American-style heroes. He's motivated by the love of freedom and a strong sense of ethics, morals and justice. He will respect the law, but he'll only obey it as it

doesn't get in his way. The soldier sees himself as part of the bigger picture. He'll take orders, but only in the form of an assignment. His methods are his and he tolerates no interference with things like rules and instructions. But nothing gets between him and his goal, not even his boss, who often will find himself humiliated or even dead if he tries to stop his soldier from the very task he ordered him to undertake. David Web-Jason Bourne of Robert Ludlum's *Bourne Identity* trilogy and James Bond, who is actually outside of the law, are soldiers. Police are soldiers; Luke Skywalker is a soldier (even though Star Wars is a western), family men, Geronimo, Crazy Horse, Shaft, all are soldiers. This also is the place where the normal man is thrust into situations that take heroic actions. The soldier custodians our sense of dignity, patriotism, duty, loyalty, commitment ethics and security. Everyone can sleep better because the soldier never sleeps unless it's safe for everyone else to sleep.

● **The Cowboy** — He is the ultimate American cultural heroic image, head and shoulders above any others. The cowboy is freedom. He is untainted by the greed of the pirate; free of the soldiers' structure, and pretty much the antithesis of any hero models from any other culture. He may be an itinerate wrangler, or a deadly gunslinger. In either case, in his mode as heroic prototype, he's free of law, free of rules, and most American of all, free of rulers. He lives under the stars. His best friend is a horse who won't turn his back on him. He works when he wants and can live off the land for a lifetime. He thrives in nature because he's part of nature, one with the land.

He's solitary but not a hermit. He has ample company when he's on the range, but

he's alone in a crowd. When trouble starts, his only decision is what does it have to do with him, or what does it have to do with his personal code of ethics. If he thinks the trouble is right against wrong, the hero cowboy will fight for right for no other reason than it's right.

Shane — the perfect cowboy — had every opportunity to flee the bullies, but that would be too much like running. While he'll avoid a fight, he wouldn't run. He wouldn't abandon the weak who would have been left to the will of professionally violent men. When the reckoning came, Shane didn't call the law. Once the line had been crossed, he rode off to settle up with the bad guys. After the accounting, he left, without even stopping to patch his wound.

Honor, albeit, self-defined, peculiar and often lethal, rules the cowboy. None would run from a bully, even if it means dying. None will leave a friend behind in a lurch. Mike Hammer and most private detectives are cowboys. Hans Solo was a cowboy before he became a soldier. But most of all, cowboys are cowboys, whether they are cowhands doing piecework on a ranch or wandering gunslingers who drift about the countryside.

A major reason that these three prototypes get such high marks is because they do exactly what every American can't do: resort to violence to solve problems. To these folklore heroes, violence is good for ending a problem, one way or another — kill their enemies, look at life cut and dry. Real life is filled with compromises, uncertainties, losses, imprisonments and only a few freedoms that nevertheless are governed and

regulated by everyone from police to the credit bureau.

This is why living-legend heroes can't provide an escape. They are slaves to the same plagues and powers as are the average Jill and Joe who are bound to this overpopulated society, hounded by those who wish to leech their money, time and talents. Pop-culture heroes are embraced for a moment, because by being human, they're certainly going to have a fall even if the fall is just lapsing into being boring — which could explain why James Stewart, who was the quintessential American star was never nearly the pop-culture icon as the John Wayne who never fought in a war off screen and only took a political stance when it was safe. Eventually, they slip and break the award the culture gives them. Michael Jordan gambles. Living people are just too vulnerable. Michael Jackson had plastic surgery to make himself look like Diana Ross. John Delorean tried to sell cocaine to keep his corporation afloat. Ladies' man Rock Hudson died of AIDS with a male lover by his side. Al Gore made illegal phone calls from his federal office.

While the culture dictates much of what a person does and how he or she does it, it has a more important task: to allow its members to look at the future. The past is the realm of the memory. The present is the realm of the consciousness. The future is the realm of the imagination.

For a series of novels that I intend to write, I decided to start with the strongest prototype hero, the cowboy. (Another, *Pirate*, and still another, *Soldier*, are on the drawing board)

Wills already noted that the cowboy and the American West are the strongest of the American myth sources. And we established that African-Americans are, after all, Americanized. Also, the cowboy myth appears to me to be the one most obviously mishandled by the American allergy to African-American truths. At any one time in the West, blacks comprised as high as 25 precent of the "cowboys" working ranches or roaming aimlessly. Still, literature and film both ignored the presence until within the last relatively few years.

And, I needed a character to break away from the norm. The norm is the key word word. For a white cowboy, the norm would be to break away from the congestion and structure of civilization because civilization put pressure on him to be civilized. For Jed, his breaking away from the norm is to join a community, join a family, join a church and live in peace because the pressure that civilization had put on him was to be an unstructured beast. And while he complied, his goal was to reverse his conduct and win his fight against slavery by doing just the opposite.

Finally, since I created Cowboy Jed, I could do what I wanted. And I wanted a cowboy. Maybe it's because watching my dad, from Kansas and all western, stroll around the house like the guys I saw on television, I knew there was something missing. Or, maybe it's just an itch stuck in my craw, left from a time I can't forget, like when I wanted to be Lash Laroue.

Hero Pills

Jed is not the first cowboy to ride into a novel. But he's the first black hero

cowboy to do so. If I am to prove that, I first must re-examine the rules set down by my sources as to what makes a hero. It must be remembered that Jed is literary, not mythical. His mythical status is decades if not centuries away, if ever. Therefore, he is entitled to his hero status through degrees of these incumbencies.

Carl Jung's list is the template for others, but is the checklist for mythical heroes (110-120) The most important elements are:

1 — Miraculous, but humble birth.

2 — Early proof of superhuman strength and abilities.

3 — A rapid rise to prominence and power.

4 — He must wage a triumphant struggle with the forces of evil

5 — He has a fallibility to the sin of pride.

6 — He must fall to a heroic sacrifice that ends in his death or a fate worse than death.

7 — The weakness of youth or inexperience requires a counselor, tutor or guardian by his side who enables him to perform superhuman tasks that he can't do unaided until he matures.

8 — He must make a journey into blackness, darkness through a sort of death or a valley of evil.

9 — He must come to grips with his destructive power before he confronts the monster.

10 — He must slay the dragon and save the maiden so that everyone, especially himself, can live happily ever after.

These are the generic hero requirements. But, I established that the requirements

for an American hero will differ and further, that the requirements for an African-American hero will differ radically. The creation of the African-American culture was radically different. Therefore, I turn to Van Deburg to make the alterations that will render Cowboy Jed what he needs to be. He noted that the culture will embrace a hero only if certain manifestations take place, mainly because so often these manifestatins were withheld.

> Throughout American history, whites have guarded access to the national pantheon of heroes with an unafraid vigilance. Often, there were cultural gatekeepers who have opted to define the heroic in a manner which effectively excluded all but white males from consideration. (24)

Within their communities, though, blacks built their own heroic requirements and used them to anoint the living heroes of the day, Van Deburg said.

> While blacks by no means rejected all — or even most — mainstream notions about heroism, they did stand firm on one issue. A black skin, they declared, was no barrier to heroic stature. Indeed, in some cases, it was deemed a prerequisite. (24)

The anointing of hero status to figures both literary, living and theatrical has followed these main points. So, following are the points that I have extrapolated primarily from Van Deburg, but also put together with his points flavored with Jung's principles and Wills observations.

African-American heroes:

1 — Must have that "it." The "it" is described as undaunted by adversity and a willingness to be tested by adversity for or in the name of the black community and having shared the life experience of the African-American community. Part of that "it," I observe, must be a despair which is a level identified by Jung. African-American heroes in many cases start life in despair; they are never truly happy or content, because they know that if they are down, they have more than simply a few obstacles to overcome to get up. And if they are up, they never really feel up because as blacks, they are one step away from a plummet, whether it's be because of cheating by the government or a rope by a lynch mob. But one of the things the black hero must do is include in his life's plan, a goal that cannot be destroyed by racism, economic downfall or even death.

2 — Punish the sycophants of evil. Evil doers must be punished, not forgiven. The Bible says to love and forgive your enemies. But the hero can find creative ways to both forgive and exact vengeance. I can only imagine that this is the result of a need to express the residual collective anger left from the historical status of blacks in America.

3 — Be highly attractive to women. Obviously this is for male heroes. But while this seems frivolous, even women appreciate the element. My observation is that the stereotyping of black males as buffoonish, apelike and ugly must be reversed. Even Mouse in the Easy Rawlins series was irresistible to women. This does not mean, though, that he's a womanizer (although Mouse is). In fact, it's more heroic to be a pillar of morality because it's just the opposite of what the propagandists would have the world believe about blacks. (See item No. 5.)

4 — Work for racial uplift. A person cannot and will not be embraced by the black community if he is not a champion in the arena of gaining equity, rights and dignity for black Americans. But, unlike other literature, the African-American heroic novel requires a happy ending, in that the primary characters must arrive at the end of the novel alive and generally intact. To say that this is just to give the "feel-good" effect, is both to understate it and to be right on target. Albert Murray, in *The Hero and the Blues,* noted that the happy ending has a great use that I found especially valuable to the African-American community.

> Coming as it does after the hero has made his way through certain tribulation, the happy ending is in effect the most fundamental statement about the nature of security. As a direct result of his adventures, it can be assumed that the hero has acquired enough practical first-hand experience to handle a passable amount of such difficulties as are inherent in the nature of things. The lessons he has learned are the very essence of security, which is to say, survival. (27)

5 — Perform deeds and live a life with some biblical analogy. Heroes across the cultures must have at least a mythic aura provided by their link with origin and maintenance, as in where did we come from and why are we here. For black people that link is through biblical text, parables and analogies. The nature of African-American cultural evolution has not allowed for a unique heroic or mythological tradition. Within this parameter, he must maintain a superhuman moral code that is throughly opposite that ascribed by the

propaganda campaign, which means he is devoted to his family so deeply that his family may only be a memory and his loyalty remains true.

6 — Use his power, resources and abilities to promote self worth for his readers. Jed would make a great bargaining chip on America's playgrounds. But in the studies of heroic literature, or simply something to raise the spirit, Jed would do for black folk what other cowboys of lore have done for white folk. And he would also make way for overlap, so readers could integrate their experience into a true form of American folklore.

7 — Must arrive at his state of heroism through growth, not birth. The black respect for — if not adherence to — Christianity will not tolerate miracle birth for anyone other than Jesus Christ. And through the passages in Jung's *Man and His Symbols,* he demonstrated, if not said directly, that no Christian culture generated heroes of virgin births or other miraculous births other than Duncan, Thane of Cawdor in MacBeth, who was of Ceasarian birth and therefore not born of woman. But the African-American community will demand that a hero survive childhood or young adulthood to reach manhood and become strong enough to set out on his quest. For instance, the instance of including the Dr. in the name of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King is not just a sign that he earned his Ph.D. It's also a sign that he achieved the pinnacle of education, an achievement very important to black people.

8 — Personify the possibilities that a man can fulfill by reaching the goal of the dreams in the heart of every black person. This is particularly important for the literary hero. It is incumbent on him to fulfill the dreams that black people want to fulfill. If it's not

financial independence and immunity from racism, at the very least it's total freedom from the weakness to be turned from personal integrity. So many characters are defeated by racism in African-American literature. But so many blacks suffer the same fate. The hero's job as a moral builder is to overcome the enemy, not to be overcome.

9 — His appearance must be an emotional lift; he must be an opposite of the stereotyping embedded by the propaganda campaign. So much groveling has been necessary for survival that his appearance must not have any evidence of being demeaned or made to present himself in a stereotypically demeaning manner. He has to look good.

10 — He must capture the imagination of his admirers. Not only does he do what's before the reader or the observer, he must stir new, original imaginings in their hearts so that his story grows whether more is written or not. In other words, he must be able to be personalized for each reader so that the readers imagine how to become the hero when facing their daily challenges, routine or extraordinary.

11 — He must be an agent of change. He must not only change the people he touches, he must also change the environment. So much of the world for black people is nightmarish and needs at the least a dose of fairness, and in the worst case, total refurbishing. The hero will end the nightmare by any means necessary.

With these paradigms in place, I can demonstrate how Jed is the consummate literary hero and possibly a prototype for ensuing hero models.

1 — The hero must have the "it," meaning he is undaunted by adversity and is willing to face adversity and has shared the life experience of other blacks. He has to

have a goal and solution that transcended the standard American dream.

Jed was born a slave on a ranch in southwestern Oklahoma. He watched slavers kill his father for trying to stop his mother from being sold away. He watched his brother die of poison after the brother had been injured beyond an ability to work. He later trusted Boss Wes, the son of the slave owner, Massa Wes, and was betrayed and whipped and treated like a farm animal. Facing racism was a second nature pastime for him. But he didn't back down, regardless of the consequences.

His goal was to bring his family together. Regardless of what happened from that point on, they were a brood, a clan, a family. Whether they lived or died, or prospered or starved, they would do it together, and the togetherness of the black family is the ultimate spit in the eye of slavery, racism or oppression.

As for his despair, he is haunted by the dreams of his family being murdered, sold and tortured under the whip of slavery.

2 — He must punish the disciples of evil. Throughout the novel, those who got between Jed and his goal of freedom paid an ugly price. But they didn't simply pay. They suffered — deservedly.

The lieutenant and Micah Abraham stood alone, peering into Jed's eyes and seeing the flicker of the flame burning there.

"What kind of devil from hell are you," Abraham said. "Git him boy. Git him! He stands in the fire because that's where he belongs!"

Jed felt the flames from the fire, but it only dried the blood.

Mary had never seen Jed fight before, she wished she hadn't seen this mercilessness side of him. The air filled with hatred, but for some reason, it felt grotesquely necessary.

The lieutenant let loose of Micah Abraham. The old man sat back and supported himself on one arm.

Henry regained consciousness, and looked up. The haze left his eyes, and he made out the bodies, a half dozen of them over the ground, and he saw the lieutenant open his duster and let it fall.

Little Jed was on the sidewalk, now, and Mrs. Preacher had crawled to her husband pulling him from the water trough.

But the lieutenant and Jed didn't care. It was time for the end.

Jed watched patiently as the lieutenant reached across with his left hand and pushed up the right sleeve of his shirt.

"Can't we stop this," Mary said. "Why can't we stop this, she cried."

"Cain't stop now, Mary. The devil done took the town. The devil done took the town," he whispered.

The lieutenant heard only his own rage. "Time to die for what you done, nigger," he growled.

Jed had no intention of letting these men walk out of Nehemiah. His eyes frozen, his face emotionless, like a statue.

"C'mon, draw, you black Satan. Draw! Draw!"

Jed stood motionless. Then, as if amused, he smiled and even chuckled a bit at the lieutenant's demand. The colonel watched from behind the lieutenant. Seconds passed.

Isaiah's foot moved. Mary inhaled sharply and crawled to him, hoping to find signs of life. Jed's eye wandered for a fraction of a second and the lieutenant drew.

Even with the short lapse of attention and two days of beatings and no food, starvation, the lieutenant wasn't a close match for the gunfighter Cowboy Jed. Jed planted a shot in the lieutenant's chest, off center, as if purposely.

But hate held up the lieutenant. He stumbled backwards, and fell, caught by Micah Abraham. They gripped one another and the lieutenant drew strength from the old rebel.

His face glowed with anger. He pushed off the old man, stood, and staggered forward and raised his pistol to shoot. Jed fired a second shot into the lieutenant's stomach.

The lieutenant grabbed his stomach and spun and fell to his knee, his back to Jed. The impact of the bullet flung the gun from his hand. He fueled himself with the insanity of Micah Abraham's eyes pushing him on. He looked down at his wound, then stood again, pulling a knife from his boot.

The lieutenant screeched a blood-curdling rebel holler and staggered towards Jed. He got within six feet and Jed shot him again in the left upper chest, but the lieutenant didn't fall. Jed backed away, not in fear, but in taunting as the rebel officer staggered towards him, blind with hatred. The lieutenant lunged. "Die Satan, die!"

Jed sidestepped him and shoved him head first into the fire. The lieutenant screamed for nearly a minute.

Jed would kill in two ways. He'd shoot those who simply needed shooting. But he punished those who deserved to be punished. In this scene, Jed is facing a raider who has helped to slaughter a defenseless farm family:

Two raiders stayed behind to ambush the family that might have gold from the sale of the crops and pelts. They camped in a treeline above the cabin, a place to pounce while the family was distracted by what was left of their home. Jed and Sancho walked up behind them.

"Got nothin' to share with niggers," one of the men said.

"Oh, maybe you do," Sancho said. "Where Tom and Ansel?"

The outlaws tried to stand and draw. Sancho put a slug in one man's forehead. Jed's bullet broke the second outlaw's shooting arm. Jed didn't approach the outlaw. He let him squirm in pain. Jed squatted, balanced himself on his toes, his forearms on his knees, his gun hanging between his

legs. "Where," Jed whisper-growled. Sancho pulled the dead man away from the fire and returned to the two rabbits cooking on sticks.

The outlaw remained indignant, holding his riddled arm. "To hell with you, you ..."

Jed shot the outlaw in his good arm. The outlaw screamed a man scream, unable to hold either wound with both arms useless. His feet kicked and bucked.

"Where."

The outlaw's arrogance had turned to fright. At this point, he wasn't resisting. He was just too afraid to talk. Jed didn't care. He shot the outlaw in his leg and Sancho took a bite of one of the rabbits. "This pretty good Cowboy. Better hurry up or yours gonna cook too much."

"All right. All right! Ach!" The outlaw snapped and grimmaced. "Portersville, down into the New Mexico Territory. There's a place there. A place Ansel plays poker, gotta woman there. Old whore named Girtha."

"Why ain't chall headed for Mexico?" Sancho said through a full mouth, not looking up.

The outlaw breathed hard and fast and kept talking. "Ain't made no money this year," the outlaw was near tears. "Now, dammit, if you gonna kill me, be Christian about it. Put one in my head and be done with it!"

Jed reached out a hand. Sancho handed Jed a rabbit on a stick. Jed

blew on it and bit the cool spot. He traded glances with Sancho, sat back and began to eat. He stared at the outlaw and saw the pitiful family at the bottom of the grave — the brave little boy, the brother and sister, just babies, their hands frozen together, the noble father bashed beyond recognition, the mother who was so much more dead than alive, she could talk to the family while walking around. Jed shot the outlaw in the lower gut above the groin. The outlaw cried at the pain and doubled up. His broken arms unable to grasp his stomach, he cursed and spit blood at Jed.

"You'd think he'd talk a little nicer considering he's on his way to hell," Sancho chuckled.

Jed didn't answer. He sat on the outlaw's blanket, leaned back on the outlaw's saddle, ate the outlaw's dinner watched the outlaw die.

The family he avenged was white. Jed was concerned with justice as well as payback.

3 — He must be highly attractive to women.

Jed is a handsome man. He is both rugged and smart. He dresses tough like a cowboy and sleek like a gunfighter. His eyes are probing, sometimes sinister and sometimes laughing, but always expressive, until he is ready to kill, and his face goes totally stoic. This is far from the look ascribed to him by propagandists who would prefer rounded eyes and the cowardly grin of a clown.

Twilight beat them to Bigelow, Arkansas, a three-hour trot east of Nehemiah, just above the Red River. The sun and dust dried whatever sweat had risen on Woody and Clarence. But Jed was nearly wet from sweat. The townsfolk, black and white, looked at the tall black man, riding with McAllister's two henchmen. The ladies hadn't seen a black man dressed like a cowboy and armed with anything other than a rifle or double-barrelled shotgun. Men in southern Arkansas wore overalls, not Levis. They wore pullover shirts, not heavy western button downs and suede vests. They wore big floppy sun-shade hats, not sleek Stetsons. They wore big work boots, not Durangos.

Two young sisters raised their fans to their faces and giggled; they wiggled to shake the hems of their wide dresses and the bustles on their behinds, hoping to get him to look to the side, but he didn't, and they were rewarded with a disciplinary smack from their mother.

Neither was this lost on Jed's wife, Mary.

Mary stepped through the door and onto the rickety gray porch. The sight of Jed's body — barefoot, and naked from the waste up, except for the small sack on a leather chord around his neck — stirred her as much as it did those nine years ago. They had been apart for so many years, the sight made her tremble — despite the previous night of reunion. In the cool

morning breeze, she could feel her skin flush. She moved to him and slid her warm arms around his cool waist and lay her flushed cheek against his back. Her boldness said they belonged together and the years apart had cost time, not closeness.

4 — He must work for racial uplift. The name, "Cowboy Jed," could come to stand for a man of Jed's ilk, as much as "Uncle Tom" has come to stand for a man of Tom's. As for the happy ending, everyone in the novel makes it through to the end transformed, but intact. Even when Isaiah takes a bullet and nearly dies, he returns to life, which I'll explain in the next segment. Little Jed has become a man with the good and bad of every man. Henry is a total human being, and he and Jed have moved closer to being the same. But the secret is that they were the same from the beginning.Mary finally realizes her power in the family, and everyone embraces their place in the community because they've not only won their fight against the devil, but they survived.

5 — He must perform deeds and live a life with a degree of biblical analogy in order to create the "mythic aura," required for a hero.

A major, three-dimensional character, Preacher and Mrs. Preacher dominate parts of the story. They maintain the bibilical meanings of nearly everything that happens through the story. Here, Mary is pondering her decision to ask Jed to teach their son how to use a sidearm.

Inside, Mrs. Preacher was in the kitchen awaiting the family's return.

"You look a little forlorn," Mrs. Preacher said.

Mary looked sad, a bit.

"Somethin' not well with the family, Mary?"

"I told Jed to teach my boy to shoot," she said, "to use a gun."

"What's the trouble with that?" Mrs. Preacher said.

She moped. "I prayed on it, and I thought on it, and I don't want my boy bein' no killer, but I don't want him bein' killed. In one breath I tell Jed to not let these evil men bother our family; in the next, I want him to take off that damn gun and just do what he's told so he'll live long enough to be with me. I don't know what to do. After they killed Isaiah ..."

Mrs. Preacher thought a moment. "If only weren't no evil men. We didn't fight the slavers, and look what happened all them hundreds of years. I don't know what's the worse sin, Mary, keepin' slaves ... or bein' slaves."

Mrs. Preacher stood and shook the wrinkles out of her dress and petticoats. "Lotta evil men out there, Mary. Don't want us doin' nothin'. But remember, baby," she said as she walked from the cabin. "We prayed in the church for the hand of God to deliver us from evil. And a few days later, Jed rode inta town. I say, if what we was doin' wasn't good, devil wouldn't be tryin' so hard to stop us."

Mary stared at Mrs. Preacher's back as she walked out. She actually

felt better.

Still, there's more to the fidelity of the hero adventure that meets the eye. Isaiah nearly dies in his heroic effort to put himself between the bully and Mary. Yet, he lives. While black readers would not tolerate virgin birth — although heroic birth is acceptible — they will tolerate resurrection, because adherence to the word of the Lord is considered being saved. Isaiah's resurrection at the hands of a purified young girl takes care of that need in the heroic mosaic. As he balanced between death and life, her voice, courageous in that she touches and loves him back from his purgatory, is symbolic of an angel leading him back to where he can finish his work. The young girl who called him back, also had performed one of the heroic tasks. Mindy had descended into hell — five years in a Baton Rouge cathouse as a prostitute. She'd become a most spiritual young woman who looked for the good in people and only the good in herself.

6 — He must use his power, resources and abilities to promote self-worth for his readers.

Any moron can write a story that is fun to read, and many often do. But for a black hero to wear the mantle truly, he must make the black readers feel good about themselves. All of Jed's goals are for the improvement of a black goal: getting his family together, raising his son to be a reponsible man, getting in to real trouble by helping Bullneck Cooper build a general store, settling in southwestern Arkansas because that's his home and he'd rather make a stand there than run. He accomplishes what every black person would like to achieve, a freedom in the midst of racism and hatred and do it without becoming a hateful person in the meantime.

One of his major spiritual obstacles was his hatred for the West family, the last male survivor being Henry West Jr., son of the old slaver, Massa Wes'. He's only able to overcome his hatred when he is forced by his brother to make a choice between his hatred and the moral development of his son, "Little Jed." He makes the choice, not because it's not right for Little Jed to hate, but because Jed himself knows that to carry hatred was worse to him than it was to Henry West Jr.

In this scene, Jed, Henry and Little Jed, have returned from rescuing Jed's mother, brother and sister from share-cropping semi-slavery in Nachez County, Mississippi. He has ordered Henry West Jr. out of his life, but Henry returns demanding work because Jed is the only man in Arkansas who will tolerate him any longer.

Henry pounded the side of the barn with his hand violently and knocked loose a board. He turned and rushed Jedediah and grabbed him at the shirt collar and slammed him against a post.

Jed was amazed. He didn't hit Henry. He stood limp his arms to his side, his anger speaking through his eyes. Why couldn't he put Henry down? Maybe the same reason he put that bullet in his shoulder and not his head.

"I'M SORRY, YOU BASTARD! I'M SORRY! I'M SORRY! I'M ... SOOOORRRRRY! YOU HAPPY, DAMMIT!" No tears, but a red-faced trembling, like he was about to explode. "And ya know what? I'm sorry that my family burned. I'm sorry I lived in a evil place and didn't learn no better from my preacher or my daddy or even my country! I'm sorry that war turned my daughter

into a whore. I'm sorry that I'm goddamned drunk! Whaddya want me to do Jed! Blow my damn brains out? You had your chance!"

Jed pushed him away. "You cain't never know how I feel," Jed said. "Never!"

Henry walked a few steps away, he turned and walked back, his nose only inches from Jed's. "And you know somethin' Jed? I really, don't give a damn. You know somethin'! I don't wanna know, God Dammit! I gotta tell my daughter not to prance around in her nakedness, that her womanness ain't a commodity to be sold like meat in a store? To tell her that to make friends she doesn't have to fornicate with strangers and lay with women, and I gotta find a way to put food on the table and stop taken' handouts from people laughin' behind my back, and I gotta stop dreamin' of the blood and the sin and, the people up here sayin' I deserve what's hapnin' to me and the white folks in town yellin' out from the shadows callin' me white nigger! ... Jed, you got your pains, and I got mine. And I cain't waste any more time regrettin' the past. There's too much to do, there's too much ..." his voice cracked "... to do!

"Jed, I gotta daughter who spent the last five years workin' as a Baton Rouge harlot. She was there so long she thinks what she did is right. I ain't got time for anything else now, Jed. If you hate me, kill me. But I ain't got time for no more of these memories. From now on, you gonna haveta do that by yourself." Henry put his hands on his head and took a breath. "I don't give a damn if you

hate me or not, Jedediah. I need work. I need it now. And you the only man gonna give it to me."

Conflicts pounded Jed like a bunch of thugs in that San Francisco alley. Truth had no respect of past, present or future. It was just truth.

Then, breaking the tension like a big window, Isaiah spoke from the barn door. "Heard all this hollerin' out here and thought I'd come see everythin' okay, Jedediah. You be havin' a problem?" Little Jed stood beside him.

Jed had thought they were alone. "Yall get outta here. This ain'cho business."

Isaiah put his arm around Little Jed and pulled him close. "Oooooh big brother Jedediah. Aaaaaall business family business. I ain't goin' nowhere durin' family business." His commanding tone caught Jedediah off guard. "Jes wanna see what you gonna teach your boy. You be goin' to that church talkin' about Jesus and forgiveness. Now teach him that forgiveness is only good when it's eeeeeasy, Jedediah."

Jed realized a theater had opened and he was on center stage. Mary and Claudia stood on the porch looking out at the barn. Asia stood in the yard. Mama West rocked in her swing, listening with her ears and watching with her heart.

Isaiah shook Little Jed with a manly squeeze. "Now you watch your daddy, Little Jed," Isaiah said, still smiling. "He gonna teach you how to be a real man."

Jed took a step towards Isaiah. "I said git the boy outta here!"

Isaiah took a step toward Jed, put his hands on his hips and blocked his way to the boy. "And I said no ... big brother."

Jed wanted to slug Isaiah, but it wouldn't do any good, and it might cost him a bone. He stopped, though, out of respect. He walked to the barn door, leaned against it and took a deep breath. He made a cigarette, lit it and took a draw. He fought it, but a tear broke loose and trickled down his face.

"I knows what went on at the ranch," Isaiah said. "I know. I saw daddy die. I saw Hosea die. I saw you sit and hold his hand 'till he died. You done a good job takin' care of us 'till we sold to where mama was. Jedediah, maybe 'cause you was older, I cain't see whatchu see. But I know you hold on to that hate, one day, you look around, and your hate gonna be all you got left, 'cause you lookin' at the past, mean you gotta have yo back on the future. An' ain't the future what it all about, big brother?"

Jed didn't expect the next move. Little Jed walked away from Isaiah and over to him, he noticed that Little Jed had grown another inch since they first got back together. He almost looked Jed in the eye. Little Jed's words made his head snap to look the boy in the face. "Isaiah's right, paw." It was the first time Little Jed had ever sided with someone other than him. "Mindy ain't done nothin' to hurt nobody."

Henry leaned against the post where he'd pushed Jed. His hands behind his neck, the emotions of the last six years and the last few days pulling him

apart.

Jed put his arms around his son, squeezed. Little Jed's touch chased the demons away. He wouldn't carry the devil hatred any longer, and he wouldn't teach his son to carry it either. He walked back into the barn and began stroking the horse again. He spoke in a calm voice, wrought with pain and surrender. "Henry West Jr. We leave in about a month or so for Dallas. The trip gonna take about three weeks — maybe more. Have Lippy Moore fit you a drovin' horse. Take this mule here we got off that slave hunter. Lippy make a trade; he like mules more than horses. Be time enough to get a cuttin' horse in shape and for you to learn the land. You go up to the house. Mary write the papers for ya."

Henry West Jr. stood, his back was to the door and to Jed.

Jedediah wasn't looking at him either. "I'm gonna count on your experience to help teach Little Jed how to run a ranch." He finally walked to Henry West. "Tell Mary you gets $50, your first two month wages. I take care of the church guest house and the horse 'till you get a place-a your own. You decide to stay permanent, we build a place out on the land for a foreman. You and her stay there."

"Th ... thanks ... boss," Henry West said, quietly.

Jed closed his eyes. "Don't never call me that agin, Henry. My name Jedediah. You call me that or Jed. When we in front of Mr. Braddock or on business, you call me Mr. West. The peckin' order here, is I run the ranch. Little

Jed learnin' to run the ranch. And then you!"

Henry West looked at Little Jed and nodded.

On the surface, an intense confrontation has led to a concilliation between characters. However, only one person was in the scene, and only one person concilliated his true self: Cowboy Jed. Jed in this scene is black men in America. He's confronted with the time where he may have generated all of the success he needs to be a full person in his own heart, yet, his heart still carries a torment. Then, the embodiment of evil confronts him, the last surviving male member of the West family. And like the knight who slays the dragon, Jed is ready to strike the final blow. But what Jed doesn't know is that Henry is not his torment. Henry is inside of him, and that inner demon is his torment. No matter how far he sends Henry West Jr. away, Henry West Jr. will always be right in his face. So when Henry throws him against a post, Jed doesn't fight because the battle isn't against the man pushing him, the battle is against the man in his heart.

In walks Jed's pure side, Isaiah, and his future, Little Jed. He must confront them and Henry West Jr. in the same room, and he does it as his love, Mary, and his honor, Mama West, look on. The future of those elements of his life, watching from a distance, are dependent on his next move. And he must do the right thing, and to do the right thing, he listens to his good side and his future.

But the miracle is that he realizes, that the hated part of him will not disappear. So, instead of giving Henry more money or charity, he incorporates Henry into his being. But more than that, he embraces what's good in the source of his hatred in that he has to

admit that it gave him strength. His dispair was his motivation. Had he not had the tormented memories of Henry Jr., Henry Sr. and slavery, he never would have been the man he is today, strong, focused, successful and proud.

Finally he says the last few words in Henry's exchange with him. Telling him not to call him boss is to say that although he has embraced the hatred and incorporated it, it will from that day forward be under control. Putting Henry behind himself and his son means that the hatred will never again get in the way of himself and his future.

7 — He must arrive at his state of heroism through growth, not birth.

It is explained in the story that Jed is born a slave and is hardened through turmoil, torture and the goal left with him by his father, Ezra, that is to never be what the slavers want him to be and that he must stay alive in order to make those goals come true. Otherwise, see item number six.

8 — He must personify the moral possibilities that a man can fulfill by reaching the goal in the heart of every black person.

Jed abstained from sex outside of marriage. He saved every dime he made even during a stressful and deadly occupation. He refused to run away from the West ranch because he had to learn the whereabouts of his family. Even under the greatest temptation, he refused to abandon his values.

In the following scene, Jed has just collected on a bounty and is camped with a group of former slaves heading to Kansas to find farm land. Jed beds down with camped clans hoping to hear word of any member of his family. An old man and Jed are

discussing the route to Kansas:

"But we heard they's a lotta wild Indians up that way?" the old man said.

"They ain't wild," Jed said. "They mad. But ain'tchu they mad at. You tell'em you jess riden' through, runnin' from white folk. They ain't gonna bother you you don't squat on they land. But don't tag along wit no white folks; 'specially no soldiers, white or colored. They all gittin'a bad name in these parts."

The woman shifted herself. Jed's heart beat harder. One of the elder women spoke about a settlement in Arkansas in the southwest, near the Texas border. (The light from the flames flicked on her face. She sat up on her hands and her blouse formed around her breasts more distinctly than Jed had seen on a proper woman. But traveling the prairie weren't proper.) A colored settlement, with the church and tavern and blacksmith, a colored blacksmith. (The movement of her legs as the flimsy cloth adhered to each muscle, to rise and fall with her inhales, fueled, they both knew, by emotions and urges that Jed had kept buried for years.) A colored settlement. Built up around a tavern." (Soon, Jed stared shamelessly.) "Yeah, that's it. Nehemiah, Nehemiah, Ark-Kansas. An a woman like you talkin' 'bout," and elder woman said before another draw on her cigar. The younger woman flinched at the words and wished the old woman would shut up. The last thing she wanted was for Jed to get renewed hope to find a long-lost wife and son.

"Yep," the old woman said. "Woman makin' ball dresses for the white folk

rount' Texa-kana. Nice little goin's on she had there. Pretty woman, nice young boy. Live in a basement or sump'in, cleanin' fo da chuch."

Jed turned his attention to the elder. The more she talked, the more the spring tightened in his chest. (She was a real beauty. She was strong; sturdy. The light from the flames enhanced her. Her essence crossed the flame and Jed could feel it making him more a man ready for a woman.) The elder woman kept talking and the younger woman got more and more annoyed. (The disturbance on her face more and more excited him.)

Jed looked as if in a trance, feelings battling in his heart. He stood and started to roll his blanket. The elders talked more about Nehemiah, but less about the woman and boy.

"Hi," she said. "I'm Daisy."

Jed didn't look. "Glad to meet you m'am."

"Where you gonna go," she said as she unexpectedly knelt and helped him roll the blanket. She smelled musky and female. Jed got woozy for the first time in nine years.

"Arkansas. Nehemiah. Where the old woman talked about." Jed struggled not to look at her.

"You know, I gotta really pretty son," she said.

Jed smiled and kept working. "You got him sleep in the wagon?" Jed said.

"Don't know where he be. Got sold off when he was three. Old massa sold

the young men to make money for the war. Sold off half-dozen."

Jed's heart sank. He lifted his rig and walked to his horse. She followed.

"You be big and strong, be a good farmer," she said lyrically. "And I be a good farmer's wife. I worked the fields all my life. Be nice to work for my own family."

"Ain't gonna be no farmer. Gonna be a rancher," Jed grunted tossing his saddle on the roan.

"I can do that too." She spoke too quickly, too forcefully to restrain the anxiousness. There was no time for coy.

Jed slowed, temptation overwhelming — the sincerity in her voice, the yearning that had grown since the farm when he saw how life could be snatched away; how one moment's wait could be a moment too long.

"Ya know, keepin' house and tendin' a garden, makin' bread and tendin' children cain't be that different on a ranch or a farm ... And I'm not a brazen little hussy like my sister who runned off in the dark with your friend." The moment dragged on them like walking through mud. But her actin' like that come in handy in Mississippi, 'cause she do the old massa and he not sell me and her away from each-another. Too young to be doin' that when they sold away my baby."

Jed yanked at the straps around the big roan, then turned to her. He had no words. The woman's eyes warmed him like he'd been warmed only once before. He felt her warmth before the back of his hand touched her soft face; he felt the

heat from her just as she stood closer. She pushed her cheek closer and exhaled hot breath on his wrist and closed her eyes and pushed closer to him and he felt her breasts on his chest.

Jed trembled at the warmth against his skin, cooled by the spring night. He couldn't speak. He inhaled her deep into himself, felt her steam on his face. His discipline lapsed. He could take her to Dallas, set up a home and work the way he's working now. No. He couldn't. It hurt that he couldn't. Maybe God was still with him, although it seemd like God had things to do other than take care of Jed. But the old woman's words jumped in just before he'd lost his will to the pretty black woman. The conflict raged. Her lips were inches away from his face, silently begging him to stay, promising him a good life, good love, peace.

But how much peace could he have wondering if he'd given up one try too soon. Was she safe and secure; was she tormented praying for him to save her. Was the boy praying every night for daddy to come home?

He took a breath, turned, coldly, and synched the saddle tight on the roan's midsection. He froze for a moment, opened a saddle bag on the horses' haunches and the leather pouch and withdrew some coins. He counted $200. He took her hand and placed the ten gold pieces in her palm. She wouldn't know how much he gave her until she looked later.

"Yall been real good to me," Jed said. "Thanks for sharing your fire, and your food and your hospitality."

She felt his face and found it burning hot in the cool night air. She knew she had touched him. They had shared a lot in that moment. Too much. Enough to care for him more than herself. She set him free. "Good luck findin' your dream. But if this don't work out, we headin' that way, like you said. Won't be as hard to find me as it been to find her."

She extended her face, closed her eyes and kissed him gently on the lips. Jed sipped her breath, tasted the kiss, the first comfort from a woman since slavers pulled his family apart. She turned and walked away, the way a field woman walks when she wants a man to remember her. Jed reached very slowly out, then up and touched a small leather pouch tied around his neck with a rawhide string.

Sancho was returning from the dark arm in arm with the young lady who'd accompanied him. He saw Jed strapping up the saddle bags. He wasn't surprised. "Another story, huh, Cowboy?"

"Tell Mr. Braddock Bill Page take my place. I'll send a wire," Jed said, mounting up. He charged eastward into the night.

Sancho watched the cowboy disappear into the darkness, and soon, heard the last, faint sound of powerful hooves pounding the Texas foothills pursuing the dream that would end his nightmares.

9 — His appearance must be an emotional lift; he must be an opposite of the stereotyping embeded by the propaganda campaign.

Jed didn't grovel, regardless of the threat or the cost. In this scene, Jed has only been reunited with his wife and son for one day. But two men confront him wanting to take Little Jed to town for stealing, where the boy would be beaten unmercifully. Jed wouldn't have any of it.

Jedediah walked to a window. Two white men, rode slowly, maybe a quarter mile down the road.

"Paw. I'm sorry. I didn't ..."

Jed thought, then spoke, calmly. "Mary, yall been hungry?"

"Jedediah, damnation, we like any other colored folks. We get by. Just that Little Jed, sometimes, he try to be more of a man than he is ..." She walked about, wringing the front of her clothes.

"Paw?" Little Jed said. "What am I gonna do, mama?"

It broke Jedediah's heart to see his son so afraid.

"What they here to do, git money or what," Jedediah asked. "We got money to ..."

"They don't want no money, Jed. Woody and Clarence, they just mean. They gonna take Little Jed back to town and put him in the middle of the street and whip him, Jed. They whip him 'till he can't walk; 'till he's an example for other coloreds not to steal." Mary ran to the kitchen and returned with a butcher knife. "Little Jed hide in the barn! When they get to ..."

Jed watched, then he took a step, looked out the door and he got calm, a

calm that was eerie to his family. His voice fell to a whisper. "Naw, boy. You ain't gotta hide. Mary. Put that away." He picked up his gunbelt and strapped it on. He checked. He had reloaded. They could hear the hooves approach the cabin. The men were laughing and joking with each other.

Mary's voice quivered as she embraced Little Jed's head and body. "Jed? What you gonna do with ..."

Jed stepped outside as the riders dismounted. He leaned against the post and looked down at the horses hooves.

Woody walked up. "I'm lookin' for a nigger named Jedediah West. You seed him boy?"

Jed chewed a toothpick. He was a foot over Woody. "I'm Jedediah West."

Clarence walked up to Jed's left. He looked like the gunman of the pair. Clarence didn't talk or smile.

"You? You ... Hot damn. You that boy's daddy?" Woody laughed and slapped his chaps and dust rose from the sides. "Now Clarence, you didn't tell me the boy had no daddy? Where'd you come from boy?"

Jed spoke low so the men had to strain to hear. "What business you got here?" He looked about the sky as if searching for birds.

"What's that? Huh? Hey, we gotta take ... your son ... in for stealin'. Now just bring him on out. We'll have him back by mornin'," he laughed. "Most of him any way."

Clarence didn't smile.

"You the law?" Jed nearly whispered, still not looking at them.

"You must be new here, buck. We work for Mr. McAllister. That's all the law we need when it comes to niggers. Now, we ain't got time for this shit. Bring him out!"

Jed looked to his right, away from the henchmen. He stood straight and squared himself on Woody. "Boy stole somethin' I pay for it; right now. How much?"

"Too late for that, boy," Woody grinned and squinted. "Rules is rules; let the boy git away with it and soon won't be a honest nigger left in the county."

"Then I'm goin' into town witchall and me and this Mr. McAllister gonna talk; straighten this out."

Clarence spoke up. "Boy! That ain't how Mr. McAllister does business. The niggers in this part, they know the rules. I said bring out the boy or we're goin' in an git him."

Jed's eyes, shadowed by his brow. He whispered. "Naw. You ain't goin' in."

Woody laughed. "I'll be damn. Boy. You ready to die over one little thievin' niggerboy?"

"Yep," Jed answered. "I'm ready to die for my son. You ready to die over a bag-a cornmeal?" Clarence moved his thumb toward his gun, Jed felt the movement. His sixshooter was out so fast that the henchmen didn't remember if

it was ever holstered. He extended the gun so the muzzle blocked Clarence's view of Jed's face.

Clarence jumped. His hand moved away from his gun. Both men forced deep swallows. "He's pointin' at me. Git 'im Woody!"

Jed's eyes didn't move. Jed smiled. "Go on, Woody. Git 'im."

10 — He must capture the imagination of his admirers. Frankly. This speaks for itself. No one after reading this will be able to walk or talk the same again. Maybe that's a bit ambitious, but a strong hero figure will have the same affect on the black community as Howard Roarke did on the young white males who flooded the architecture schools after publication of *The Fountainhead*. More importantly, though, we can only hope that Jed's embrace of morality, ethics and dedication to family will be the sticking point.

11 — He must be an agent of change. Jed is the muscle behind the Nehemiah, Arkansas, community, helping to make the community more self-sufficient by both helping the town grow and by eliminating its enemies.

But Most of All

By now, I have established that there's a need for black heroic literature and that Jed qualifies under some strict parameters set down by experts on establishment of heroic traditions. But the inherent question that arises is why hadn't it been done?

Chapter 5

Reflections on the Sources of Future Heroes

If *Imaro* didn't work, what will. Jed will, but what about others?

Let's take a look at this guy. His name was John P. Parker. Stuart Seely Sprague, the historian who arranged his "autobiography," describes him as a "Former Slave and Conductor on the Underground Railroad." My fascination with John Parker is to ponder what he will be in 10, 50, 100 years. What will he be in the minds of children who hear stories that range from simple and childish to the powerful and entertaining adult fare.

His Promised Land, as Sprague entitled it, is a compilation of a diary that Parker kept on his mischief, and an interview by a journalist, all about Parker's abolitionist activities, helping slaves escape from Kentucky to Ohio. Parker's existence and the accounts of his exploits are historically factual and important. But I feel that his future matters as much as his past. As Professor Early noted that black people must build a mythology out of their resistance, and Parker is a man who resisted.

Parker was a man of extraordinary will, thrown into extraordinary circumstances. The historians have done their job. Sprague uncovered Parker, finding his diary in an old trunk stored in an archive in Virginia. His life was chronicled in a book of information.

Now begins the second job. Parker's life is a rich target for a folklorist who wishes to expand on the legends of African-Americans. He is a hero even historically, a living

legend. But his elements are so immensely rich in heroic flavor that he is a natural to become a literary hero.

Parker was born a slave, the closest thing to hell a people can conjure, real or imagined. He learned the skills of the foundry, so I imagine him a strong man, arms as taut and passions as red hot as the steel he molded. He was stubborn and focused, which is why after he persuaded a woman to purchase him for $1,800. He repaid her for his freedom in less than two years. He was a mysterious man, considering the wanted posters with bounties of $1,000 — but no photograph or drawing. He was smart, an avid reader who educated both of his children so that in two generations his family moved from slavery to prosperity. And he did all of this while pulling other blacks out of slavery, helping other members of his clan find freedom.

In fact, his legend already is growing. Sprague speculates that Parker may have been part of the scenario that led to Harriet Beecher Stowe's characterization of "Eliza." Beecher Stowe said that she had based all of her accounts in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on things that she had seen and heard from first-hand participants. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Eliza fell across an ice-covered Ohio River, in fact, near Ripley, Ohio, in the same area where Parker would have been operating. And Ripley, during that time, was a bastion of abolitionism and the home of John P. Parker.

The embracing of John P. Parker by a storyteller will not be anything to worry about. While they may exaggerate and blur and even lose the facts, the stories never lose

the truth. John P. Parker, abolitionist, hero and a conductor on the Underground Railroad, was a champion, a hero, a warrior against the greatest enemy African-Americans have ever faced. He is ours to do with as we please, and I see no reason not to watch him grow (Appendix 2).

Parker's case is a perfect example of Professor Early's major point: that black people need to look to their resistance as a source for heroic tradition. Parker's case has the potential of reaching mythic proportions, especially considering the abstract nature of his history, and the particular ego needs of the African-American people.

More heroes will follow. As I demonstrated earlier, both living legend and literary heroes would tend to follow the same requirements for herodom. Therefore, Jedediah West is of the same importance. Only Parker offers historical facts. But both Parker and Cowboy Jed provide the psychological truth noted by Professor Early. Both men worked for freedom in the midst of intense danger and opposition. Both men deliver a message broader than historical facts and fundamentally more important fundamentally, that black people resisted, and did so with a vengeance. "People need to know it was resisted, fought against. That we too had heroes and we too had these larger than life figures. That's real important for people," Early said.

Getting the Word Out

I cannot believe that I am the first person to conclude that American blacks need fictional heroes. Nor am I the person to write historic fiction. I can only wonder how

many manuscripts are sitting in the drawers of African-American writers who can't find publishers. Let's face it, the primary villain in any story of black heroics is going to be wealthy, powerful white men who are trying to keep slaves as slaves or trying to keep blacks as inferior. Will publishers accept this, considering who owns the publishing companies? Will literary agents, who live off of gratuities served up by fees from publishers, even give the novels a chance to be perused by publishers? Contrary to popular belief, the writer is not the most significant element of the publishing process. Eventually, a publisher must agree to buy, then print, distribute and market a book. Publishing companies currently are not very courageous even when the issue is not about race, but simply about something that's never been a publishing topic before.

But what happens when the book is about a true hero fighting the enemies of the culture? Who are the enemies of the black culture? White supremacists. Will publishers be able to differentiate between white supremacist and white people in general? Personally I think the reading public would be able differentiate a lot more than publishers. But I can only wonder if publishers will think in those terms. If publishers don't think in those terms, literary agents, the bridge between many writers and publishers won't think in those terms.

Jabari Asim, assistant books editor at the Washington Post, noted that one of the great stumbling blocks to getting literature written by black males into print is that the work is difficult to sell to publishers. "Publishers use the excuse that there's nothing out

there to print, but we all know that's not true," said Asim, who had a short story included in the anthology, *Brotherman: The Odyssey of Black Men in America.*(Incidentally, the anthology had no heroic literature.) The fact is that publishers don't see such literature because agents won't waste their time presenting it to them.

Overcoming this won't be easy. At the very least, there are some avenues, not the least of which is one that I noted in Chapter 1, that the greatest skill African-Americans brought with them from slavery was the ability to survive slavery — keyword, survive. So perseverance would be the primary avenue. But where will that take writers and authors who wish to perpetuate African-American heroic literature? Anyplace.

Remember that all authors are having a tremendous problem with commercial publishers. Companies are more and more owned by corporate umbrella companies that demand quick and sure profits which generally don't come from anything other than how-to books and books on improving sex lives.

About a half dozen or so black publishers (the number fluctuates) are struggling with trying to get a foothold in the publishing industry. But Asim noted that few black publishers own their own presses and have access to all of the accouterments of putting out attractive, well-written books. By accouterments, I also mean publishing skills, ranging from good editing to getting publications out on time, things that established writers often have problems tolerating. Mystery writer Walter Mosley allowed Black Classic Press to publish *Gone Fishin',* which turned out to be successful endeavor. The

book came out in snazzy hardback with an eye-catching cover. Derrick Bell, on the other hand submitted a manuscript to Third World Press of Chicago in early 1997. Black History Month o 1998 passed, and it still is not ready for publication. Bell writes culture essays and his work is timely, which makes the problem all the more upsetting.

Asim notes that there is a resistance to black heroic literature or black male fantasy literature in the publishing industry because of the myth that "...blacks don't read." But he says that the resistance is masked beneath the mantle that publishers have always feared new materials. Of course this doesn't explain the wellspring of black female literature on the market ranging from the incomprehensible *Push*, to memoirs by any woman who wants to complain about her victimhood or any memoire from a man who wants to chronicle his path from being a gang member to becoming CEO of a corporation. Author Jill Nelson said succinctly some years ago, "...again we feast at the trough of black pathology."

But this doesn't change the need for this new genre to be available to black readers. I'm not sure I know the answer. But, to ever find it, I'll look back at my own ancestry, my own roots. As I said earlier, black folk left slavery knowing, pretty much one basic skill:, how to survive slavery. We fixed ourselves on the fly and came up with answers as the problems presented themselves. So if the answer is to get back to the black basics, I recall the words John Amos in the sitcom, *Good Times*, "...We'll get through this the way we've always done it, baby. Somehow."

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Appendix A

Bigger Thomas: Hero or Hellion

or

Was Wright Wrong?

While I noted in Chapter 1 that Bigger Thomas was by no means a hero, Richard Wright may not have agreed with me. What's little known about the primary character of Wrights' Native Son is that two versions of the novel are available. One is the popular version that became the first African-American work to be accepted as a Book of the Month Club selection. The other is the version that Wright completed before Book of the Month got its hands on it.

BOMC, as it's called, made as a provision that Wright tone down the erotic interaction between Bigger and the white woman he eventually killed and dilute the communist allusions that he tucked neatly into so many of his works. He complied — surprising to me considering his scathing criticism of such compliance in his essay, *Blueprint for Negro Writing* (Norton 1380).

Wright never said it in so many words, but his examinations of his own works seemed to say that his characters, especially Bigger Thomas, were heroic. But Bigger Thomas would be a hero because he was a strong example of what not to do, says Jabari Asim, assistant editor of Washington Post Book World. Wright laid out a series of events that should tell black folks what to avoid and why to avoid them.

That Bigger's weaknesses became his undoing — from the death of the white woman to the coverup of the death and a second murder — seems clear to us who believe

ourselves more civilized. But Wright saw a bigger picture than murder and mayhem. Wright was concerned with justice. The message of *Native Son* was that certain types of individuals got no justice.

I find that *Native Son* was more of an indictment of whites than an examination of Negro character. The parts Wright took from the book for BOMC dealt more with communist allusions than with the character of Bigger or the white antagonists. Wright believed that justice transcended race and expressed much of his belief in terms that justice sprang from the quality of people. And when that equality was violated, acts like those of Bigger or many other of his characters were the natural result. Bigger, for example lived in a compact, city where he had virtually no resources other than his body. He was a ticking bomb, the fuse of injustice lit long before the murder.

Bigger, though, was as much a product of an increasingly left-wing labor movement in America as he was a member of the black race — as John Henry was in the *Legend of John Henry.* Wright believed that justice is not about race, it was about a system of unfettered capitalism betrays justice in the name of profit. That's one of the reasons why the adventure took place in Chicago, a northern city, as opposed to the deep South. He needed to show that the South, being a singular structure of racism, was, rather, part of a greater structure of injustice spawned by the broader system.

"It was not that Chicago segregated the Negroes more than the South, but that Chicago had more to offer, that Chicago's physical aspect — noisy, crowded, filled with the sense of power and fulfillment — did so much more to dazzle the mind with a taunting

sense of possible achievement that the segregation it did impose brought forth from Bigger a reaction more obstreperous than in the South," Wright said in his essay, "How Bigger was Born" (Wright 853).

Finding a white perspective on how to deal with the problems of injustice was easy, Wright said. Discussions with white authors explained the points of view that authors took to their work. Readings especially from authors apart from the American xenophobic structures also taught him more perspectives.

In conversations between Gorky and Lenin, he said he found the pair walking about London pointing to edifices calling them, "*their* library," and "*their* Big Ben," and "*their* Westminster Abbey" — a feeling of apartness. And he saw the sameness in the comment from Lenin: "We must be ready to make endless sacrifices if we are to be able to overthrow the Czar," and Bigger Thomas who said, "I'll kill you and go to hell and pay for it."

So in Wright's mind, Bigger Thomas was no less a hero than the leader of the Potempkin mutiny. Bigger's job was to expose injustice and its effects, and by getting such wide exposure with the BMOC, and to change the culture by spurring at the very least, unrest.

Did he do it? Not really, but he gave it a college try. One technical reason was because he seemed to mix up the difference between political agenda and character. And the opposition came from the group outlined by Carter G. Woodson when he said that educated blacks will be so brainwashed that they would do little more than attempt to

become mirror images of former slave keepers.

Wright himself noted Lenin's observation that "oppressed minorities often reflect the techniques of the bourgeoisie more brilliantly than some sections of the bourgeoisie themselves. Wright anticipated this in that many of his black critics brought this to him: "... But Mr. Wright, there are so many of us who are not like Bigger! Why don't you portray in your fiction the best traits of our race, something that will show the white people what we have done in spite of oppression?..."

Wright responded, "But Bigger won over all these claims; he won because I felt that I was hunting on the trail of more exciting and thrilling game. What Bigger meant had claimed me because I felt with all my being that he was more important than what any persons, white or black, would say or try to make of him, more important than any political analysis designed to explain or deny him, more important, even, than my own sense of fear, shame, diffidence."

Wright's defense of Bigger at this point takes a turn towards a more universal Bigger Thomas, as a purveyor of the pain all people, colored and white, carry with them under the yoke of capitalist tyranny. But that is a commentary more suited for an examination of Wright's political agenda. But, then, all literature is the offspring of political or moral agenda, and in the hands of an idealist author, there is little difference between the two.

But the universal nature of Bigger Thomas does adhere to elements that I set down in Chapters 1 and 4. This is what made me rethink my principles of elements required to

validate a hero enough to pen this essay. Bigger Thomas actually fits into all of them.

So is he a hero? The answer is, it depends. If he is to be an example for the black culture; a prototype human being, no — not even close. If he is what Wright designed him to be, a metaphor for the state of a human being deprived of justice, he is, yes, a tragic figure, and in the undying attention he attracts to his situation, yes he is a hero, but, ironically, an American hero, not a black hero. While he has told black folks what not to do, he did little to demonstrate what to do. His growth was at best slight, but by no means beneficial.

The reason Bigger didn't climb to hero status was because Wright's communist, worker-based perspectives prevented it. Wright was attacking a system, not demonstrating a human being. And while Bigger's humanity propels the story, the story is what can happen to rich humanity when it is subjected to the negative elements of an oppressive structure. That is one of the differences between great literature versus heroic literature. The hero deals with the affect of the individual on the system; the politically based literature of Wright, dealt with the affect of the system on the individual.

Appendix B

A Level of Rank Stupidity

During the days of slavery, the debate widened to some ridiculous breadths. On group attempted to teach that West African blacks were of a different ilk than those of East Africa. Another attempted to put forth that the Africans of myth and legend were, in fact, white, and the blacks were their slaves, again teaching that the blacks in America were suitable for slavery.

Two proponents of slavery who swished and swashed back and forth across the South attempted to prove that the blacks in America were of the lineage of blacks who where held in slavery by the white Egyptians and had been, therefore, bred for slavery.

Richard Poe documented in his book, *Black Spark, White Fire*, that two of those propagandists were Josiah Nott and George Gliddon. Nott and Gliddon campaigned through the south preaching that ancient Egyptions had, in fact, kept blacks as slaves. The Egyptians, they taught, were white.

Nott and Gliddon were both fierce advocates of slavery. A physican from Mobile, Alabama, Nott toured the country amusing audiences with what he jokingly called his "lectures on niggerology." In these talks, Not declared that blacks were a separate species from whites and railed against the "insulting and revolving" practice of race mixing, which could only end, he warned, in the white race being "dragged down by adulteration and their civilization destroyed."

Gliddon too lectured widely on black inferiority. A diplomate rather than a scientist, Gliddon sought out specialists ... whose work he could use to defend slavery."

Gliddon wrote at one point, "...the Negro races had ever been servants and slaves," even in the far off days of Angient Egypt.

Poe wrote later in the same chapter:

One of the chief arguments raised nowadays to discredit Afrocentrism is that East Africans — such as Somalis, Ethiopians and Egyptians — supposedly belong to a race entirely separate fromthat of West Africans. For that reason, say the critics, the Egyptians and other East Africans should not be lumped together with the "True Negroes" of West Africa and should not be called black. Such arguments preserve the legacy of Nott and Gliddon with unmistakeable clarity.

Even the blacks of the North were not immune from this propaganda. George M. Frederickson accounted in, *The Black Image in the White Mind*:

As part of their effort to gain widespread support ... proslavery polemicists turned their attention to the free Negroes of the North, whom they presented not so much as a population degraded by white prejudice and color consciousness as one demonstrating its natural unfitness for freedom. When the census of 1840, which later proved to be inaccurate, revealed very high rate of insanity among free Negroes as compared with slaves, they seized upon these statistics as evidence of the Negro's conditional inability to function in a free society. In 1844,

[John C.] Calhoun, then Secretary of State, concluded that "the census and other authentic documetns show that, in all instances in which the states have changed the former relation between the two races, the African, instead of being improved, has become worse. They have been invariably sunk into vice and pauperism, accompanied by bodily andmental afflictions incident thereto — deafness, insanity and idiocy — to a degree without example ..."(50-51)

And the motivation wasn't always propaganda against abolition. Frederickson also noted another reason:

In promulgating the stereotype of the happy and contented bondsman, Southerners were doing more than simply putting out propaganda to counter the abolitionist image of the wretched slave. They were also seeking to put to rest their own nagging fears of slave rebellion. It was no accident that proslavery spokesmen in the Virginia legislature made much of an alleged contentment of the slaves; for the debate took place in the wake of the Nat Turner uprising of 1831, and servitude had come under attack as leading inevitably to black resistance. One of the proslavery members made it clear that the recent rebellion was a bizarre exception to the general pattern of master-slave relationships: "Our slave population is not only a happy one, but it is a contented, peaceful and harmless ... during all this time we have had one insurrection."

But in private, southerners were haunted by the memories Nat Turner, and the stories of he slave revolt of Santo Domingo.

In moments of candor, Southerners admitted their suspicion that duplicity, opportunism, and potential rebelliousnessss lurcked behind the mask of Negro affability. A concept of the duality or instability of Negro character was in fact one of the most important contributions made by southern proslavery propagandists to the racist imagery that outlasted slavery (54).

Appendix C

This is an example of turning a living legend into a folk hero. This story is the product of reading a newspaper story about the discovery of Parker's lost notes. It was written before the book that is listed in the Works Cited page. I put the new copyright on it, although I wrote it in 1996.

The Cave

She made me do it. I couldn't believe it. Another field trip for Beverly and the kids. I don't remember anything in the marriage vows that said I had to make sure that all of my entertainment was suitable for children under 12. But Beverly likes these heritage field trips, as she calls them. So I missed the San Francisco-Dallas game to go. At least she allowed me to put the VCR on to tape it. This day, she makes it a special trip. Someplace special? No. New shoes, special. About $200 worth of gym shoes so an eight-year-old boy and a five-year-old girl could walk on gravel. When I was coming up, we called $200 rent. Shoes? Lord of the Dance doesn't wear $100 gym shoes. But do you think they were satisfied? Check out the back seat symphony.

"Daddy! They didn't put ketchup on my Whopper! I asked for ketchup and no mustard and they gave me mustard and no ketchup!"

"Sweetheart," as if nice tones of voice will quell this dissent, "We have three pounds of ketchup packages in the bag..."

"Daddy, don't you know anything? That's french fry ketchup, Daddy!"

"I'll eat it," says my helpful son.

"Daddy, it's not fair. You went to Burger King for Ricky and you knew I wanted to go to McDonalds for a happy meal. My lunch is terrible and you don't care."

"April, honey, I care, but ..."

"Oh, honey. You know how she's going to feel if we don't ..."

"Be ...ver...ly ..."

"There's a McDonalds right up there ... There! Turn off here."

Ricky was helpful again. "I want two big Macs Dad!"

April would have none of this injustice. "Mommy, Ricky already had his Whopper and mine. It's not fair for him to get ..."

Get the picture?

We get to the starting point for this thing. It's an Underground Railroad tour one of those slavery history things on the banks of the Ohio River. I didn't even know that there was an Underground Railroad into Ohio. If I were going to escape from someplace, it wouldn't be to Ohio. Besides, the Civil War is over. The North won. Blacks are free now. Free to pay $200 for gym shoes.

We ferried across the river to Kentucky where we walked along the banks, looking into cellars that once hid people trying to make it into the North — and later way stations for blacks on the way to Canada, because they couldn't stop in the North after 1850 because of the Fugitive Slave Act. See I was listening. We saw replicas of row boats planted along the banks, and watched three actors upright one of them and row off into the river. And I watched my $200 worth of gym shoes become the color of mud.

We got to Reed's cave. Not a particularly distinguished cave. The mouth was relatively narrow, so the group had to elongate into a line to pass through, and to stay on the board walk. That sort of put the shoes out of any more immediate danger. Of course Ricky never saw gravel or dirt that he didn't like. Inside, we found the prettiest stream I'd seen in this part of the country.

Crystal clear. Probably spring fed because we hadn't seen it outside. It seemed to come from one wall and go into the rock face of another.

The tour guide's words were faint at this distance. The old guy, 65-70, started talking. I half listened as I bent over the yellow guard rail to look for trout.

"This was a hiding place along the underground railroad where slave hunters would pursue runaways into the mouth of this cave and watch as the men and women would dive headlong into the stream and disappear. The slave hunters would assume that the fugitives had chosen death over capture. Many people of those days often felt dying free was better than living as slaves Suicide was common among slaves. What the slave hunters didn't know was that about 50 yards further down the stream was an opening where runaways could hide until the slave hunters retreated."

Fifty Yards under water, I echoed?

"Well, not quite, sir," the old man answered. Beneath the rocks are several air pockets. Seems the algae and bubbles from the water made a fresh supply of oxygen."

I leaned over further: "How did they find out about an underwater cave? Somebody had to jump in once and find it, didn't they?"

"The legend has it that the abolitionist, John Parker of Ripley, Ohio, had a vision that led him to the hiding place. His diary said that an angel from the Lord came from the waters and after leading him to the place of salvation, returned to the waters," the tour guide answered. "But history is unclear of ..."

I leaned further ."I didn't get what you said ... a vision ... He dreamed of ..."

I slipped and fell head first into the stream and grazed my head on a smooth rock. But in a

few seconds, hands on my arms jerked me to the surface.

As I left the water, the lights were uneven and I thought I was looking into the sun. My head cleared. The light was from a lantern, one with a flame instead of a bulb, right beside the muzzle of a rifle, a really big rifle pointing in my face.

"Woooooo-eeee, Gus! Look how this nigger's dressed." I heared chains rattle. "What's your name, boy; who's your master?"

I rubbed my sore head. The way the men were dressed, I figured I'd run into a couple of nut-case survivalists or something, so regardless of their name calling, I didn't want to anger them further while they pointed that gun in my face. "My name? Uhm Robert! My master? I guess the closest thing to that would be, well, this little girl named April.

I readied to say something else, but I got a bony fist in my gut so unexpectedly that I was still gasping for air when they dragged me to the mouth of the cave.

One of the men tossed a set of shackles in front of me. "Put these on, nigger."

"What the hell are you talking about? I'm ..." This time it was a rifle butt to my chest.

"Shut up! Who the hell taught you to talk so much."

"I was on the ground. I could see the wooden walkway into the cave was gone, and the railing, and the lights. I had to cough my words. "What the hell is going on here?"

"Earnest. Listen! That's it. He's one-a them Massachusetts niggers." Gus said, pointing his rifle. "Helpin' the abolitionists. Yeah. I bet this boy ain't no slave. At least he weren't."

"Well that's an intelligent conclusion ..." I heard the click of the hammer of the rifle.

"Ernest, we get paid just as much for a dead abolitionist as we do a live slave."

Two quick shots made me jump and the rifle in my face flipped backwards.

The spray of blood, like a mist, settled about me. I was frozen and could only stare at Gus and Earnest, their chests opened and bloody. Their lantern lay on it's side spilling a puddle of coal oil, burning brighter as it soaked the ground.

Slow footsteps approached from behind.

"Don't look around," the voice growled, audible, but whispered, with authority. I heard another gun lever click.

"Fine. I promise I won't look. But would someone tell me ..."

"De slaver's was right! Ain't nobody from da South be talking dat way." A deep, gravely voice spoke and I saw him from the back kick dirt on the lantern fire, and the light went out, replaced, as my eyes adjusted, by moonlight and starlight.

The big man walked into my view, his features shadowed. He was wide. A second figure walked up, a smaller man, holding a pistol in each hand. He was dressed like someone from an old movie, a long coat, a wide hat over his eyes. I had trouble seeing his face.

Without speaking, he left me to the big man, walked past, leaned against the cave wall, and began to load the pistols down the barrels. With a powder horn?

"You from Massachumit?" the big man said.

"No. I'm from ..."

"Den you a house nigga?"

"No! I'm not ... house ..."

"Yo clothes look like you a house nigga."

"It's called casual." I tried to raise my voice, but my chest ached. I was sitting up. The night didn't look normal. It was darker than I'd ever seen.

A woman's voice spoke from behind me. "I seen them kinda clothes. Dey from a kitchen in a big restaurant, ain't dey mistah."

I looked to the woman's voice. She fearlessly sauntered from the shadows into the moonlight.

"Milly! You come back here before Mr. Parker know who he be!"

The woman didn't waiver. She carried a child. A boy clung to her right side, beneath the arm that cradled the baby. Her dress was made from burlap bags, like the clothes of the little girl whose shy little eyes looked around her mother, and in the flicker of the flames could have been those of a beautiful little girl named April.

The big man began to search the bodies of the dead survivalists. At least I thought that's what they were.

A third man, strongly built, in a sleeveless shirt and drawstring pants and no shoes appeared beside the woman when she got close to me. He acted like a father and husband as he moved them away from me. The back of his arms and part of his back showed long whelps of scar tissue rising in relief from his skin: old black whelps, high enough to cast shadows in the light.

"Reece! Best be gettin' them men into the bushes." The man with the pistols had finally spoken.

The third man, smaller than Reece Reed, left the woman and children and dragged the second man into the bushes.

"Shouldn't we call police?" I said, my head starting to clear and my wind coming back. "Is there a phone around here we can..."

"A what?" Parker said. Parker pulled a pouch. He took out pieces of something brown.

"Here take this and eat it." He handed one each to the children. Then he handed one to me. "Go ahead. Have some sugar. Maybe it clear your head up."

I sniffed it. "But those men you shot. We need to report..."

"A fone? A pony? We ain't got no hauses, mister," said Reece Reed. "Where you thank we is?"

"Maple candy. Take your hunger away." Parker said and walked away, looking at me like I was crazy. His clothes were very odd. Everyone's clothes were very odd.

Not really hungry, I put the candy in my pants pocket. I'd be quiet and see what was going on. Everyone seemed to have a gun but me, so I thought I'd take a silent role.

Reece Reed walked from the bushes. He carried what I recognized as two powder horns and the rifles. The smaller man ran from the bushes after pulling the body "Millie! Millie!" Look honey! Shoes! Them men ain't gonna be needin' 'em where they goin'. Here. Put these on."

Millie looked at them and smiled. "You better take 'em baby. You mights ta be carryin' all-a us foe this night over."

"Naw, Millie. I got shoes from the other man. Gots bigger feets."

She sat and pulled up her clothing, above her ankles. Instead of old shoes, clothes wrapped her feet, bruised and raw. Her face grew a broad smile when she looked at the bent, cracked, ugly boots. "Ben. You the bess man a woman could want." They hugged. The little girl smiled. The boy didn't. He watched me, still suspicious of me, still suspicious of this strangest of strangers.

Reece lumbered past me. "You gonna sit here all night?"

The man Parker pushed his guns into his belt. He walked to me and knelt. "You hurt bad?"

I shook my head. He looked about as Ben and Millie smiled at their new footwear. "Nice family," Parker whispered. I nodded as he helped me stand. I looked at the feet of the children. Both were barefoot, their tiny feet rough and dirty.

"You got a family?" Parker said.

I nodded.

"They back there?" he asked.

"I'm not sure where they are," I answered.

"Hm. Got separated?" he asked as we walked to the edge of the light cast by his lantern.

I looked about. That's what was missing. The glow of electric lights, even far away, that glow civilization gives off even from a distance. This night was black as black could be. Any thought I had that I'd been washed to the other end of the stream was gone too. This was the front of the cave I'd entered with Beverly and the kids. I leaned against the walls. "Separated. I guess you can say that."

"That happens. Pray for 'em. That's all we can do. Jess pray for 'em."

"Why are they out here," I asked Parker. "What's going on. Why can't we call the authorities. You saved my life from those nuts."

Parker was peeling his ears around the night, listening. He looked at me during my question. "Boy, them slavehunters hit you in the head 'fo I got here? You best be quiet 'till your head clears."

Before I could answer, Parker seemed to have heard something and pointed his face south. But he didn't let on. He didn't understand my question. "This family here, she heard the ole massa making' plans to sell off some-a the women and children. They didn't want to be broken up, so

they ran off. Been hidin' in the cellars of some Quaker people down the way."

This was too hard to take. My head was woozy, less from the beating and more from Parker's words. I hurt too much to be hallucinating. And if I were hallucinating, where were the bright lights and music? "These people were slaves? Where could they ..."

"You muss be from dat Cunay-da," Reece said. He'd walked up noticing Parker's concentration. "Maine? Was you a slave?"

"Canay-da? Canada? I've never been there. And I'm not a slave."

Parker broke his concentration, looked at me and laughed.

"Whoever made you wear them clothes figured you was a slave," he said.

I had dressed myself. But this wasn't a time to argue.

"What's this slavery stuff," I protested. "I've heard the stories about the sharecroppers in the South, but slavery was abolished years ago, and two men are dead, and this is no time for joking. I mean ..."

"You heard somethin' about no more slavin'" Reed said. The man and woman looked up too.

"The man is adled by the beatin' he took from the slavers," Parker said. "Talkin' crazy. Buchanan ain't freed no slaves an' ain't gonna."

By now, without lantern light. I could see. The world was dark. Pitch black. Not the faint glow that makes civilization visible day and night. Buchanan. The president before Lincoln. Men dressed like something out of a movie. I would have thought I was hallucinating, but my chest hurt too bad. I'd wake up from that.

Before anyone else heard a sound, Parker spoke in a loud whisper. "DOWN!" Everyone

dove for cover.

The bushes rustled in the distance, and then closer. A man and woman burst into the clearing. Had the woman not been by his side, Parker would have shot him. Slave chasing black men don't work with women.

Ben and Millie knew the newcomers. "Amanda? Drew?" The woman ran to them. "How you get here?"

"Benny? Milly? Didn't never 'spect to see yal agin. We figga the massa gone one way lookin' for you, we go da othu, try to git to da rivu."

"You get away clean," Parker asked.

"Nawsuh. Not so., shu" Drew answered. "Massa's man, him an' d-others come aftu us'n. Got dogs wid-'em, too, suh."

"Damn!" Parker cursed. "We ain't got room ... Dogs! How many men!"

"We seed, maybe six, wit guns."

"C'mon, cap'n." Reece said. "We worry about it on da way."

Parker's eyes spoke more distress than he tried to show.

Then I heard it. In the distance. A baying, like a dead soul crying out for peace.

"They probably heard the shots, cuttin' across tryin' to pick up your scents," Parker said.

We took off into the darkentess. Reece carried the two rifles from the dead slavers, one in each hand. Ben picked up the boy. I carried the little girl.

An hour later, over land guarded by thick bushes, thorns and holes, pushed by the sounds of baying animals not so far away, we arrived at the river.

Reece poked the river banks. The sound of the dogs grew. He hit a hollow sound. They

would have lighted a fire had the hunters not been as close. "Heah. Heah it is!" Reece bellowed.

Reece's powerful muscles flipped the rowboat upright, the oars were beneath it.

"Reece, get in the rowing seat," Parker ordered. Help the women and children."

With three unexpected passengers, there was room for one more.

"You gotta go," Drew said. "We wasn't s'posed to be heah and now yall in the same danger as us'n."

Ben was larger. He punched Drew's gut enough to double him up. He threw Drew into the boat.

"And us?" I looked quickly at Parker.

"Ain't nuff room," Parker grunted.

The baying neared. Maybe minutes away. "You don't have another boat?"

"This ain't the Kentucky Navy," Parker spoke calmly.

Reece began to row.

"Ben. Ben, baby. I love you," Milly cried with a force we could hear like waves of grief riding the wind.

Ben stood silent on the river bank. Probably lamenting that he hadn't taken the time to hug his wife and children before pushing them to safety.

"Goddammit," Reece shouted in disgust. He jumped from the boat and dragged it back to shore. "Get in. Row hard, into the dark. Get across the river to Ripley." Reece said to Ben. "Look for Eunice Reed. She sen-yu up north. Tell her ... I be along directly."

"But Mr. Reece ..."

Go now, you damned fool. Or ain't nonna us gittin' outta here."

Ben hit the water, then scaled the boat. The dogs closed.

Parker chuckled. "Why you do that Reece? You were almost home."

"Didn't come fa dat." he said. "Come here to hep them people be free, not get over here and leave'em for the slavers. Not worth gettin' outta bed I gonna do that."

Parker chuckled. "We better be goin' big man. Somethin' happen to you and Eunice gonna kill both-a us."

"C'mon boy." Reece ordered to me.

The sounds of the oars flapping on the slow'moving river got fainter and farther away.

"We gotta move," Parker said. "It'll take a bit to pick up our scents."

We moved fast, along the river bank, then inland. We heard the single shots from flintlocks. We knew that from that distance, they wouldn't hit anyone.

So we took off, but after a short distance, I realized they weren't trying to run, not really. It hit me that I was with two men preparing to die. We stopped in a thicket and they began to check their guns. I had followed them to a place they'd picked out before hand, who knows how much earlier, to make a stand. The pursuers would have to scale several low hills, but their heads would be visible before their guns.

I for one, wasn't ready for my last stand. "Aren't we going to try to get away?

"We ain't gonna outrun no dogs," Parker said. "An' I ain't hangin' by no slaver's rope." He spoke to Reece. "We might be able to bushwhack 'em..."

"I know a place," I blurted, nervous as hell.

"You know how to use one of these," Parker said, handing me a rifle.

"I know a way to get away," I told him again.

"What you talkin' about?" Reece said."

"It's a place to hide. We can stay there hours or days."

Parker wasn't buying it. "I know every inch of this place. Ain't nowhere to go them dogs cain't follow."

"I ... I ..." I had to talk these guys into following me, regardless of my confusion. "I was on my way there when the slavers caught up with me. Come on. It's safe from dogs and hunters."

We could see the glow from the torches. We stood. A hound exploded from the bushes and jumped at Reece. Reece caught the ill-trained animal in mid-air and snapped its neck.

"We just have to get back to the cave," I said. "Please. Come on." I jumped around like a kid begging to go to the bathroom.

Parker hunched his shoulders. "What the hell. Lead the way, abolitionist."

We scaled the last hill before we'd make the hard run. We heard silence. They'd found the dead dog. Then the noise began again. I could see them from the top of the hill. They wore wide hats and carried long rifles. The dogs were on ropes. Two of the men had torches, two had lanterns.

"Don't look back," Parker said. "Won't make no difference how close they are and it slows you down."

We hit another thick undergrowth at the base of a steep hill. We could hear them shouting. We weren't going to make it. Reece was last to top the hill, his mammoth form silhouetted in the moonlight, and we heard a shot ring from the near distance.

Reece tumbled forward behind us. "Dammit. Damn, Dammit!" Reece grabbed his leg.

"They're too close. Keep goin' I slow'em down."

"Too hell with that Reece. I ain't leavin' you."

"You gotta go, John. Get this abolishuniss across da river. He ain't got no bizness over here."

"The dogs went silent. From below the hill, a voice taunted. "John Parker? We know it's you. Got all yo markin's over it. Come out and we take you in alive. At least you live long enough to hang. Give up boy. Won't nobody hurt you.

Parker pulled a knife from his boot. "I'm gonna move to the side. When they down the hill, hill..."

"John!" Reece reprimanded the younger Parker. "One-a us gotta live; keep the railroad goin'."

"Reece," Parker whispered and trembled.

"They don't know whachu you look like." Reece said with a big grin. "Gimme dat knife."

Reece took John Parker's hunting knife. He gripped both of the rifles. He struggle upright and hobbled to the hill. Parker stayed squatted and touched him for the last time. "I'm comin'. I'm comin' gi-mysef up. Donchall shoot me."

The great giant strode not even limping much, the rifles extended over his head, the knife stuck in his belt behind him. Then, in defiance, the rifles whirled about as he spoke his challenge. "You want John Parker, you got ... John Parker!"

The muzzle of one rifle flashed and filled the night with sound and fire. We heard the cry of a man wounded, maybe dying, We could hear men scurry for cover, shouting warnings to each other. The second rifle bellowed and another man cried in pain. We saw his silouette throw one rifle like a spear, then the other he swung like a club. The sickening yelp of a dog followed the

first wing. The cry of a man clubbed in the head followed the second. The knife appeared in his hand as the noises of violence overtook the night. But all we could see was Reece Reed.

"I'm John Parker." He repeated again and again. Defiantly. Laughing. He flung the rifle at something we couldn't see, then raised the large knife.

A shot exploded. Reece's shoulder exploded. But he seemed ambivalent to pain, I only hoped, protected by a God with some sence of justice. About this time I wasn't so sure.

Reece shook his fist with the knife in the air and shouted his invitation. A second shot ripped away a piece of his side. He catapulted himself over the hill out of sight.

"We gotta go." Parker yanked my arm, snapping me out of my trance. I was seconds away from joining Reece, my anger growing fiercely now. I finally realized that I didn't care how I'd gotten where I was. I was there. Reece Reed had died so half of the team could carry on the work. His job was my job now. I had to get John Parker to safety.

I turned and ran. "Back to the cave," I said. The back drop of battle still hung behind us. Dogs yelped, men barked, then screamed in pain. Men shouted, then shots, then ... silence. Some talking, we could hear, but not well over our fast breathing. But we both knew, that night, the slavers had tasted the blood of a man.

We ran, I ran hard. The bushes and thorns were like paper to me. Parker followed. The cave opening was in sight. I heard a shot from behind us. But I didn't look around. I could hear Parker still running.

A few yards from the mouth of the cave, another shot rang out. A bullet bounced between my legs in the dirt. We rounded the cave opening and got inside. The stream reflected moonlight and darkness.

"In here," I shouted.

"Are you stupid?" Parker said, amazed. "The cave is a dead end. We're going to ..."

"No," it's not. The stream. It goes ..." I realized I knew only what had been described by an elder tour guide with poor enunciation.

Two slavers rounded the mouth of the cave. "Put your damned hands in the air or we kill you where you stand."

John looked at the water and took a breath. "I ain't goin' back with them no matter what." he said, quietly so only I could hear. He drew his pistol, turned and fired. One slaver fell with a bullet in his shoulder. The second dove from the line of fire but came up aiming and got a bullet in the forehead for his troubles. Parker dropped the guns as we heard the feet of two more men rounding the mouth of the cave. The last thing they saw was our butts airborne into the water.

The stream swept us below the wall, under water I pushed upward at the ceiling until I felt air. My feet found the bed of the stream and I stood. I felt Parker collide with my legs. I helped him up and we both took some tasty breaths of highly oxygenated air. We couldn't see each other in the darkness. But he was amazed. "How you know about this?"

I thought for a moment. "You wouldn't believe me. Hell. I don't believe me." We rested for several minutes. "Down the way. There's an opening."

"And we get out there?" he asked.

"I didn't hear that part of the tour," I said. We found another air pocket, and a third. On the fourth dive, we surfaced to a beautiful sight. A big open room of rock, and through a hole in the side, moon light, obscured by thick trees and bushes, but moonlight.

Parker's face lit up more than the moonlight. "I'll be damn. This gonna come in handy," he

mumbled. He stepped from the pool he stood and looked as if staring at heaven. He began to ascend the wall.

"Hey. Help me outta here," I said. I didn't know where the stream went from this point, and I didn't want to find out. I took his hand, took a step and fell back into the pool.

I took a mouthful of water, twisted, closed my eyes and a hand caught my wrist and pulled me to the top, into daylight, from beneath ... the yellow railing. Where I looked into a bunch of curious faces.

"Honey, you scared the daylights out of us," Beverly said. "Are you all right?"

I was wet and very tired. I think I was glad to have awakened from a bad dream. At least I think I was glad.

I haven't told this story to anyone except Beverly. She's the only person who doesn't think that I lost my mind. My kids and the rest of my family just think I went crazy. No more hundred dollar gym shoes. We eat what we need. No more gluttony. We got rid of the expensive car and after some long battles, Beverly stays with the kids and I work my ass off to make sure we have our necessities.

But after all that cutting back, we found that what we needed most was each other. Ricky didn't need extra burgers when he had me to give him a hug. We even lost a lot of weight. Beverly is looking pretty good. I guess that comes from the family walking everywhere together. The family stopped buying fun and became fun to each other. You know something, it's great to be a family.

Now, I guess., you're wondering why I'm telling you this.

Right after I arrived home that day, I undressed. I figured I'd dreamed it all, listening to

the lecture just before bumping my head. We rationalized the deep bruise in my chest as probably hitting a rock when I fell. And the scratches on my shins ... Funny how much you can disregard.

Then, as Beverly was sorting the clothes hampers, she found this wad. "Robert? What's this in your pocket. Aren't you a little old for this?" She brought me my trousers. I folded a pocket inside out and smelled it, and tasted it. Maple sugar candy. That's when I told her the story.

"So I'm writing this letter to you to say something that I never got a chance to say. It took me two years to track down the records of Eunice Reed. Never found any on Reece Reed. And the park people have no idea who that cave is named after. It took another year to trace her to you. What I couldn't say to him. I'd like to say to his blood. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Robert Cooper.