

SHIFTING IDEOLOGY IN MILDRED D. TAYLOR'S BOOKS

by

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I dedicate this dissertation
in honor of my husband, Douglas P. Davis,
without whose support
I could neither have begun
nor completed my doctorate
and
in memory of my parents,
Sarah P. and Theodore M. Manley,
who, as Mildred Taylor's parents did for her,
believed I could accomplish anything
I was determined to do.

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ABSTRACT

Newbery Award winner Mildred D. Taylor (born 1943) drew from her family's oral storytelling tradition to write nine books about the Logans, a fictitious landowning African American family in Mississippi. These texts take four generations of Logans from the 1870s to 1950 and show how they endure despite racial injustice. This dissertation examines the author's shifting political ideologies, as defined by Robert Sutherland's "Hidden Persuaders: Political Ideologies in Literature for Children." Nuanced changes toward greater empowerment are highlighted when her books are organized into three stages—early, middle, and late. The first chapter provides an introduction and literature review, disclosing gaps in the existing scholarship. Chapter Two, "'Them Black Kings': Influences that Shaped Taylor as a Writer," shows that Taylor derives her affinity to W. E. B. Du Bois through her father, Wilbert Taylor, who exemplified much of what Du Bois sought to convey in his children's literature. Chapter Three, "'He Can't Speak No More': Taylor Challenges Perceptions of African Americans in Her Early Stage Books," shows that Taylor's first three books—*Song of the Trees* (1975); *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976); and *Let The Circle Be Unbroken* (1981)—reflect Du Bois's objectives regarding re-imagining African Americans, re-casting the African American family, and writing African Americans into history. Chapter Four, "Changing Focus in Taylor's Middle Stage Books," shows that Taylor diverts from Du Bois's family model in her middle stage books: *The Gold Cadillac* (1987), *The Friendship* (1987), *The Road to Memphis* (1990), and *Mississippi Bridge* (1990). Chapter Five, "'We's Free Now' and 'Use Your Head': Agency and Efficacy in Taylor's

Late Stage Books,” discloses how main characters in her late stage books, *The Well: David’s Story* (1995) and *The Land* (2001), achieve greater empowerment through verbal or written contracts. In these books, Taylor also demonstrates that characters do not merely endure segregation but that they thrive in spite of it, allowing her latest book to conclude with an uncharacteristically happy ending. In the conclusion, Chapter Six, I discuss the ramifications of Taylor’s message of empowerment and implications for her readers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	x
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW	1
Levels of Ideologies	5
Literature Review.....	10
Three Stages of Taylor's Books	18
Taylor’s Early Stage	20
Taylor’s Middle Stage	27
Taylor’s Late Stage	32
Chapter Overview	37
CHAPTER TWO “THEM BLACK KINGS”: INFLUENCES THAT SHAPED TAYLOR AS A WRITER.....	38
Du Bois's Literature for Children	39
Evidence of Taylor’s Harkening to Du Bois	57
Taylor’s “Manifesto”	68
CHAPTER THREE “HE CAN’T SPEAK NO MORE”: TAYLOR CHALLENGES PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN HER EARLY STAGE BOOKS.....	77
Taylor Re-Images African Americans	79
Characterizations in Taylor’s Early Stage Books	86
Taylor Re-Casts the African American Family	92
Taylor Reconsiders African Americans in History.....	105

Education	107
Judicial System	110
Voting	112
Lynching	113
Labor Unions	117
A Bridge Text	119
Summary	121
 CHAPTER FOUR CHANGING FOCUS IN TAYLOR’S MIDDLE	
STAGE BOOKS	123
Change in Subject	123
Change in Narrator	126
Change in Family	135
Change in the Author’s Life	139
Change in Agency	145
A Bridge Text	152
Conclusion	153
 CHAPTER FIVE “WE’S FREE NOW!” AND “USE YOUR HEADS”:	
AGENCY AND EFFICACY IN TAYLOR'S LATE STAGE BOOKS	155
Change in Efficacy	156
Change in Endings	164
Change in Focus	170
Change in Family	174

Change in Contracts.....	181
Contracts in <i>The Well</i>	184
Contracts in <i>The Land</i>	187
Change in the Author’s Life	192
Change in Narrator	195
Conclusion	196
CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION	198
WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED.....	206

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Three Stages of Mildred D. Taylor's Books	19
Table 2 Du Bois's Objectives and Taylor's "Manifesto"	76

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Mildred D. Taylor (b. 1943), writer of nine African American books for juveniles, is most famous for *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976). Winner of the coveted John Newbery Medal for this novel, Taylor is the second African American¹ recipient of this prestigious children's book award. After four decades, she remains the Newbery foundation's most recent African American Award winner. She became a writer of juvenile historical fiction in the mid-1970s following the Civil Rights Movement, in what Donnarae MacCann calls an "all-too-brief opening in the 'system'" prompted by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 that encouraged publication of titles by black authors ("Family Chronicles" 93).² Taylor's publishing career thus far spans twenty-six years and touches four decades, from 1975 to 2001. Her work includes seven children's books: *Song of the Trees* (1975); *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976); *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* (1981); *The Gold Cadillac* (1987); *The Friendship* (1987); *Mississippi Bridge* (1990); and *The Well: David's Story* (1995). Taylor also wrote two

¹ Having grown up in an America in which persons of color have been called "coloreds," "Negros," "niggers," "nigras," "blacks," "Afro-Americans," and "African Americans," and whites referred to as "honkies," "crackers," "whitey," and "European American," I am sensitive to labels. This dissertation uses the noun "African American" or "black" to refer to an American whose ethnic background is rooted in Africa and "black" for a slave who had no American citizenship. Both those terms are also used as adjectives. The dissertation refers to an American with European ethnic background as "white." If a quoted passage capitalizes any of these terms, I maintain that differentiation as well. This discussion is informed by Gina Philogene's "Choosing a Name as Filter of Group Identity."

² Signed by President Lyndon Johnson, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was an initiative against poverty. Sometimes referred to as Title One, the program works to enhance the education system by providing funds for intercultural materials and books in poverty areas.

young adult novels³: *The Road to Memphis* (1990); and *The Land* (2001). Her books chronicle four generations of the fictitious Logan family, African Americans united by close family ties, by love of their land, and by efforts to resist racial inequities in rural Mississippi, from the Reconstruction Era to 1950. However, she did not write or publish these family stories in chronological order. Her current writing plan is to conclude the Logan saga with a tenth book, which she calls “Logan” (J. Brown 24). In this volume, she intends to bring Cassie Logan and her family up to the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s.

In her Newbery Medal acceptance speech, reprinted in *The Horn Book*, Taylor highlighted what she plans to accomplish in her books. She wants to show “strong black families,” “happy, loved children” with “strong fathers and concerned mothers” (Taylor, “Newbery” 405). She wants her books about the Logan family to “mirror a black child’s hopes and fears from childhood innocence to awareness to bitterness and disillusionment” (Taylor, “Newbery” 407). Portraying a picture of the black experience that more closely resembled the history reflected in the family stories she heard growing up, she wants to show what African Americans in past generations endured and what Cassie Logan’s generation did to bring about the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s (Taylor, “Newbery” 408).

In the first seven of Taylor’s nine books, even though the Logans’ struggles to resist oppression are seasoned with occasional small successes, African American

³ There is no definitive consensus about young adult (YA) literature among librarians, publishers, teachers, etc. YA novels are chiefly “problem novels” involving young adults (Nodelman 200), or books with “hard-edged realism” (Cart 96). “Young adult” is often code for mature content in the realm of juvenile fiction. Broadly, young adult literature is also literature young adults choose to read (Bucher and Manning 4).

characters are hindered from achieving equal rights due to Jim Crow. Generally, the books end with ambiguity or a sense of foreboding about what will happen next at the hands of white oppressors. The reader is constantly confronted with a dream deferred.

In Taylor's last two books, however, significant changes are evident in the characterization of the main characters and in Taylor's implied reader. Whereas Taylor's first books stress how the black community endures racial oppression, as well as the Logans' determination, integrity, and self-respect, it is in her latest book, *The Land*, that Taylor allows the black male protagonist to do more than stand proud and brave. She allows him to fulfill his desires. The changes are evident in the main character's agency, which is his means or impetus to make changes, and in his efficacy, his success at achieving his desired results. In this prequel to the Logan saga, Taylor imbues protagonist Paul-Edward Logan with the abilities, opportunities, vision, and acuity to succeed; she also awards him with a sizable boon of land and family. His is a dream realized. Taylor invites the reader to celebrate the protagonist's victory, for *The Land* is the only book of the nine with a happy-ever-after ending. In 1994, Karen Patricia Smith finds in Taylor's books, "possibilities that *can be*" despite oppression from Jim Crow society (273). With the publication of *The Land*, mere possibilities become reality because what *can be* becomes what *is*. Instead of the pessimism and despair that cloud earlier books, optimism outshines loss.

Two changes in characterization are highlighted in Taylor's last two books. Instead of focusing on behavior or events that benefit the black community as a whole, as she does in prior books, Taylor minimizes the male protagonist's actions for anyone other

than himself and his family. Her focus is on the individual. Not only is the male character more efficacious; Taylor re-images the primary black female character, Caroline Logan, who is Cassie's Big Ma from earlier books. She depicts this younger Caroline as more empowered than she is pictured in earlier books.

The final significant change in the late stage books is Taylor's choice to further reconsider the family model. Instead of depicting the patriarchal model so important in her early stage books, she complicates the family by offering a more efficacious mother in *The Well* and by presenting an array of family models named by the narrator in *The Land*, all of which accentuate ways they help him reach his goals.

With her change of focus from a community's betterment to an individual's, Taylor addresses a different reader. Instead of devoting her books to helping non-black readers understand the perseverance of African Americans in prior generations, taking the black child from innocence to despair, Taylor is more focused on demonstrating that any reader, despite his or her ethnicity, is able to achieve personal goals and dreams in the present day. By the time *The Land* was published, Taylor achieved respectability as a writer, so she was not trying to carve out a place for herself in the literary world. Instead, her books help the next generation, including her own child, realize their dreams.

In changing her emphasis from black community betterment to individual achievement, Taylor expands her fiction's social commentary beyond the themes typical of books in the African American literary tradition. However, this dissertation does not seek to examine Taylor only in the context of her work in African American juvenile fiction. Instead, it centers on changes among the books themselves. Even though

scholars recognize her importance in the black literary canon, they generally overlook in what ways, if any, her books have undergone changes in the author's tone, attitude, or ideology. This paper examines the textuality of Taylor's books, from earliest published to most recently published, grouping them into three stages to recognize the ideological shift that occurs over the course of her writing of the books and to assert that personal changes in the author, not changes in the African American literary culture of which she is part, prompted that shift. The changes in Taylor's books, from first to last, are evidence of changes in her political ideology.

Levels of Ideologies

This dissertation is informed by two works about ideology in children's books written by Robert Sutherland and Peter Hollindale. Sutherland's "Hidden Persuaders: Politics in Children's Literature" discusses three kinds of ideology. Hollindale's oft-republished article, "Ideology in Children's Books" discusses three levels of ideology in children's literature, and his categories are not identical to Sutherland's. I will discuss these two works separately and then show how they dovetail and provide a framework within which to discuss Taylor's ideology.

In his groundbreaking article, Sutherland identifies the author's view—what he defines as the author's politics—as that which reflects "a set of views and assumptions regarding such things as 'human nature,' social organization and norms of behavior, moral principles, questions of good and evil, right and wrong, and what is important in life" (R. Sutherland 143). First, he classifies the "politics of advocacy," which he describes as "pleading for and promoting a specific cause, or upholding a particular point

of view or course of action” (145). As an example, Sutherland cites Horatio Alger books as advocating hard work and honesty as the way to individual achievement of financial security and an improved standing in society (146). His second classification is the “politics of attack,” an author’s practice of criticizing a particular course of action, social institution, or prevailing practice, belief, etc. The attack can take the form of anything from mild ironic satire to fierce invectives (146). As an example of the politics of attack, Sutherland cites Mark Twain’s attempts to disparage slavery in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (148-49).

Sutherland’s third classification is the “politics of assent,” which is the “author’s passive, unquestioning acceptance and internalization of an established ideology” (151). Sutherland differentiates politics of assent from politics of advocacy and politics of attack in that the author unconsciously affirms prevailing ideologies rather than trying to establish new ones (151). Sutherland asserts that the reader likely shares the author’s viewpoint (151). He considers P. L. Travers’s *Mary Poppins* an example of politics of assent when Mary takes the children “South to visit an African Negro family who are nearly naked but wearing crowns of feathers and a great many beads” (Travers qtd. in R. Sutherland 151). Sutherland states that the Negro mother speaks in dialect, explaining that her visitors are in time for watermelon, and then she laughs as though the “whole of life were one huge joke,” thus exemplifying the stereotypes of the simple, carefree Negro (R. Sutherland 152). Though considered politically incorrect or insensitive today, at the time of publication, Travers’ portrayal of the black character was widely accepted by white readers.

Three years after Sutherland's article, Hollindale continued the discussion of ideology in children's literature by describing ideology as layered, from easily identified to more hidden. The first level of ideology as explained by Hollindale is the "explicit social, political, and moral beliefs of the individual writer and his [or her] wish to recommend them to children through the story" (10). These are the aspects that authors intend to include in children's book; they may express "revolutionary attitudes" (11). He states that the second level of ideology involves the implicit level of the writer's "unexamined assumptions" (12). Thus the author is conveying what he or she holds as obvious truth (12). The texture of plot and storytelling reveals what the author believes and even what society expects the younger generation to believe in or adhere to (12). The second level of ideology is implicit, and it guides the explicit ideology of the first level of ideology. Hollindale states that examples of second level ideology "are taken for granted by the writer and reflect the writer's integration in a society which unthinkingly accepts them" (13).

The third level of ideology is related to literary form (Hollindale 14). This level is far less conspicuous since the ideology is inherent in the form and language of the story. It is seen in choices made about the plot and the characters and in how the conflict is resolved. These choices are not always conscious decisions but are often a matter of the author's unconscious mind at work and the influence of prevailing cultural practices since, as Hollindale further explains, a writer cannot hide this "essential self" (14). He includes in his explanation a comment made by Gary Waller who critiques sixteenth century poetry. Waller defines ideology as subliminal:

When a text is written, ideology works to make some things more natural to write; when a text is read, it works to conceal struggles and repressions, to force language into conveying only those meanings reinforced by the dominant forces of our society. (qtd. in Hollindale 14)

Hollindale's third level of ideology subtly conveys the assumptions a person accepts since the ideologies are so much a part of one's community and life. The writer can make conscious choices about his explicit ideology, but, at the same time, "the uniqueness of imaginative achievement rests on the private, unrepeatably configurations which writers make at a subconscious level from the common stock of their experience" (15). Regarding the third level of ideology, Hollindale explains that "a large part of any book is written not by its author but by the world its author lives in" (15). Ideology is bound to shift as the world changes and as the author changes. The third level is far less conspicuous since the ideology is inherent in the form and language of the story and is seen by how conflicts are resolved (14). The choices are not conscious decisions but are a matter of the author's unconscious mind at work and cultural practices (14). Thus, third level ideology involves more than the author's conscious decisions; it pertains to the ways in which society establishes ideas.

Sutherland's three categories of ideologies fit together with Hollindale's first two levels of ideology. The politics of advocacy and attack are the explicit ideology conveyed by the author of children's books. The politics of assent pertain to Hollindale's second level of ideology. Sutherland does not have a classification that coincides with Hollindale's third level.

Recognizing the presence of implicit, explicit, and integrated ideology as presented by both Sutherland and Hollindale helps identify ideologies in Taylor's work. Her politics of advocacy and attack are evident in all of her books. In the books written in the 1970s and 1980s, Taylor wants to emphasize or advocate black characters' courage in the presence of white oppression. She also attacks the unfair behavior by white racists leveled at African American characters. Critics have generally discussed only these easily discernible levels of ideology in Taylor's books, her politics of advocacy and attack. Critics do not write widely on the more subtle expressions of ideology in Taylor's work, the ideology that Sutherland and Hollindale maintain can be present without the authors' and even the readers' awareness.

One reader and critic who appears unaware of the extent of these deeper levels of ideology in Taylor's books is Robert con Davis-Undiano. In "Mildred D. Taylor and the Art of Making a Difference," Davis-Undiano sums up Taylor's contribution to children's literature after she won the NSK Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature in 2003. He notes that Taylor writes "without the support of extensive ideological baggage" (13). Davis-Undiano does not explain specifically what he means by "ideological baggage" other than stating that Taylor serves "her community steadfastly through the fiercest adherence imaginable to the truth of the African American experience" (13). He understands Taylor's books to be a truthful telling of the black experience and finds her "[n]either a zealot nor a left-leaning critic" but one who is "armed with only her keen sense of social injustice and her enormous talent" (13). Davis-Undiano accepts Taylor's viewpoint as being in the realm of unexamined politics of assent, of what the general

public considers acceptable, which is the second level of ideology. However, this critic perceives Taylor's politics as those of advocacy and attack, first level ideology. This dissertation explores ideology in Taylor's politics of assent as well as her unconscious views.

Literature Review

The scholarship regarding Taylor's work, rich though it is in a plethora of subjects and insights, displays gaps in the areas this research addresses, most notably an in-depth discussion of the literary relationship between Taylor and W. E. B. Du Bois in African American children's literature. Several scholars mention but do not develop the argument that Taylor's work reflects the objectives Du Bois established for *The Brownies' Book*. Along with literary editor Jesse Redmon Fauset, Du Bois created the magazine under the auspices of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In "African American Children's Literature: The First One Hundred Years," Violet Harris calls the magazine "the premier periodical" for children in which Du Bois sought to "redefine colored youth" and to prepare them for "racial solidarity and uplift"⁴ (546). More pointedly, in the section of her essay about literature in the 1970s, Harris includes Mildred Taylor as one of "a cadre of writers whose avowed purposes for writing and illustrating children's books harkened back to those of Du Bois" (550).

However, Harris does not specify how Taylor's books reflect Du Bois's purposes.

⁴ In *Uplifting the Race*, Kevin Gaines explains that racial uplift includes the efforts of the black community to enhance their presence and demonstrate their autonomy in the white-dominant culture. What began as a means for evoking liberty for slaves became a way for whites to control blacks. "Uplift' came to signify a program for assimilating blacks into the political realities of Jim Crow and New South economic practices, ... for banishment of black leadership from politics" (11). In the realm of children's literature, Rudine Sims Bishop states that the black press acknowledged one of the children's books by black writer Amelia Etta Hall Johnson, *Clarence and Corrine* (1890), as an early example of racial uplift, refuting the belief that blacks were incapable of producing literature (*Free Within Ourselves* 17).

Rudine Sims Bishop agrees with Harris that African American children's literature coincides with the purposes Du Bois named for his children's magazine (*Free Within Ourselves* 93), but she does not articulate the similarities. On the other hand, Dianne Johnson, who has written about both Taylor and Du Bois, does not enter into a discussion about any connection between Taylor's and Du Bois's literature. Gregory Hampton links Taylor to Du Bois's ideas in his discussion of *The Land* in "A Triumphant Mulatto: Racial Construction in Mildred Taylor's *The Land*" by showing how Taylor tacitly explores Du Bois's theory of double-consciousness.⁵ Hampton describes Taylor's protagonist Paul-Edward Logan as one who has the ability to see himself through his own eyes as well as those of his oppressors (84). Yet Hampton does not connect Taylor's motivation for writing for juveniles with Du Bois's goals in children's literature. In "The Day that Daddy's By Girl Is Forced to Grow Up," Cicely Denean Cobb, recognizes that a character in another book faces her double-consciousness. 'Lois in *The Gold Cadillac*, realizes that how she views herself varies from how white people view her (n. pag.). Like Hampton, Cobb does not instigate an obvious connection between Taylor and Du Bois. This study seeks to fill a gap in this area of scholarship and to explore the ways Taylor's books fulfill Du Bois's purposes for *The Brownies' Book* during her early stage as well as to show that she departs from a strict adherence to Du Bois's guidelines in later

⁵ Du Bois explains that double-consciousness is "the sense of always having to look at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (*The Souls of Black Folk* 11). Hampton notes that Paul-Edward duplicates Du Bois's behavior in that just as the youthful Du Bois decided to respond to his white classmates who belittled his existence by outshining them at exam time or in athletic competitions (Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* 10), Taylor shows that Paul-Edward set himself to achieve his dream, despite what white people said he could or could not accomplish (Hampton 84).

stages. Examining the connection between the writings of Du Bois and Taylor in her early books helps to characterize the political shifts in Taylor's later books.

A second area where scholarship on Taylor's works is lacking is in a discussion of ideological shifts in Taylor's books. Several factors have potentially hindered scholars from recognizing the narrative shifts towards greater agency and efficacy of her African American characters. One is the pervasive subject of race-consciousness throughout her oeuvre, such as race discrimination and race uplift. David Rees commends *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* for its explanation of the "effects of racism" (90). In each of her books, Taylor vividly portrays racial oppression as a ubiquitous presence that causes an ongoing struggle for black characters. Donnarae MacCann recognizes Taylor's attempts to inform readers about survival techniques employed by African Americans whose existence in the systematic oppression in Mississippi of the 1930s was like warfare ("Family Chronicles" 93). Yet in their emphases on Taylor's treatment of racism as an oppressive social system, Rees and MacCann overlook the changing focus on how characters respond to racism over the course of Taylor's books.

Another element hindering scholars from observing the presence of shifts in Taylor's books is the means by which Taylor opposes racism. In "Let Freedom Ring," Michelle Martin positions Taylor's work in the genre of African American children's literary tradition, showing how the Logans' use of land, literacy, and lore, as well as the intangible concept of liberty, helped members of the black community resist racial discrimination. Similarly, in "A Chronicle of Family Honor," Karen Patricia Smith states that in the books published before 1995, Taylor's characters balance racism with

resistance using another set of concepts: “spirituality, love, unity, and vision” (273). In “Mildred Taylor’s Story of Cassie Logan,” Hamida Bosmajian concludes that Cassie’s emotional need for justice in the face of institutional racism becomes an intellectual “realization that just laws will have to become the agents for change in an unjust society” (143). In “I’m Gonna Glory in Learnin’,” Elizabeth Schaffer suggests that Taylor reiterates the common assumption that education is the lifeline for the African American community’s struggle with racial prejudice (63). In “Exploring the Works of Mildred Taylor,” Michelle Martin articulates Taylor’s ability to cultivate interrogative texts in which she invites readers to be involved in answering questions her texts pose. Martin states that Taylor problematizes the reader in the subject position because he or she is called upon to judge characters by their actions and not by their ethnicity (“Exploring the Works” 6). Critics recognize that Taylor accomplishes more than telling stories in which African Americans are the main characters and racial injustice the main conflict. However, their focus on her portrayal of the black community’s support, the black characters’ depth, and the characters’ struggles to resist racism obscure the changes in perspective occurring over the course of the Logan corpus.

Rudine Sims and Joel Taxel recognize that Taylor deals with racism differently than the authors whose books she read when she was a girl. Sims explains that white authors attempt to sweep aside the misconceptions and prejudice wrought by past centuries in “social conscious” books of the 1950s. In these books, white writers contrive to change a person’s ideas or behaviors in order to solve a deep-seated problem regarding the color line that the protagonist faces (Sims 17-18), suggesting a facile solution. In

“Reclaiming the Voice of Resistance: The Fiction of Mildred Taylor,” Taxel explains that Taylor’s books differ from what Sims call the “social conscious” books that Taylor had read growing up, books whose purpose was to explain what whites know about the black experience (Sims 5). Taylor and other African Americans whom Sims calls image-makers write “culturally conscious” books whose strategy is to help “Black children understand ‘how we got over’” (Sims 49). Taxel explains that Taylor’s portrayal of the difficulties in forming the mixed labor union in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* is realistic because neither whites nor blacks can superficially put aside the hard feelings and years of distress between the two groups (“Reclaiming” 121). These critics correctly distinguish Taylor’s books as a departure from the books she read growing up. Yet they do not recognize that her books alter how she projects the black character’s means for getting over.

A fourth element that potentially prohibits scholars from recognizing ideological shifts in Taylor’s books is the consistencies in her texts, such as her focus on the same main characters, same setting, and similar themes in her books. Even though the books depict four generations of the Logan family, many family members are present in multiple books and are characterized consistently. The stories in all of her books take place fully or partially in the rural community of Great Faith, Mississippi.⁶ As Taylor’s biographer Chris Crowe articulates, key themes are constant in the books—the closeness of family, the importance of the Logan land, the need for survival in the Jim Crow South, and the resistance against white oppression (96-117). Principles for survival are repeated

⁶ In *The Gold Cadillac*, the protagonist’s family lives in Ohio and travels to visit relatives in Mississippi. In *The Road to Memphis*, the protagonist and her party travel to Memphis to help their friend reach freedom.

in all of the books, including the inadvisability for African Americans to trust white people and the importance of individual self-respect. The constancy in characters, themes, and setting may lull scholars into the belief that there is a comfortable ideological sameness about the books.⁷

Taylor's continuance as a writer of juvenile historical fiction may also overshadow critics' awareness of changes in her ideology. Her choice to write historical fiction is informed by her early negative experience with textbooks and history classes which presented a "lackluster history of black people both before and after slavery" (Taylor, "Newbery" 404).⁸ In hopes of drastically altering readers' views of the past, she demonstrates how African Americans persevered despite the myth of white supremacy. In "Mildred D. Taylor: Keeper of Stories," Pat Scales calls Taylor "the forerunner in writing books that portray African American history as it really was, not as people wanted it to be" (240).⁹ Similarly, Joel Taxel and Carolyn Knight praise Taylor's fiction for its historical merit when compared to popular middle school textbooks (Taxel, "Reclaiming" 119; Knight 177-81). Publishing books over the course of four decades, Taylor remains constant in her efforts to write historical fiction about the segregated rural South, a focus that set her apart from most other African American writers of children's books of the time period.

⁷ In contrast to Taylor, Virginia Hamilton, the only other African American to win the Newbery Medal, writes about a host of characters in rural and urban settings. Hamilton also writes in various genres, including contemporary fiction and fantasy.

⁸ Both Chris Crowe and Rudine Sims cite Taylor as one of the few African Americans who was publishing historical fiction in the 1970s and 1980s (Crowe 73; Sims 97).

⁹ The only other African American author publishing historical fiction about African Americans for children in the 1970s was Lorenz Graham, brother-in-law of W. E. B. Du Bois.

A sixth aspect that may distance scholars from seeing the kind of political shifts that Robert Sutherland identifies is that Taylor did not write her books in chronological order. The settings of the books in her late stage predate the rest of the saga, and her most recently published book is the prequel. One might expect to observe a progression of ideas, especially a progression toward empowerment, to appear later in the timeline of the plot and not in events that predate her earlier books.

Critics also may have underestimated a comment by Taylor about her intentions for writing that she made after the publicity that her initial success garnered had subsided. A decade after issuing her “manifesto” in her Newbery Medal acceptance speech, Taylor suggests a new dimension to her writing by stating that she continues her father’s legacy but in time, she hopes that she can pass along “a legacy of [her] own” (“Mildred” 286). Scholars have not used Taylor’s disclosure as a reason to consider ideological shifts in her oeuvre, but they have noted other changes in certain books. In *Presenting Mildred D. Taylor*, Chris Crowe determines that Taylor’s third book, *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, “represents an important move for Taylor” (75). He postulates that the death of her father caused Taylor to “turn to other sources to complement the now finite trove of Taylor family stories she held in her own memory” (75). She moved to seek sources beyond the family storytellers. She states that she consulted with Denver attorney Norm Early, Jr., about legal issues associated with T. J. Avery’s court trial in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* and researched labor unions in Mississippi (Taylor, “Mildred” 285). However, Crowe does not expand the explanation of how Taylor’s scarcity of material relates to more than that one book, nor does he announce an ideological shift as a result of this change.

One of the few scholars who recognize changes in individual texts, Violet J. Harris, asserts that “the urgency of race and racism reflected in the . . . novels of Mildred Taylor seems to have lessened in intensity” in the 1990s (“Children’s Literature Depicting Blacks” 39). Harris also states that Taylor addresses other issues like gender and class (39), yet she does not probe the significance of her observation. Crowe may even disagree with Harris since he asserts that *The Road to Memphis*, written at the start of the decade, is the “harshest novel,” one in which Taylor “lets the pain of loss and the suffering caused by racism hit the reader full force” (Crowe 86). The third scholar, Gregory Hampton, observes that Paul-Edward Logan is mentally superior to other characters in the book, even his white father (91). Hampton notes that Paul-Edward exhibits almost heroic skills and feats (93). Yet Crowe, Harris, and Hampton, like the previously mentioned scholars, focus on one or, at best, a few books by Taylor and, therefore, miss the broad ideological changes that are visible when Taylor’s entire corpus is analyzed.

Juxtaposing her most recent book, *The Land*, with her best known work, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, an unnamed reviewer for *Publisher’s Weekly* states that Taylor’s tone in *The Land* is “more uplifting than bitter” (313). This reviewer determines that Taylor does more than expound on the nature of the racists’ actions by delving into motives for racism and showing that racist values are shaped by society. The change in the tone in *The Land* provoked me to investigate Taylor’s nine books individually and collectively in order to determine the nature of the tonal change. Taylor’s work unfolds

its full meaning when her books are read as a set (Davis-Undiano 11), and the ideology behind them becomes clear when the works are examined in three stages.

Three Stages of Taylor's Books

Ideological shifts regarding agency and efficacy, as well as the family model, are discernible when Taylor's novels are analyzed in three writing stages: early, middle, and late. The books in Taylor's early stage were written from the middle 1970s to the early 1980s: *Song of the Trees*; *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*; and *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*. The middle stage comprises four books written between 1987 and 1990: three books for children, *The Gold Cadillac*, *The Friendship*, and *Mississippi Bridge*, and her first young adult novel, *The Road to Memphis*. These four titles cover incidents that occur from the 1930s to 1950, but were not written in chronological order. The late stage includes Taylor's most recent books, published in 1995 and 2001: a book for older children, *The Well: David's Story*, and another young adult novel, *The Land*. The last two books are in reverse chronological order, taking place from the 1870s to 1910. Markers depicting the stages in Taylor's oeuvre can be discerned in (a) choice of narrator, (b) presentation of the black family, and (c) conclusions of the texts. There is a correlation among the changes in her texts with some events in her personal life, raising the question of causal criteria for the categories. Refer to Table 1 for an overview of the three stages.

Table 1 Three Stages Of Taylor’s Nine Books

<u>Early Stage</u> Before the mid-1980s	<u>Middle Stage</u> Late 1980s to Early 1990s	<u>Late Stage</u> Mid-1990s to Early 2000s
<i>Songs of the Trees</i> (1975) <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i> (1976) <i>*Let the Circle Be Unbroken</i> (1981)	<i>The Gold Cadillac</i> (1987) <i>The Friendship</i> (1987) <i>The Road to Memphis</i> (1990) <i>*Mississippi Bridge</i> (1990)	<i>The Well: David’s Story</i> (1995) <i>The Land</i> (2001)

* This book is a bridge, showing one or more elements identified in adjacent stages.

In “Cryin’ for the Land,” Cicely Denean Cobb acknowledges a strident connection between Taylor and her books, arguing that Taylor employs a mixture of private and public discourse to disclose her voice, particularly through the characters of Cassie and ’lois¹⁰(60). Likewise, Crowe associates Taylor with at least one of her characters, Cassie: “Many of the lessons Taylor learned, Cassie also learned, and the

¹⁰ Taylor chose not to capitalize the first letter of the narrator protagonist’s name, ’lois.

challenges they have shape them into memorable, admirable characters” (25). Although one could question whether Taylor, the author, is a character, arguably a close relationship exists between Taylor’s life experiences and what transpires with her narrators. Taylor recognizes this personal connection in her Newbery acceptance speech, saying that she could artistically weave her childhood feelings into the factual and fictional incidents in the stories (“Newbery” 405).

Taylor’s Early Stage

Childhood experiences spearheaded Taylor’s desire to be a writer and are evidenced in her early stage books. Taylor explains that she feels privileged to have grown up in a loving, close-knit extended family (“Mildred” 285). She feels especially privileged to have a father who shared life guides and principles of survival to help her navigate segregation in the North and the South (Taylor, “Newbery” 402-03). She was deeply affected by stories shared by her father, a master storyteller, and by other relatives. The family stories provided a history of black people that bolster her sense of self-respect and black pride (Taylor, “Newbery” 404).

Experiences beyond her family life also motivated her as a writer in her early stage. She explains in her 1977 Newbery acceptance speech that she experienced racism personally in various regions of America when she was denied the right to use public restrooms, drinking fountains, and restaurants and to try on clothes in stores. An avid reader as a girl, she says that she was disturbed that library books did not contain any black heroes or heroines who were handsome or beautiful. Additionally, she said neither school textbooks nor history classes presented black people in a favorable light but as

“docile, subservient people . . . who did little or nothing to shatter the chains that bound them, both before and after slavery” (“Newberry” 403-04). She states that the representation of black people was a “personal embarrassment” (Taylor and Rochman). The written words did not explain the black world like what she heard in her family’s oral texts. Once in sixth grade when she tried to relate events counter to the prevalently accepted version about black history, some students laughed at her in disbelief, and not one person present, not even the teacher, lent her stories credence (Taylor, “Mildred” 273-74). She states that her father guided her to find a way to resist bigotry. She decided by the time she entered high school that she would become a writer and offer a picture of the black experience that more accurately identified the black people whom she knew from personal experience and through her family’s oral storytelling tradition (Taylor, “Newberry” 405). She admits that of all her relatives, she was the one who felt “tapped by God” to transfer the oral family storytelling tradition to the public arena of the written page (Taylor and Rochman).

Her life following graduation from Scott High School in Toledo, Ohio, expanded her view of black people in the world and bolstered her self-respect, and her heightened self-respect is reflected in her early stage books. In 1965, she completed a bachelor of arts in education at the University of Toledo. Afterwards, as a Peace Corps volunteer in 1965-1967, she fulfilled her dream to travel to Ethiopia,¹¹ a country that has never been colonized by Europeans and a country to which she was attracted for its culture, history,

¹¹ According to Martha Forgh in Graduate Studies at the University of Colorado, Taylor’s transcript indicate that her coursework included Ethnography in Sub-Saharan Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa in World Affairs, and Archeology of Africa for undergraduate work at the University of Toledo where she minored in African Studies (Forgh).

and leadership (Crowe 18). She states that she felt at home among the Ethiopians, who welcomed her as a daughter lost to them in bygone centuries due to the slave trade (“Mildred” 280). In 1968-1969, she earned a master’s degree in Journalism at the University of Colorado, where she became a black student activist (Taylor, “Mildred” 279-82; Taylor, “Newbery” 405). She calls her involvement with the student movement a “period of growing self-respect and self-determination” and a necessary element of her life (“Mildred” 280, 281). In contrast to the optimistic view of herself and of black people in general that she gained while in Ethiopia and at the University of Colorado, she was distraught by the United States media, including the Moynihan Report released in 1965, which painted a negative picture of black family life. She determined to show that the black family was not “fatherless or disintegrating” as the media reported (Taylor, “Newbery” 403).

In her early thirties, her long time dream of publishing a book finally came to fruition. Despite numerous disappointments when editors sent her rejection notices for her manuscripts, Taylor remembered her father’s aphorism, that she could accomplish anything she set her mind to if she did not give up (*Meet the Newbery Author*). After submitting manuscripts for more than a decade and having a drawer of rejection slips to show for it (*Meet the Newbery Author*), Taylor enjoyed her first success as a writer when her short story, “Song of the Trees,” won first place in the African American category for the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) in 1974. Winning the contest put into motion “a fairy tale kind of turn of events” which led to her phenomenal success as a writer of children’s books (Taylor, “My Life as a Writer” 7). CIBC flew her to New

York to accept her prize, where she met with several publishers, including Phyllis Fogelman, with whom she began a long time working relationship and friendship. Taylor signed a book contract for *Song of the Trees* with Fogelman and Dial Books.

This book for younger children was named the *New York Times* Outstanding Book of the Year 1975, the 1975 Coretta Scott King Honor Book, and the 1975 Jane Addams Honor Book. Her success with this, her first book, opened the door for another book contract and resulted in her publishing *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* in 1976. This book was given the ALA (American Library Association) Notable Book citation and was named the National Book Award finalist in 1976. In 1977, the book won the highest award given in American children's fiction, the John Newbery Medal, as well as other awards during that year, including the *Boston Globe/Horn Book* Fiction Honor Book, *Kirkus* Choice, *Horn Book* Fanfare, Young Reader's Choice, American Book Award, Coretta Scott King Award, Jane Addams Honor Book, and the NCSS (National Council for the Social Studies)–CBC (Children's Book Council) Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies. In 1978, NBC television aired a dramatic rendition of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* as a two-part series. The book's success continues. It was listed in the Best of the Best Books, 1970-1983. In 1985, Taylor was also awarded the West German commendation, the Buxtehude Bulle Award, for this novel.

Taylor received numerous awards for the third book in the series, a sequel, *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*. Its award include the 1982 ALA (American Library Association) Notable Book, the ALA Best Books for Young Adults award, the Coretta Scott King Award, Notable Children's Trade Books in the Field of Social Studies, Jane Addams

Honor Book, and American Book Award Finalist. The *New York Times* named it the Outstanding Book of the Year in 1982. She also received international acclaim, her books being translated in multiple languages.

These numerous accolades validated her efforts as a storyteller and had a continuing effect on her writing. She had tried to convey the historicity of family stories to sixth graders two decades before. Her classmates disbelieved her stories then, but in the 1970s her peers granted her credibility. Taylor verifies that she feels she finally gained a hearing from her peers: “[W]hen my first books were published, those feelings and the history I presented were understood. Yes, people would say. We remember how it was” (“Acceptance”). Her awards established for her that people recognized the “truer picture” of black people she had wanted to paint. Her success also suggested that since she was heard and her stories believed, she would have additional motivations for writing beyond her early stage books.

Perhaps the most significant event that occurred in Taylor’s personal life during the writing of her early stage books was her father’s death. Six months before *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* was published, her father, Wilbert Taylor, died unexpectedly at age fifty-six (Taylor, “Newbery” 408; Taylor, “Mildred” 268). According to Taylor’s essay in the *Something about the Author Autobiographical Series (SAAS)*, he had been her “greatest inspiration for writing and [her] greatest literary source” when she began writing (“Mildred” 285). His death left a hole in her life and created a breach in the textual reservoir from which she had gained ideas for her writing. At the time he died, she sensed that her will to write as well as her ready source for her stories was gone. She

talks about the struggle of returning to “the void,” of writing about her childhood existence in which racism and violence were real once those who helped her deal with the conflicts, people like her father, were gone (“Mildred” 285-86). But Taylor would not allow herself to give up, for her father had always told her she could do anything she put her mind to (Taylor, “Newbery” 405).

The loss of her father was obviously fresh in her mind as she prepared her acceptance speech for the Newbery Medal less than a year following his death. In the speech, she extols Wilbert Taylor for his presence in her life, and she said that she accepts the prestigious award in his name. Taylor insists then and on other occasions that “without his words, my words would not have been” (“Newbery” 409). She isolates the superlative aspects of her father’s character and replicates them in her characterization of David Logan, the protagonist’s father. In her dedication in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, she admits to inserting his personality traits and his teachings in her books: “to the memory of my beloved father who lived many adventures of the boy Stacey and who was in essence the man David” (n. pag.). She writes in the author’s note of that novel that her father’s “voice of joy and laughter, his enduring strength, his principles and constant wisdom” are “within the pages of this book, its guiding spirit, and total power” (*Roll* n. pag.) Phyllis Fogelman states that Mildred often recognizes Wilbert Taylor as a “determining factor” in her formative years (412).

Besides being influenced by the life of her father, Taylor’s early stage books are also influenced by the works of another man, W. E. B. Du Bois. These books are identified by the way they replicate the objectives that Du Bois set up for *The Brownies’*

Book, which is discussed in full in Chapter Two. As noted in that chapter, their similarities to Du Bois's objectives are grouped into three broad categories. First, Taylor re-images African Americans. The black characters, especially the Logans, are not stock characters but are well-rounded, interesting, industrious, and even heroic. They are also the main characters in the book and the plot focuses on them, not on white characters, something that had disturbed her about the "white" books she says that she read growing up ("Newbery" 405).

Second, Taylor re-casts the African American family differently from how the media portrayed it. The Logans are a patriarchal family, headed by David Logan, who is loved and respected by his wife and children, as well as his mother, who lives with them, and a brother, Uncle Hammer, who lives in Chicago. The parents train their children to be willing to make a difference in society by modeling resistance and by giving them opportunities to oppose racial injustice.

Third, Taylor writes black history in a way that differs from how it was conveyed in the books she read as a girl and even in books published into the 1970s. In refutation of the history books she had read growing up, Taylor shows the vitality of the black family and the strong black characters who persevered in the midst of oppression of the 1930s in Mississippi. Some characters relate acts of heroism from slavery and Reconstruction that were performed by relatives in prior generations. Through Cassie Logan, Taylor chronicles a black child's "hopes and fears from childhood innocence to awareness to bitterness and disillusionment" for readers (Taylor, "Newbery" 407). Taylor accomplished the goals she established for her writing career when she was a

teenager by painting what she considers to be a truer picture of black people (“Newbery” 405). Characters do not actually effect changes in the fabric of Jim Crow society, but they shine as survivors who endure despite racial injustices leveled their way. A full discussion of Taylor’s early stage books is presented in Chapter Three.

Taylor’s Middle Stage

Taylor’s next four books also received accolades, so her prestige as a writer of children’s books continued. In 1988, *The Gold Cadillac* won the Christopher Award, ABC Choice, CCBC (Cooperative Children’s Book Center) Choice, NCSS-CBC Notable Children’s Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies, and the *New York Times* Notable Children’s Book. Also in 1988, *The Friendship* received the Coretta Scott King Award, *Boston Globe/Horn Book* Award, ALA Notable Children’s Book, NCSS-CBC Notable Children’s Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies, New York Public Library 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing, and *Parent’s Choice* Award. In 1991 *The Road to Memphis* received the Coretta Scott King Award, ALA Best Books for Young Adults, and ALA Notable Book. Additionally, in 1991 *Mississippi Bridge* won the Christopher Award, NCSS-CBC Notable Children’s Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies, and the Jane Addams Honor Book.

Events in Taylor’s family life motivated changes that began in the last book of the early stage books, *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, a bridge text, but are more clearly distinguishable in her middle stage books. With the passing of time, her grief over the death of her father opened up a way for Taylor to develop a closer rapport with her mother. Taylor stated in 1977 that her father had been the greatest influence in her life in

her early stage. Yet Taylor admitted a decade or more later that her mother, who had always been a quieter influence than her father, had been just as important to her writing career and her life (Crowe 40). It had been her mother, she explains, who “has always watched out for me” (“Growing Up” 740). Taylor’s admission of her mother’s importance to her suggests reasons for changes in her middle stage books. The death of her father and the closer relationship with her mother likely opened psychological space for Taylor to delve into new perspectives, loosening the hold of some of her father’s tenets and allowing different ideas to surface. As a bridge text between her first two stages, *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* reveals ideological changes that come into clearer focus in subsequent books.

After her father’s death, Taylor could no longer rely on his stories for source material. His absence becomes evident in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, for which she researched history books and contacted an attorney for information. Biographer Chris Crowe observes that Taylor relied more on her skillful use of historical details gained from research and less on family history and stories in the third sequel (Crowe 75), her first book published after her father’s death. In her first middle stage book, *The Gold Cadillac*, Taylor set aside her father’s stories altogether and wrote from her own girlhood memories.

One other autobiographical event likely prompted changes in Taylor’s ideology. Taylor became a single parent sometime in the late 1980s.¹² When accepting the ALAN Award in 1997, Taylor mentions her eight-year-old daughter (“Acceptance”). Becoming

¹² In “Acceptance Speech for the 1997 ALAN Award,” Taylor explains that she always talks to her eight-year-old daughter about what life was like for her and her grandparents before reading her books.

the head of a single-parent family likely caused her to reconsider how she would reveal that “truer picture of Black people” (Taylor, “Newbery” 407). In an interview in the early 2000s:

I know that a lot of people don't always relate to this, but when I was growing up, all the families in our circle were from two-parent families. I wanted to make a real statement concerning strong men who were dedicated to their families, to show the life I knew and what my family was like and what so many of my friends knew. I wanted to show a different world other than the one that was depicted out there. (“A Conversation”)

With her father's death, she no longer had a two-parent birth family, and as a single parent, she did not provide a two-parent family for her daughter. No longer could she espouse a patriarchal family as being her only family experience.

Obvious changes in how she presents the family in the middle stage books support the argument that Taylor reconsiders the make-up of the black family unit at this time. One way the family differs in Taylor's middle stage books is that the family unit is less focused on the significance of the husband/father's strength. For example, in *The Gold Cadillac*, the father is not always the wisest member of the family, the one on whom every member unquestionably depends, as was true in *Song of the Trees* and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Although the child protagonist 'lois sides with her father when her mother will not condone his purchase of the new Cadillac, the reader realizes

that the mother is the wiser in the conflict since her husband buys the car using money the couple has earmarked for a new house.

In all of Taylor's middle stage books, parents are not the strong bulwark against the oppressive white world that the Logan children depended on in the early stage. In *The Gold Cadillac*, young protagonist 'lois does not feel that she can depend on her parents to protect her and keep her safe. In two other books, *The Friendship* and *Mississippi Bridge*, parents David and Mary Logan never appear, even when the children face danger, mayhem, and death. In *The Road to Memphis*, the older Logan children face danger and life-threatening occurrences without their parents. Gone is the insistence that duplicated Du Bois's objective, that the father and mother are essential in children's lives and are the ones who train them to meet life's challenges. As Perry Nodelman notes, a main narrative pattern used in many children's books is the home/away/home pattern in which the child protagonist has an adventure apart from parents and then returns home as a way to assure readers of their safety and contentment (Nodelman 192-93).¹³ This scenario does not happen in two of Taylor's children's books (*The Friendship* and *Mississippi Bridge*) because the children are not at home in the beginning of the book nor do they return home by the end. The children have adventures away from home. Thus, the picture of family in Taylor's middle stage books is far different from the family model pictured in the early writing stage where the parents are intricately involved in the

¹³ In *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*, Perry Nodelman distinguishes between the safe but boring place children characters usually find home to be and the excitement but danger children usually find away from home. In children's books, children characters have adventures away from home to learn the value of home and then return home upon finding it (192). Christopher Clausen writes that "when home is where we ought, on the whole, to stay—we are probably dealing with a story for children. When home is the chief place from which we must escape, either to grow up or . . . to remain innocent, then we are involved in a story for adolescents or adults" (143).

children's lives. Taylor's willingness to de-emphasize the patriarchal family in the middle stage books when she embraces that family model vehemently in her Newbery Award acceptance speech in the early stage suggests a shift in Taylor's ideologies.

One textual element that marks changes in the middle stage books is Taylor's choice of narrators. The most obvious change in narrators is that Cassie Logan, who was the narrator in all three early stage books, no longer retains the sole voice through whom Taylor's narratives flow. The first narrator in the middle stage is 'lois, who is a closer approximation of Taylor as a child than was Cassie. Taylor explains in the author's note of *The Gold Cadillac* that 'lois shares some of Taylor's childhood experiences. Taylor returns to Cassie Logan as narrator for the second and third middle stage books, first using her as a nine-year-old girl in *The Friendship* and then as a seventeen-year-old young woman in *The Road to Memphis*. Cassie's narrative voice shifts from nine-year-old bravado in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* to more discretion born from experience in *The Road to Memphis* as the young woman faces the challenges and cannot rely on anyone, including her parents, for deliverance or guidance. Taylor's narratorial changes in the middle stage are most pronounced in the final book of this stage, for she selects Jeremy Simms to be the narrator of *Mississippi Bridge*. Taylor's decision to use Jeremy is startling because unlike Cassie and 'lois, he is neither female nor African American. The array of characters Taylor taps to tell her family stories suggests Taylor's propensity for change. She did not venture to make these choices when her father was alive. Furthermore, in each of these narratives, Taylor is less inclined to allow older characters

to vocalize but allows the younger voices of first-person narrators to tell the story, who are to be focalizers (Wyle 188).

The final noticeable change in the middle stage books is subtle and not fully realized until the late stage books. It is also unique because it is a tonal variation. Taylor shows that African American characters are no longer simply resilient victims who courageously endure the ramifications of racial injustice. Likewise, there is a nuanced difference about the characters' sense of empowerment from the early stage books. Some are able to articulate their reasons for resisting white opposition and, in one case, God's judgment seems to play a part in opposing the dominant culture. The middle stage books are a time of transition, a time when the author's ideas are reiterative, leading her to shifts in her ideologies that are more visible in her late stage books. These changes in the middle stage are discussed fully in Chapter Four.

Taylor's Late Stage

Nearly two decades after her first book, Taylor's books continue to receive award. In 1996 *The Well* received the ALA Notable Book and ALA Quick Picks for Reluctant YA Readers, Parenting Reading Magic Awards Certificate of Excellence for Distinguished Achievement in Children's Literature, Notable Children's Trade Books in the Field of Social Studies, New York Public Library's 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing, New York Public Library's Books for the Teen Age, American Bookseller Pick of the Lists, National Christian Schools Association Lamplighter Award, IRA (International Reading Association)-CBC Teachers' Choices, and Jane Addams Award. Her most recently published book, *The Land*, received numerous awards in 2002:

Coretta Scott King Award, Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction, ALA Best Books for Young Adults, ALA Notable Children's Book, Top Ten Black History Books for Youth Booklist in 2002, PEN USA West Award for Children's Literature, *Bulletin Blue* Ribbon, and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for Young Adult Fiction.

During her late stage, Taylor also received several other honors for her life time of achievement. Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour declared April 2, 2004, Mildred D. Taylor Day and honored her with a day of festivities (Schultze). Also in 2004, she was the recipient of the NSK Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature. In 2007 Taylor received the ALAN (Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English) Award for her contributions to Young Adult literature.

During the writing of her late stage books, Taylor faced an important challenge and subsequent victory that marked a strategic milestone in her life and prompted a significant change in her writing. Taylor, who had kept private many details about her adult life apart from her literary career, describes in the author's note in *The Land* the trials and the triumphs of how she came to own property in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. She attests that the events caused her to identify profoundly with her great-grandfather, whose experiences are embodied in Paul-Edward in that novel. She feels that she was finally able to tell his story. Her sense of accomplishment as a landowner is exhibited in Paul-Edward's success. Even though the political situation is much different when Taylor purchased her land about a century later, much of what Paul-Edward endures in his acquisition of property is analogous to Taylor's struggles (Taylor, *Land* 373-75). In an interview with Jennifer Brown, Taylor states she was finally able to

write the novel that she most longed to write. She says that she had to wait until she had some life experiences that enabled her to embody the message with the pathos it deserved. Having achieved a goal of owning land, she was ready to write the story of her forefather's struggle to obtain land (J. Brown 24).

In the late stage Taylor continues to experiment with narrators. She designed two African American adult males as narrators: David Logan narrates *The Well*, and Paul-Edward Logan, David's father, narrates *The Land*. Both narrators are adult Logans telling events from their childhoods. Choosing adult black males over the more youthful females that narrated most of her prior books marks an interesting change and is foreshadowed in the bridge text in the middle stage, *Mississippi Bridge*, which is also narrated by an older male, though a white male. The use of black adult males in her late stage books coupled with a greater sense of agency and efficacy of those male protagonists is significant.

In her late stage, Taylor complicates her representation of the family, offering more variety than the two-parent, father-led model. She portrays the family to be strong, whether or not a father is at its helm. Taylor expands the definition and purposes of family. She reiterates the importance of parental involvement in training children to survive. She minimizes the parental role as agents of societal change. Taylor demonstrates her willingness to further complicate the idea of family by various depictions of family. The family in *The Well* is headed by a strong, quick-thinking woman who presides in her husband's absence. In *The Land*, the protagonist identifies four families of which he is a part and from which he benefits.

Another change in the late stage books that is startlingly different from the early stage books and a continuation of some of the events in the middle stage books is that main characters do not work on behalf of the community but work to benefit themselves and their families. Taylor's main characters resist the hold of a white dominant society on a personal level. In both full-length novels in the early writing stage, African Americans willingly work as a community to oppose racial prejudice. In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, David and Mary Logan organize a boycott with thirty families, and in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, David participates in the Farm Workers Union. In *The Road to Memphis*, Cassie and others aid in the escape of their friend, Moe Turner, a fugitive from the law. In the late stage books, however, characters choose only to take steps to benefit themselves rather than the community. In the late stage, the sense of communal benefit differs from earlier books. In *The Well*, Caroline and Paul-Edward Logan gladly share their fresh well water with the community, but they do it because it is the right thing to do, not because they are trying to curry favor with white folks or to improve relationships between the black and white communities. In *The Land*, Paul-Edward prefers to keep to himself in order to achieve his goal to buy farm land. He is not involved in community affairs. By the late stage, Taylor demonstrates that characters are more efficacious, but they are so because they are seeking not to change society but rather to achieve a place in society.

A last indication of change in the late stage books is the presence of happy endings. In all the other books, even when Taylor could have characters be exultant, they are restrained or forced to contemplate the possibility of new injustices or tragedy. But in

the late stage books, and most particularly in the last book, not only do good things happen, but the characters are more optimistic about them. The tone is one of encouragement not fear or negativity.

These changes suggest a shift in Taylor's political ideologies. Taylor says in her 2001 interview with Rochman that with all the advancements toward racial equality, in reality, there is only "so-called" equality (Taylor and Rochman). This implied that she believes that society has not fully removed limitations from non-whites in America. Her personal success motivates her to suggest that the best course to follow is for individuals to seek to realize their own dreams, using their mental acuity and abilities for individual gain. She leads them to be more focused about individual concerns than concerns of the African American community. Paul-Edward's achieving his dreams by his hard work and perseverance suggests that success is attainable by Americans no matter their ethnic heritage. In a spirit of multiculturalism, she seems to embrace her ethnicity. She no longer is satisfied to paint a picture of the endurance of past generations before the Civil Rights Movement; she wants to enlighten readers about possibilities they face today. Having her characters embody attitudes and behaviors that are anachronistic, she demonstrates through the stories of past generations that despite hardships, it is possible for hardworking individuals to achieve their dreams and goals. She has moved her perspective from the past to the present and future, and she leads readers to share that perspective of hope. These ideas are developed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Overview

Subsequent chapters of the dissertation develop the ideas outlined in this introduction. Chapter Two, “‘Them Black Kings’: Influences that Shaped Taylor as A Writer” shows that Taylor’s affinity with Du Bois was through her father, Wilbert Taylor, who exemplified much of what Du Bois sought to convey in children’s literature. Chapter Three, “‘He Can’t Speak No More’: Taylor Challenges Perceptions of African Americans in Her Early Stage Books,” shows that Taylor’s early stage books align with the purposes of reflecting Du Bois’s objectives to re-image African Americans, re-cast the African American family, and write African American into history. Chapter Four, “Changing Focus in Taylor’s Middle Stage Books,” shows that Taylor diverts from reflecting Du Bois’s objectives as she did in her early stage books by diminishing the patriarchal family model and showing a nuanced change to plots that question the dominant culture’s power. Chapter Five, “‘We’s Free Now’ and ‘Use Your Head’: Agency and Efficacy in Taylor’s Late Stage Books,” shows how main characters achieve greater agency and efficacy in the late stage books. Taylor moves away from showing merely how black characters endure white oppression but how they thrive in spite of it. Chapter Six, “Conclusion,” discusses the ramifications of Taylor’s message of agency for her readers.

Chapter II

“THEM BLACK KINGS”:

INFLUENCES THAT SHAPED TAYLOR AS A WRITER

Taylor subtly suggests her affinity to W. E. B. Du Bois’s ideology in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* when protagonist Cassie Logan and her three brothers find T. J. Avery flipping through the pages of Du Bois’s book, *The Negro* (1915). T. J. deflects suspicion that he is filching test questions from his teacher (the Logans’ mother) by explaining his interest in the book: “Jus’ lookin’ at Miz [Mary] Logan’s history book, that’s all. I’m mighty interested in that place called Egypt she’s been tellin’ us ‘bout and them black kings that was rulin’ back then” (*Roll* 76). *The Negro* is one of the earliest histories of Africans in sub-Saharan civilizations and includes one of the first accounts of the impact of centuries of slave trade in the West. Taylor’s use of *The Negro* is an appropriate prop in T. J.’s charade and is a likely text in Mary Logan’s lesson plan, but one could overlook its significance in Taylor’s ideology since this is the only time Taylor alludes to Du Bois or his writings in the Logan chronicles. A closer look at the Logan saga, however, reveals that Taylor’s allusion to Du Bois is more than a figurative nod at a man she admires. In naming Du Bois and alluding to *The Negro*, Taylor symbolically and literally engages with Du Bois in call-and-response,¹ a method of oratory combining the speaker’s statements with echoes from the audience.

¹ The mention of “call” is nodding to the African American tradition of call-and-response. For further discussion, see Keith E. Byerman, John F. Callahan, Christa Dixon, Theodore O. Mason, Jr., Geneva Smitherman, and Howard Thurman.

Du Bois's Literature for Children

Highlighting Du Bois's book accentuates Taylor's like-mindedness to a man who was something of a "black king" in African American cultural history. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963), leader of the African American intelligentsia of the early twentieth century, was the first African American to earn a doctorate at Harvard University, in 1885, where he defended his dissertation, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States, 1638-1870*. A prolific writer for adults, he was particularly noted for *The Souls of Black Folk* in which he insists that "the problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the color line" (17). Du Bois was the only African American on the founding committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He served as editor of the NAACP magazine, *The Crisis*, for twenty-four years (1910-1934). Throughout his impressive career, Du Bois promoted a variety of concepts, such as the "talented tenth," the "New Negro," and "All Art is Propaganda" ("Criteria" 297).²

Although Du Bois's aforementioned accomplishments do not relate directly to children or their literature, he was involved in children's literature through his writing about the black child and his aspirations for African American children's literature. Du Bois's view of African American children and what he considers their most pressing needs are encapsulated in the chapter titled "The Immortal Child" in his autobiography, *Darkwater*:

² This discussion of Du Bois is informed by the scholarship of David Levering Lewis's *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*.

If a man[,] die shall he live again? We do not know. But this we do know, that our children's children live forever and grow and develop toward perfection as they are trained. All human problems, then, center in the Immortal Child and his education is the problem of problems. (193)

Du Bois determines that despite the importance of education in school, it is the responsibility of educated parents to train their children at home in order to “accomplish the immortality,” to help African American children become productive members of society (*Darkwater* 203). In an article for *The Crisis*, he regards children as “embryonic men and women rather than as babes or imbeciles” (“Discipline” 269). During the last two decades of the twentieth century, children's literary scholars Violet Harris, Dianne Johnson, and Katharine Capshaw Smith provided important insights into Du Bois' contribution to the genre. Referring to excerpts from two magazine Du Bois edited, *The Crisis* and *The Brownies' Book*, as well as to *Darkwater*, these scholars articulate that Du Bois helped launch the modern African American children's literary tradition (V. Harris, “African American” 545-48, 550; V. Harris, “Race Consciousness” 192-97; Johnson, *Telling Tales* 15-38; and Katharine Smith 1-52).³

³Du Bois's affiliation with the African American children's literary tradition remains largely unacknowledged by the general public even though scholars like Katharine Smith have written about the subject in recent decades. An example of the lack of recognition of Du Bois's accomplishment with children's literature is apparent in a published children's book of non-fiction by Wade Hudson, *Powerful Words: More than 200 Years of Extraordinary Writing by African Americans* (2004). Hudson has authored several books about African Americans for children. The book jacket names him a “force behind Just Us,” so one might expect that if he knew about Du Bois's involvement in children's literature, he would have chosen to share the information with children. Nonetheless, in his brief biography about Du Bois, Hudson notes only that Du Bois was “editor of *Crisis*, a magazine published by the civil rights organization” (61). He does not mention Du Bois's involvement with *The Brownies' Book* children's magazine or Du Bois's desire to engage children in civil rights, both of which would be of interest to young readers. In contrast, to coin a phrase by Paule Marshall, Taylor is a mouth-king for Du Bois (qtd. in Harper 75).

In his position as editor, Du Bois took steps toward generating literature dedicated to meeting the needs of children. Katharine Smith states that Du Bois writing demonstrates that he intended to create a “sophisticated and militant black childhood” in which children were guided to speak for adults and to speak to adults, particularly about racial discrimination (xix). She documents Du Bois’s use of cross writing—a strategy of writing that blurs the boundaries between what is generally held to be appropriate for an adult audience and for a child audience—as a useful way to address his concerns. Although cross writing is generally understood to be a means of addressing adults as a secondary audience in a work for children, Smith asserts that Du Bois initially instituted cross writing as a means of addressing children as a secondary audience in *The Crisis*. Smith argues that more strategically, Du Bois’s use of cross writing became a basic means for helping children learn about and commit themselves to the political concerns of adults (2). He acquainted children with their potential as change agents. Material written on a child’s level in *The Crisis* was useful because children could be conduits to transfer information to adults who were illiterate or were culturally or intellectually deficient in matters of importance to the black community (Katharine Smith xix).

In 1916, Du Bois increased his attempt to reach out to children by dedicating the October issue of *The Crisis* to children, calling it The Children’s Number. The Children’s Number included stories, poems, and features geared to interest children.⁴ It also includes baby contests, displaying pictures of engaging children from infancy to

⁴ Du Bois reports that the Children’s Numbers made “the widest appeal to our readers” (“True Brownies” 285). Although the issue is generally considered to be intended for children, Donnarae MacCann considers this special issue to be primarily intended to “inspire and admonish adults in their children-rearing role” since it “did not address at the child’s level a socio-political concern” (MacCann, “Effie Lee Newsome” 60).

adulthood. In this issue, the children are the primary audience. Du Bois claims that The Children's Number became the most popular issue ("True Brownies" 285). Du Bois's influence in the annual undertaking is evident in that the issue dedicated to children ended the year after Du Bois gave up his editorship.

Interestingly, cross writing creates its own set of concerns for Du Bois. Because cross writing means that the younger generation read about adult concerns, Du Bois finds that cross writing works at cross purposes with his ultimate goals for children. He expresses consternation that he had to publish information about race riots and lynchings in each Children's Number from 1915 through 1919 since they were newsworthy current events. Nevertheless, he thinks that the accounts of violence engenders fear and hostility, such as one young person expresses in a letter: "I hate the white man just as much as he hates me and probably more!" (qtd. in Du Bois, "True Brownies" 285). Du Bois states in that issue that he does not intend to stir up animosity in children (285).

Du Bois worked with Jessie Redmon Fauset, an accomplished writer for adults and children, to design a magazine for African American children, *The Brownies' Book*. This publication addresses his concern that literature available for children does not help them prepare for their role as agents of change in society. Written by the "gentry class" of the early 1900s, literature for children was generally intended to guide white children in how to view black children—with "benevolent condescension"—and was informed by the belief in the myth of white supremacy (R. Gordon Kelly qtd. in V. Harris, "Race"

192).⁵ One popular magazine for children, *St. Nicholas*,⁶ to which Du Bois's daughter Yolanda subscribed as a child, stereotyped African American characters pejoratively. Resenting what society generally accepted as suitable literature for the black child, Du Bois asserts:

Heretofore the education of the Negro child has been too much in terms of white people. All through school life his [sic] text-books contain much about white people and little or nothing about his own race. All the pictures he sees are of white people. Most of the books he reads are by white authors, and his heroes and heroines are white. If he goes to a moving picture show, the same is true. If a Negro appears on the screen, he [sic] is usually a caricature or a clown. The result is that all of the Negro child's idealism, all his sense of the good, the great, and the beautiful is associated almost entirely with white people, [not with black people]. The effect can readily be imagined. He unconsciously gets the impression that the Negro has little chance to be good, great, heroic, or beautiful. ("The Grown-ups' Corner" 63)

⁵ Violet Harris discusses what some identified as the "selective tradition" for the gentry, which values "truth, honor, temperance, prudence, justice, polite speech, culture, refinement, and discipline" for themselves, while espousing racial intolerance, institutionalized discrimination, and social inequity ("Race Consciousness" 192). She also states that children's literature directed toward white children promoted paternalism toward African Americans whom they considered "inferior, childlike, and happy-go-lucky" (192). That literature designated African Americans to be "caretakers of whites" and to know their subservient place in society (V. Harris, "Race Consciousness" 192).

⁶ Research by Sterling Brown, Dorothy Broderick, Donnarae MacCann, Rudine Sims, and Violet Harris attests to the extent of pejorative stereotyping related to African American characters in books for children in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. For instance, Johnson reviews what was proffered in the popular periodical *St. Nicholas* (1873-1940 and 1949), such as a series of poems about ten "Little Niggers." The Ten Little Niggers verse book series contained cartoon pictures of ten diminutive adult males who were doing outlandish things (Johnson, *Telling Tales* 15-16). Johnson explains that Du Bois countered the negativity regarding black characters in children's literature by portraying in pictures and words beautiful and intelligent African Americans (15-16).

Du Bois expressed his dilemma as such: “To educate them [black children] in human hatred is more disastrous to them than to the hated; to seek to raise them in ignorance of their racial identity and peculiar situation is inadvisable—impossible” (“True Brownies” 285). In the same article, he promotes *The Brownies’ Book* as “a little magazine for children—for all children, but especially for *ours*, the ‘children of the Sun’” (286). The monthly periodical published only twenty-four issues, January 1920 through December 1921, yet Dianne Johnson and Katharine Smith are among those who herald the magazine as the beginning of modern African American children’s literature.⁷

By way of introducing *The Crisis* readers to the inaugural edition of *The Brownies’ Book*, Du Bois signals that along with entertainment, he intends to add to readers’ lives in other ways. He delineates his seven objectives for the children’s magazine:

- (a) To make colored children realize that being “colored” is a normal, beautiful thing
- (b) To make them familiar with the history and achievements of the Negro race.
- (c) To make them know that other colored children have grown into beautiful, useful and famous persons.
- (d) To teach them delicately a code of honor and action in their relations with white children.

⁷ Johnson calls *The Brownies’ Book* the “genesis” (“*The Brownies’ Book*”), and Katharine Smith explains that the magazine “signals the origin of black children’s literature as a genre separate from adult literature” (25).

- (e) To turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition, and love of their own homes and companions
- (f) To point out the best amusement and joys and worth-while things of life
- (g) To inspire them to prepare for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of sacrifice. (“True Brownies 286)

Johnson, Harris, and Smith discussed at length how Du Bois carried out his objectives (Johnson, *Telling Tales* 18-36; V. Harris, “Race Consciousness” 192-6; and Katharine Smith, *Children’s Literature* 26-42). Most telling is Harris’s observation that this children’s magazine was “a revolutionary act” (192).⁸ She states that *The Brownies’ Book* was helpful in developing attributes of the New Negro, an ideal emanating from the Harlem Renaissance. The New Negro was a “self-conscious creation of blacks themselves” since it encouraged “a sense of racial pride and confidence,” urging them to command respect and be assertive (V. Harris, “Race Consciousness” 193).⁹ Harris concludes that the periodical “coaxed its readers to believe in themselves and their race” (“Race Consciousness” 196), which is a succinct summary of all Du Bois’s purposes. In her recent book *If We Could Change the World*, Rebecca de Schweinitz attests that although Du Bois was not the only one to propose ways to promote the black child, he

⁸ Rather than dissecting Du Bois’s seven objectives for *The Brownies’ Book*, Violet Harris explores eight themes, such as “race pride” and “beautiful Blacks” and shows that they are in many of the seventy-seven stories published in the periodical over the two years (“Race Consciousness” 193-94).

⁹ Katharine Smith and Dianne Johnson address the content of *The Brownies’ Book*. In *Children’s Literature of the Harlem Renaissance*, Smith argues that the “seven goals” for the magazine “point to nurturing black children’s ability to contend with bigotry, bolstering their racial self-image, and instructing them in ways to aid their race” (27). Dianne Johnson calls the endeavors a “seven-point list of information and skills to impart to the youngsters,” and she determined that the objectives encompass two enterprises: “becoming a whole human being” and “becoming a responsible member of an African American community” (*Telling Tales* 16, 27).

was especially effective at enhancing the view of black childhood in order to effect changes in society (2-5, 11).

Du Bois's seven objectives can be distinguished into three categories. Re-imagining African Americans, the first category of Du Bois's objectives, addresses a child reader's psychological well-being. His objectives are to "make colored children realize that being "colored is a normal, beautiful thing" and to "point out the best amusements and joys and worth-while things of life" (Du Bois, "True Brownies" 286). The need to accentuate the physical attractiveness and personal value of black persons is exemplified in a letter from young Alice Martin. The girl acknowledges that she saw black people pictured in books, but she did not like what she saw:

All the pictures are pretty, nice-looking men and women, except the Africans. They always look so ugly. . . . I see lots of ugly white people . . . , but they are not the ones they put in the geography [books]. (Martin qtd. in Fauset, "The Judge")

The category of re-imagining African Americans relates to the need to improve the child's self-concept since Du Bois was motivated to help African American children realize their individual beauty. The implication in mainstream American literature was that being white is normal and beautiful and that being non-white—black—is neither normal nor beautiful (Johnson, *Telling Tales* 18-21). Dianne Johnson explores the African American child's self-image in the chapter "The Pedagogy and the Promise of Du Bois's *The Brownies' Book Magazine*," in which she cites the findings of psychologist Gloria Powell who states that "being a White person in a White society

appears to mean very little to the development of self-concept but that being Black in a White society seems to be one of the most important factors in such development” (qtd. in Johnson, *Telling Tales* 18). Rudine Sims Bishop asserts that both white and black children deserve an accurate picture of African Americans in literature so each has a more accurate self-image in light of those around them, for without a proper view of African Americans, both white and black children have an unfair perspective of “the rightness of whiteness” (“Walk Tall” 561). Du Bois’s inclusion of photographs of attractive black children and adults in magazines heightens white readers’ awareness of black people’s value and helps black people develop a healthier self-concept (Johnson, “I See Me” 12).

Beyond the importance of accentuating physical attractiveness, Du Bois emphasized that African Americans were active and productive. One letter exemplifies the absence of a reliable and positive discussion of African Americans in mainstream children’s books. Bella Seymour in New York writes that after studying Betsy Ross, George Washington, and other historical figures, her daughter asked her, “Mamma, didn’t colored folks do anything?” (qtd. in Du Bois, “Grown-ups’ Corner” 63-64). The mother explains that she catalogued for her daughter some famous historical figures, but her daughter asked, “Well, that’s just stories. Didn’t they do anything in a book?” (45). Since the girl had not read about black persons in books, she assumes they never accomplished anything exceptional. In essence, *The Brownies’ Book* addresses the question of that girl and others like her. Black people have accomplished a great deal for others. Du Bois included stories, poems, and non-fiction features that demonstrate that

the beauty and accomplishments of black persons in America and Africa “grows out of their actions and their talents” (Johnson, *Telling Tales* 26).

Katharine Smith explains that one way Du Bois helps to fashion the New Negro was by illustrating the resourcefulness of subjugated people. She notes that he includes trickster tales involving well-known characters like Br'er Possum and Br'er Bear by Julian Elihu Bagley and Br'er Rabbit by Julia Price Burrell (36-39).¹⁰ The tales by Bagley and Burrell help to acquaint northern readers with the southern literary tradition of orality and the trickster figure. Smith states that the tales teach how subordinates co-exist with a dominant culture, and they highlight the importance of home training. She also explains that the stories emphasize the “power to transform the (supposedly) weak into the triumphant” (37-39). Along with other fiction, the tales help readers develop positive self-images and visualize their potential as change agents.

Many of the non-fiction stories impart the truth about the worth of African Americans and their ability to enjoy lives rich with purpose and to reach their potential.¹¹ Du Bois stresses that one way blacks reached their potential is from achieving an education. Stories also recount common childhood experiences that involve visiting relatives, traveling, and celebrating holidays, as well as other enjoyable pastimes for children in the 1920s (Johnson-Feelings, “Everyday” 114). He endeavors to help

¹⁰ These are Bagley's stories: “How Mr. Crocodile Got His Rough Back,” “How Br'er Possum Learned to Play Dead,” “Once 'Twas a Little Pig,” “The Little Pig's Way Out,” and “The Story-Telling Contest. All are reprinted in Dianne Johnson-Feelings's *The Best of The Brownies' Book*.

¹¹ In Ella Madden's “A Girl's Will,” Helen La Rose could not attend college as a young woman because she believed that she should care for her six younger siblings after the death of their mother. When she was thirty-five, Helen was finally able to realize her dream and go to college with the *bon mot* on her lips: “You can do anything you want to, if you want to hard enough” (137-39). Example of amusements and joys are exemplified in “Jim's Theory of Santa Claus” in which author Pocahontas Foster has Jim explore the wonder of Christmas and Santa Claus in the magical realm of possibility (140-41) and in “Food for ‘Lazy Betty’” in which Jesse Faucet discusses various foods children enjoy (121-23).

Americans of all colors realize the value of black people so the black child catches a vision of his or her significance. Helping black children see their worth, as Du Bois sought to accomplish in *The Brownies' Book*, leads to their being “culturally, politically, and aesthetically sophisticated” (Katharine Smith 1).

Re-casting the African American family, the second category Du Bois addresses with his objectives, is directed at ensuring the child reader’s emotional and social wellness. Just as he wants to redirect children’s views of African Americans from what was taught to them in literature, Du Bois wants white and black people to reconsider the importance and purpose of the African American family in relationship to society. His stated objectives are to “turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition, and love of their own homes and companions,” to “teach them delicately a code of honor and action in their relations with white children,” and to “inspire them to prepare for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of sacrifice” (Du Bois, “True Brownies” 286).

Du Bois expresses concern for the state of the African American family, explaining his viewpoint in various articles in *The Crisis*. He chides black people for having unreasonable expectations of their marriage partners and a poor basis for a marriage relationship, whose purpose is to rear children (“Marriage” 247-48). He reports that 1,256 black children out of 10,000 were illegitimate in the early 1920s (“End of it All”). In the same article, to counter the prevalence of single-parent families, Du Bois calls for a strong marital foundation for rearing children because “without marriage there can be today no properly guarded childhood” (253). He is concerned that women were

working on careers and waiting too long before starting their families (“Birth” 248). In the same article he notes that housekeeping is arduous for the wife/mother, who needs energy to train the children, and thus women should not work outside the home.

Furthermore, he reports that 1,356 of 10,000 African American children died before their first birthday; during the same period, only 821 white children died (“Birth” 248).

Therefore, he states that the way for families to meet these challenges is for couples to have only the number of children they could afford and manage. To ensure strong and healthy children, he suggests that couples limit their families to two or three children, with children spaced apart three to five years (“Birth” 248). All of these efforts are intended to ensure a child’s welfare in the family.

Du Bois advocates for strong families and describes what a strong family looked like. The model that he believes would benefit children is a patriarchal, two-parent family, which is akin to the Victorian model¹² (Katharine Smith 25). He argues that it is in stable families such as these that children can be reared to fulfill their purpose. He calls for a loving and supporting mother to hold the prominent place, as the center of the domestic sphere; her chief job is to be caretaker of her children (Katharine Smith 15-18). Smith asserts that in Du Bois’s assessment, the children should receive the best opportunities to excel and grow, even at the expense of the mother’s personal growth.

¹² Both Katharine Smith and Daylanne English assert that Du Bois has more in mind than building strong families in the black community. Smith notes that Du Bois emphasized a strong home as the place to rear children by emphasizing houses of affluent black families. He occasionally published *The Home Number*, which pictured homes of affluent African Americans, in lieu of *The Children’s Number*. Even more, he emphasized the family within the home (Katharine Smith 14-15). In the “Family Eugenics in the *Crisis* Family,” Daylanne English expounds upon Du Bois’s use of both *The Crisis* and *The Brownies’ Book* to promote eugenics, a popular topic of the day. By harkening back to the Victorian model of the family, he was also taking on the values important to the white middle and upper class. According to English, Du Bois envisioned middle-class couples bearing children with the intent of enhancing race “brains and beauty” (300).

Similarly, Smith notes that a *Crisis* story by Ethel Caution,¹³ “Buyers of Dreams: A Story,” teaches that a woman chooses best if she decides to stay at home with children (Katharine Smith 17). Smith asserts that Du Bois’s model of the black family was as controversial at the time as it would be now, particularly in his emphasis that mothers should remain at home and reign in the domestic sphere. However, Smith notes that many black women were attracted to the idea of staying home to be with their children due to the history of enslavement when slave mothers had been forced to abdicate their rights. She explains that for some women, staying at home is most appealing to them even if being a mother does not offer them the self-actualization that it did for their children (17).

As he states in his objectives, Du Bois wants to help children emulate and love their families (“True Brownies” 286), calling for them to realize that their home and family is their source of stability. Du Bois specifies how parents can follow his exhortation:

At least in your home you have a chance to make your child’s surroundings of the best: books and pictures and music; cleanliness, order, sympathy and understanding; information, friendship and love,—there is not much evil in the world that can stand against such home surroundings. (“Crisis Children”)¹⁴

¹³ Ethel Caution also submitted pieces to *The Brownies’ Book*. Dianne Johnson-Feelings reprinted Caution’s stories in *The Best of The Brownies’ Book*: “Polly Sits Tight” (166) and “Tip Top of the World” (331).

¹⁴ Du Bois wrote that “with children brought with thought and foresight into intelligent family circles trained by parents, teachers, friends and society, we have Eternal Progress and Eternal Life. Against these, no barriers stand; to them no Problem is insoluble” (“End of it All”).

Violet Harris explains that in many of the stories, the parents were “pivotal” in helping the children achieve personal growth and in instructing how to relate to others regarding racial concerns (“Race Consciousness” 194).¹⁵ Du Bois’s view of the family was more far-sighted than simply being a comfortable and safe place to rear children and to develop a strong self-image.

Du Bois argues that taking responsibility for training one’s children at home is an important duty (“Crisis Children”). He states that within the two-parent family, parents could cultivate their children’s sense of self and help them navigate and make changes in a racist society. Du Bois assures his readers that the family home, not the schoolhouse, is the optimum place to train children to take part in the battles they face in the “sneering, cruel world” (“Children”). He does not want a child to be pampered or “hedge[d] about that it may not know and will not dream” (“Of the Shielding Arm” 288), nor does he want parents to “leave their children to sink or swim in the sea of race prejudice” (“Of the Grim Thrust”). These extremes can happen in families who “are striving to improve their condition and push their children up and on” (“Children”). Instead, he wants parents to teach their children to be change agents. He writes, “Children are the only real Progress, the sole Hope, the sure Victory over Evil. Properly reared and trained and there is no Problem or Wrong that we cannot withstand” (“Children”). Du Bois says fathers and mothers should model resistance to a white dominant society and allow children to

¹⁵ In Jessie Fauset’s “Turkey Drumsticks,” the family enjoys Thanksgiving dinner at Grandma Kingsley’s home. When they discover that Rosemary has been helping an orphaned youth, they rally around to help him become part of the family. By the end of the story, readers learn that the story is a true account of Grandpa Kingsley, who years before, was the orphaned youth in the story. Another story, Willie May King’s “The Adoption of Ophelia,” emphasizes the importance of a father’s responsibilities to his offspring. Once the Johnsons have grown to love their beautiful adopted daughter, Ophelia, they learn that Ophelia is actually their niece, the daughter of Mr. Johnson’s estranged brother, Howard, who had been unable to care for Ophelia when she was born, but he returns to assist in her rearing.

participate in racial uplift (Katharine Smith 15, 18). He calls for “frank explanation” and believes that ninety percent of the time the child will understand (“Frank Truth” 289). Du Bois’s focus on the home as a training ground reflects his intention to educate African American children about racism without inciting fear or hatred. He intends for *The Brownies’ Book* to prepare readers “for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of sacrifice” (“True Brownies” 286). He expects *The Brownies’ Book* to spotlight the African American child’s role in the “movement for black social progress” because his hope for the black community revolves around the black child (Katharine Smith 1). Du Bois also promotes migration, encouraging blacks to escape “out of the land of lynching, lawlessness, and industrial oppression” in the South and into the North where opportunities were increasing. Continuing, he encourages people in the North to welcome “escaping fellows” despite the “temporary difficulties” their presence will incur (“Migration”).

One of the ways Du Bois challenges youth to be change agents is seen in his publication of Langston Hughes’s folktale “The Gold Piece,” in which two orphans acquire a gold coin from the sale of their pigs. Determining that their needs are less than those of a bent old woman whom they encounter, they give the coin to her to care for her blind child. The folktale reworks the European tale by the same name and emphasizes that children should learn to use their resources to benefit others and not merely to benefit themselves (Katharine Smith 30). In publishing this story and others like it, the magazine set a precedence for emphasizing that African American children can grow up to benefit

their community as doctors, lawyers, politicians, farmers, business men and women, educators, and writers (V. Harris, “Race Consciousness” 193).

Nonetheless, two issues are problematic in a discussion of Du Bois’s depiction of the African American family. First, Du Bois comments about the “talented tenth,” the educated few who were financially stable and able to provide their children with a middle class lifestyle in which the mother stayed home to raise the children. In truth, in the 1920s, few African American men could hope to be part of the highly educated, well-paid ten percent of the African American population, so they could not follow his dictates. Many African American mothers had to work outside the home for financial security. Expecting these mothers to remain at home was unrealistic. Second, Du Bois’s inference that readers face only *little* “hurts and resentments” is problematic. The racial discrimination readers endured, especially in the South, could be demeaning and dangerous, not inconsequential (Chafe, Gavin, and Korstad 12-13, 31-32). To refer to the slights as “little” minimizes their struggles.¹⁶ Giving readers the best training in *The Brownies’ Book* required a true picture of the problem of the color line. Referring to hurts and resentments as “little” was neither accurate nor helpful. Notwithstanding, Du Bois attempted to fulfill his objectives about re-casting the African American family in the children’s magazine.

Finding new ways to present African Americans other than how they are revealed in history textbooks, the third and final category embodying Du Bois’s objectives, involves helping the child reader on both an educational and an intellectual basis. Du

¹⁶ Perhaps Du Bois was referring to an incident he recounts in *The Souls of Black Folk*, in which a new girl in the neighborhood, whom he considered a friend, would not accept a card from him when the children were exchanging cards because he was a Negro (*Souls* 10).

Bois wants *The Brownies' Book* to “make [readers] familiar with the history and achievements of the Negro race,” and by doing so, he hopes readers would “know that other colored children have grown into beautiful, useful and famous persons” (“True Brownies” 286). Du Bois wants to amend what young people are taught about the subordinate place and minimal accomplishments of African Americans in history and in the present by acquainting readers with true experiences of African Americans. *The Brownies' Book* carries out this goal in the numerous feature articles written about historical figures, such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Alexander Dumas. Although Du Bois oversaw the entire magazine, as an historian he was expressly responsible for writing a monthly column, “As the Crow Flies,” in which he reports historical facts related to the accomplishments of historical and contemporary black people, as well as current national and world news. For instance, Du Bois praises the brave “colored” troops coming home from fighting in World War I after helping Europeans achieve their liberty, and he reports an anti-lynching conference in New York (“As the Crow Flies” 24).

To augment the objective of teaching black history, he also includes fiction. One story, “The Heritage” by Blanche Lynn Patterson, emphasizes the accomplishments of a girl who is discouraged because she has to hold a job while she attends school. Her grandmother helps her view her employment as a way to achieve something that will be beneficial for others in the African American community: an education. The grandmother reminds her, “You owe it to them [your parents] never to quit till you show that you can use the opportunities you have. . . . If you fail, you disappoint yo’r whole

race” (Patterson 35). The grandmother’s conclusion articulates Du Bois’s theme, that by achieving an education, the individual uplifts others in the community. Accentuating the accomplishments of African American men and women solidifies for children an understanding of their place in the world and the responsibility each has to others in a community.

In these three categories, *The Brownies’ Book* works as propaganda by enhancing black readers’ sense of themselves, assuring them that they belong in a family and a community, and giving them a heritage of which they can be proud. In his famous speech, “Criteria of Negro Art,” Du Bois declares that “all Art is propaganda and ever must be” (296). Dianne Johnson, Daylanne English, and Fern Kory rightly infer that Du Bois’s motto pertains to the arena of literature for African American children as well as to the artists, writers, and musicians creating during the Harlem Renaissance (Johnson, *Telling Tales* 285; English 311; Kory 96). Producing literature for children is a political statement. Du Bois is credited with beginning a successful campaign that enabled America to re-imagining the potential of African American children. In essence, what Du Bois provided for readers of *The Brownies’ Book* countered what the children had seen in the illustrations and the texts for white children.

Du Bois’s influence in African American children’s literature continues beyond the two-year publication of *The Brownies’ Book*. In 1975, Eloise Greenfield wrote an essay that Rudine Sims Bishop considers a “manifesto for contemporary African American children’s literature, a declaration of its principal objectives and of its implicit

underlying philosophical or ideological stance” (Bishop, *Free within Ourselves* 91).¹⁷ As Bishop observes, Greenfield’s list replicates many of Du Bois’s endeavors for *The Brownies’ Book*. Bishop avers that the purposes Du Bois espouses and which Greenfield expresses “permeate much of the African American children’s literature of the last quarter of the twentieth century” (*Free Within Ourselves* 92). In a similar vein, Violet Harris holds that beginning in the 1970s there arose a “cadre of writers whose avowed purposes for writing and illustrating children’s books harkened back to those of Du Bois” (“African American” 550). Harris does not delineate reasons for her assertion, perhaps believing her claim about the relationship between Du Bois’s work and that of what Rudine Sims calls “image-makers” to be self-evident (Sims, 79, 96-97). For the purposes of this dissertation, the most notable of the image-makers mentioned by Violet Harris is Mildred Taylor.

Evidence of Taylor’s Harkening to Du Bois

The scholarship of Johnson, Harris, and Smith lays a foundation to suggest the viability of Taylor’s literary connection to Du Bois’s literature for children. Evidenced in her “manifesto,” Taylor’s commitment to create an image of African Americans and the African American family, and to portray African Americans anew in history is a close approximation of Du Bois’s objectives for *The Brownies’ Book*. She had not read *The Brownies’ Book* as a child (Alli);¹⁸ the magazine had been out of circulation for more than two decades by the time she was born. The likely reason that Taylor’s ideology approximates Du Bois’s becomes evident after a close reading of her autobiographical

¹⁷ Eloise Greenfield’s “manifesto” is published in *Horn Book* 51.6 (1975): 624-26.

¹⁸ This was relayed to me in a letter from Mildred Taylor’s assistant, J. Alli, when Taylor was away.

pieces. By the way Taylor describes her father, Wilbert Taylor,¹⁹ it is clear that her impressions of him and his actions show that he epitomized many of Du Bois's objectives. Since she repeatedly acknowledges her father as her inspiration for writing, it seems clear that she is writing what she knows and that in which she believes.

Wilbert Taylor personified many of Du Bois's objectives by how he lived. The affinity between Mildred Taylor's ideology and Du Bois's objectives is recognizable in the way she chooses to talk about Wilbert Taylor. Taylor describes her father in glowing terms. In the author's note in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, she calls him an impressive man of integrity and self-confidence whose advice and wisdom were sought by other men. She describes him as a "highly principled, complex man" with "strong moral fiber" who had an "unyielding faith in himself and his abilities" ("Newbery" 402). Although Wilbert Taylor did not fulfill Du Bois's requirement to be one of the "talented tenth" because he lacked a formal education, he exemplified what Du Bois and others in the 1920s described as a New Negro, including that he exuded a "sense of racial pride and confidence" and "command[ed] respect" (Taylor, "Newbery" 402).²⁰

Corresponding to Du Bois's intentions to re-image the African American child, Wilbert Taylor was active in Taylor's²¹ formative years and all her childhood. He helped his daughter realize that she not only had superlative black people to admire, but that she also was special. Wilbert Taylor indicated his daughter's importance by spending quality

¹⁹ I refer to Taylor's father as Wilbert Taylor throughout this dissertation to differentiate between him and the character named Wilbert in *The Gold Cadillac*.

²⁰ In this glowing description of her father written in 1977, Taylor is memorializing her recently deceased father. Later depictions of characters based on Wilbert Taylor offer a more balanced view and are suggestive of a shift in her ideologies away from strict Dubosian principles.

²¹ I refer to Mildred Taylor as Taylor.

time with her. In the author's note in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Taylor notes that he taught her to ride a horse, to skate, to fly a kite, and to bathe a dog. In the same author's note, along with a description of everyday pleasures Taylor enjoyed with her father, she indicates that he imparted more heady things as well: "[H]e taught me the complex things too. He taught me of myself, of life. He taught me of hopes and dreams." By detailing happy memories in Wilbert Taylor's household, such as taking vacations, going on picnics, and having family reunions (Taylor, "Mildred" 282), Taylor indicates her childhood included "the best amusements and joys and worth-while things in life" as Du Bois states childhood should (Du Bois, "True Brownies" 286). As Du Bois desires for readers of *The Brownies' Book*, Taylor, by all indications, grew up feeling that "being 'colored' [was] a normal, beautiful thing" (Du Bois, "True Brownies" 286).

Replicating the precepts that Du Bois laid down regarding training children within the family, Wilbert Taylor taught family principles which Taylor says she followed (Taylor, "Newbery" 402). His parenting helped refute the claims the media publicized from the Moynihan Report²² and other texts. One way Wilbert Taylor imparted the "life guides" and "principles of survival" was by modeling resistance to white domination and helping others make similar choices (Taylor, "Newbery" 407-08). For example, in 1943 when Wilbert Taylor was twenty-four and Taylor only three weeks old, he had a disagreement at work which almost led to his striking a white man, an action which could

²² The stated intention for Moynihan's report, unofficially attributed to Patrick Daniel Moynihan, was to spotlight for President Lyndon B. Johnson the plight of African Americans in order to prompt legislation in their favor, but the findings had negative repercussions in the African American community. The Moynihan Report indicated that a quarter of African American families were headed by women (25). The description insulted many civil rights leaders. Because the report was leaked to the public without a substantial explanation, the public perception of the findings was that the African American family was falling to pieces by not having a male as the leader of the family.

have had disastrous results for him, a southern black (Taylor, “Mildred” 268). Wilbert Taylor decided to quit his job and leave the South (Taylor, “Newbery” 270), an act of defiance that Du Bois encourages black southerners to follow (Du Bois, “Migration”). By the time Taylor was three months old, Wilbert Taylor moved his wife Deletha and his daughters to Toledo, Ohio, turning a hurtful experience into an ambitious opportunity for his family. Taylor reports that by participating in the Great Migration, Wilbert Taylor refused to allow her and her sister Wilma to live as he had lived, “in a segregated, racist society that allowed little or no opportunity to blacks” (Taylor, “Mildred” 269).

Mirroring something Du Bois emphasizes, Wilbert Taylor was involved in race uplift in his community. His choice to leave the South affected his family as well as a number of other relatives. Within a year, he and Deletha bought their first home and invited other relatives who were migrating north to stay with them until they could afford housing elsewhere (Taylor, “Mildred” 269). Thus, Taylor explains how her father enacted what Du Bois emphasized, that each individual must contribute to the improvement of the community. Wilbert Taylor modeled the importance of taking advantage of opportunities for self-improvement by buying a home in a white neighborhood and purchasing new cars—indicators that he was part of the rising black middle class (Taylor, “Mildred” 269). Wilbert Taylor’s actions taught Taylor many things about the vitality of families like hers, including not allowing others to limit her level of success.

As a strong and caring father, Wilbert Taylor helped prepare her daughter to fulfill her life’s occupation. He trained her and her sister to be change agents. Taylor

writes, “Throughout my childhood [my father] impressed upon my sister and me that we were somebody, that we were important and could do anything we set our minds to do or be”²³ (“Newbery” 402). He patiently made her aware of racial prejudice but encouraged her not to accept it. She states that when teachers taught her propaganda against the Soviet Union, he gently coached her that blacks in America were similarly denied voting rights and other privileges (“Newbery” 403). When white neighbors put their houses up for sale in the upscale neighborhood to which his family had moved, Wilbert Taylor told his daughter that she should respect herself and their home and not worry about the opinion of others (Taylor, “Newbery” 403). When the family was denied service at a restaurant in Wyoming, he helped Taylor realize that being angry about discrimination was futile and that she needed a “stronger weapon” than anger to “destroy such bigotry” (Taylor, “Newbery” 403). Wilbert Taylor believed that his daughter had “a great gift of knowing how to write” and that she had “a special mission to fulfill” (Taylor, “Newbery” 408). She came to understand that her mission was to be a writer who could open up to “boys and girls, men and women, another dimension of the Black experience” (Taylor, “Newbery” 409). She explains the outcome of her father’s guidance was evident by her chosen profession, writing books about the black experience. She surmises that he never “realized how much he contributed to either that gift or to that mission” (“Newbery” 408).

²³ Taylor’s explanation of her father’s influence in her life could probably be true of the influence he had in the life of his other daughter, Wilma (1940-2007). Wilma Taylor was a long-time advocate of black rights. On January 17, 2008 Taylor accepted an honor from the *Denver Post* on her sister’s behalf posthumously for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Humanitarian Award for thirty years dedicated to “granting equal rights and political opportunity to all” (Davidson). The article pictures Taylor and her daughter, Porsche L. Taylor, accepting the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Wilbert Taylor helped to explain African American history to his children. As Du Bois had sought to accomplish for readers of his children's magazine, Wilbert Taylor helped his daughter see the "history and the achievements of the Negro race" (Du Bois, "True Brownies" 286). Wilbert Taylor helped Taylor realize that African Americans were different from the way they were portrayed in literature. A master storyteller, he skillfully acted out family stories from several generations by fireplaces and on moon-lit porches. She states that when there was humor, he would pass that along. Continuing, she says that when there was sadness or pain, he would pass that along as well (*Women Writers*). Besides the humorous foibles of mischievous children, he also told stories of "small and often dangerous triumphs of Black people, . . . stories about human pride and survival in a cruelly racist society" (Taylor, "Newbery" 404). Taylor explains in an author's note that it was through family stories, which told a history "not then written in books," that she learned about the accomplishments of people before and after the Civil War (*Roll* n. pag.). Wilbert Taylor helped his daughter appreciate the contributions of historical and contemporary black persons. His storytelling was so effective that when she came across black characters in fiction, she wondered why books could not tell about attractive and brave characters. She chose to believe that black people were courageous instead of believing what textbooks offered, a "lackluster history of Black people . . . , a history of docile, subservient people happy with their fate who did little or nothing to shatter the chains that bound them, both before and after slavery" (Taylor, "Newbery" 404). Wilbert Taylor articulated a perspective that differed from what Taylor had learned in public school history classes and bolstered her appreciation for her forbearers and

herself. Her father's counter histories profoundly affected her self-image, as evidenced by her statement that "[t]hose stories helped make me who I am" (Taylor "Mildred" 285).

Establishing Taylor's affinity with Du Bois through her description of her father is important because she had not read *The Brownies' Book* nor was she attuned to Du Bois's ideology when she was growing up. She came to appreciate his ideas a little later in her life. Through personal correspondence, Taylor related that although *The Crisis* came to her parents' home, she "was most impacted by the writings and life of W. E. B. Du Bois while ... involved in the African American student movement during the late 1960s" (Alli). She matriculated at the University of Colorado in order to pursue a master's degree in Journalism (1968-1969). Intrigued by the Black Student Association (BSA)²⁴ when writing an article about the organization for the campus newspaper, she became a willing participant in the movement.

Apparent by the list of her activities while she was an activist, Taylor's involvement with the student movement entailed learning about other black movements of the 1960s and 1970s—the black arts, the black power, and the black women's movements.²⁵ She heard leaders in the BSA including poet/playwright Amiri Baraka and poet Don L. Lee. In the movement, she heard the pronouncement "Black is Beautiful."

²⁴ The black student movement had a two-fold purpose beyond the obvious objective of uniting black students and celebrating the black experience. The group worked to enroll more African Americans in college and to offer courses to assist in African American students' educational pursuits. Despite the advancements in education due to the Civil Rights Movement, traditionally white colleges and universities (TWCU) were admitting only a few African American students. In the fall of 1968, of the eighty colleges polled in America, 23,680 African American students were enrolled, which was slightly less than two percent of the entire collegiate population on those campuses (Cortada viii).

²⁵ The three black movements were most active between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s. The inception of the BAM is associated with the assassination of Malcolm X (21 Feb. 1965) and the opening of the Black Arts Repertory Theater School (BARTS) by Amiri Baraka. Hoyt Fuller calls the aesthetics that guided the BAM "a system of isolating and evaluating the artistic works of black people which reflect the special character and imperatives of the black experience" (qtd. in W. Harris 68).

Unlike Du Bois's statement that *The Brownies' Book* was for children of all colors, those in the Black Arts Movement (BAM), produced literature and art that specifically addressed issues and ideas important to blacks, rather than to the dominant white audience.²⁶ Although they eschewed interracial dating, the University of Colorado BSA aligned with other minority groups on campus and promoted multiculturalism.²⁷

The BSA was associated with Black Power leaders, such as Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown, and they read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*.²⁸ Taylor states that she sensed camaraderie with black students across the nation, including groups at Harvard and Yale, to which she traveled in order to interview students about their black study programs and write an article ("Mildred" 282). The BSA studied African American culture, history, and politics, joining with Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to march against the Vietnam War. Taylor heard the call for equality for black women from activists like Angela Davis (Taylor, "Mildred" 280-81).²⁹ Taylor reveals

²⁶ In *The Black Aesthetic*, Addison Gayle writes, "The question for the black critic today is not how beautiful is a melody, a play, a poem, or a novel, but how much more beautiful has the poem, melody, play, or novel made the life of a single black man? The Black Aesthetic . . . is a corrective—a means of helping black people out of the polluted mainstream of Americanism" (272).

²⁷ Granted, there is no single document that presents the views of the BAM, but in "The Blacks Arts Movement," Larry Neal clarifies that African Americans should separate themselves from white people and everything about them (Baker 135).

²⁸ The Black Power movement was the political wing of the BAM (Smethurst 14). Carmichael maintained that Black Power "is a call for black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community, . . . to begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support those organizations. It is a call to reject the racist institutions and values of this society" (Carmichael and Hamilton 43-44).

²⁹ The third movement of the time was the black women's movement, beginning with Toni Cade's breakthrough book, *The Black Woman* (1970). As evident in Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (1975), many black women were no longer willing to let black men be their spokesmen, and so took to the pen themselves, often writing disparagingly about black men. This movement is discussed at length by Elaine Showalter, Joanne M. Braxton and Andrée Nicola McLaughlin, Calvin Herndon, and Henry Gates, Jr.

that she had responded to the call of the black movements on several levels since she states that she wore an Afro and with her comrades was “black and proud” (“Mildred” 281). She performed an essential role in the University of Colorado’s expansion of the Black Studies Program (Crowe 22), and extended her involvement by becoming the black studies coordinator upon graduation (1970-1971) (Taylor, “Mildred” 281).

Taylor’s varied experiences while a BSA member indicated that she was well-versed with the BAM and its sister organizations (280-81). But even when expounding upon the importance of her time as a black activist with the BSA and her involvement with the Black Studies Program and the Black Education Program in her *Something about the Author Autobiography Series (SAAS)* article, she does not distinguish Du Bois or any of his writing as of consequence (Taylor, “Mildred” 280-81). Her association with his works must fall under the general groupings of the black history and black politics that she said the BSA studied (“Mildred” 281). Still, she names Du Bois and mentions one of his books in her series (*Roll* 76), and she asserts in a letter that he was important to her (Alli).

Despite Taylor’s close affinity with the black movements of the 1960s, her early stage books for children are more aligned with Du Bois’s ideologies than with her experiences in the BSA. Juxtaposing the New Negro movement in the 1920s, in which Du Bois was active, with the black movements in the 1960s, in which Taylor participated, reveals that Taylor’s writing reflects the earlier movement. Although there are similarities among the movements in the 1960s and 1970s with the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s with which Du Bois associated, there were important

differences. Du Bois and his peers in the 1920s worked to obtain more civil rights; Black activists in the movements of the 1960s celebrated their newly gained liberties and encouraged others to partake of them. In the 1920s, Du Bois and others partnered with white people in NAACP leadership, and artists were supervised by white patrons in the Harlem Renaissance. *The Brownies' Book* was purportedly for “all children,” black and white (Du Bois, “True Brownies” 285). On the other hand, African Americans from the 1960s to the 1970s wanted to “lead their own organizations” (Larry Neal qtd. in Baker 135) and valued independence from white people. The BAM sought only a black readership and audience.

As Taylor began publishing books for children in the 1970s, her early books differ from her contemporaries' in several aspects. One way she differed from the BAM is her intention to write for white as well as black people (“Newbery” 405). Another way is in her use of language. In “The Black Arts Movement and African American Young Adult Literature: An Evaluation of Narrative Style,” Laretta Henderson argues that many Coretta Scott King Award recipients like Taylor follow the features of white aesthetic, such as linear plots, rather than the features of African American adult fiction. Henderson's concern is that young adult African American fiction does not employ symbolism and tropes found in adult African American fiction, so young adults are not prepared to read adult fiction. Henderson notes that Taylor's books “are not written in a style based on metaphor, auralty, irony, nor do they experiment with non-linear narrative form” associated with the BAM (318). Taylor's books include vernacular dialogue, but

the narrative is in Standard American English. Taylor aligned her books for children with the status quo for white writers, not black writers.

Two more ways Taylor's books differ from the BAM is her choices of setting and genre. Taylor's historical fiction is set in the pre-Civil Rights Movement South, a time and place rooted in emotional and physical trauma for African Americans. The BAM actively distanced itself from the trauma of pre-Civil Rights Movement. In "African American Women Writers of Adolescent Literature," Rosalie Black Kiah examines the work of fifteen notable authors who published twenty-five books from 1967 through the mid-1980s. The collection begins with Virginia Hamilton's *Zeely* (1968), one of the first juvenile books with a "black is beautiful" theme. Of the authors, eight women published sixteen books during the time Taylor was writing her early stage books, from 1975 until 1981.³⁰ Taylor's seven contemporaries wrote books that include militant, political, and social aspects of the contemporary black movements. Of the authors on Kiah's list, all but Taylor and Brenda Wilkinson published books that are set in New York City.³¹ Furthermore, Taylor's work is singular in that all her books take place in the rural south unlike Wilkinson's, whose books in the south take place in a city large enough to call for public transportation.

A fourth way that Taylor's work differs from the BAM is her portrayal of the family. The other women writers Kiah studies portray single-parent families and

³⁰ In addition to Taylor, Kiah analyzes the following African American authors publishing from the mid-1970s through 1981: Alice Childress, Nikki Grimes, Rosa Guy, Kristen Hunter, Dindga McCannon, Ellese Southerland, and Brenda Wilkinson.

³¹ Brenda Wilkinson's *Ludell* (1975) and *Ludell and Willie* (1977) take place in the South. Nevertheless, in the third book in the series, *Ludell's New York Time* (1980), protagonist Ludell goes to New York City to visit her mother. Even still, Wilkinson did not write about the rural South, as did Taylor.

impoverished families headed by one or more parents who are ill or ill-prepared to parent. These African American authors direct readers to look at the present African American experience in urban New York. Taylor's books, on the other hand, are historical fiction in which readers observe challenges that characters face in the 1930s South, in rural Mississippi. Instead of displaying weak or ineffective parents, Taylor places a child protagonist in a strong, loving two-parent family. That Taylor does not align herself with leading African American women writers suggests that her writing is not a response to contemporary aesthetic or to the black political movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

Taylor's "Manifesto"

Mildred Taylor so internalized the values that her father modeled and imparted to her that it is natural for her to adopt much of his ideology when she wrote family stories. According to this reading of Taylor's memories, her father, Wilbert Taylor, epitomized Du Bois's objectives to create a fresh look at African Americans, depicting a strong African American family, and portraying African Americans involved in history differently from how they were presented by the media. Taylor incorporates what resembles a "manifesto" for her children's books in the speech she delivered at the Newbery Award ceremony in 1977. She augments those ideas in the article she wrote for *SAAS* in the late 1980s. A close reading of the two pieces reveals that, despite the passing of five decades since Du Bois articulated his purposes for writing in 1919, Taylor responded to his call, ignoring the more contemporary influences she encountered while a black student activist in the 1960s. Taylor's intentions for writing the books in her early

stage can be extrapolated from her speech and article and follow the three categories identified with Du Bois's objectives: presenting a vital view of African Americans, clarifying the African American family, and presenting a more historically correct account of African Americans. Table 2 highlights the similarities between Du Bois's purposes for children's literature and Taylor's intentions for her books regarding these three designated categories.

Taylor wants to offer a nuanced view of African Americans for her readers in order to replace what had been available to her in books when she was a child. Family stories were about courageous people who opposed Jim Crow, but the stories she read in books portrayed African American characters as impotent, one-dimensional, and marginalized, such as housekeepers whose only purpose in books was to help white characters (Taylor, "Newbery" 404-05). Nor had children's books changed from when she was a child reader to when she began writing in the 1970s. Dorothy Broderick's *Image of the Black in Children's Fiction* and Donnaræ MacCann's *White Supremacy in Children's Literature*, works that date from the 1970s and the 1990s respectively, demonstrate that books for children from the early 1800s to the 1960s were much like what Sterling Brown had discerned about books for adults in his 1933 article, "Negro Characters As Seen by White Authors." Brown finds that characters are stereotyped, such as "the contented Negro," "the brute Negro," "the comic Negro," or "the tragic Negro" (S. Brown 190). In "The All-White World of Children's Books," Nancy Larrick writes that African American characters are present in only seven percent of children's books published between 1963 and 1965 and, when they are mentioned, they are

stereotyped derogatorily. A decade later, Chall et al. did a similar study of books published by major publishing houses from 1973 to 1975 and found that though the percentage of books including African American characters increased to fourteen percent, the characters were still minimized and marginalized. In “The Changing Language of Black Child’s Characters in American Children’s Books,” Suzanne Rahn discusses the stereotypical characters whose grotesque mannerisms and features, odd names, unsophisticated behavior, and gullibility set them apart from European American characters and, therefore, were not to be taken seriously (232).

In *Learning from the Left*, Julia Mickenberg states that following World War II, “formal school curricula increasingly geared toward supporting the national security state . . . [which], in turn, were stabilized by class, racial, and gender hierarchies that children were generally taught not to question” (233). Furthermore, Mickenberg explains that by the late 1950s, those wanting to resist the dominant power structure looked to the part African Americans played in history by resisting racial discrimination and that these authors offered an education that countered what children had encountered in textbooks (232). Born in 1943, Taylor attended public school in the late 1940s through the early 1960s. An example of the way history was presented at the time is found in a 1955 history book by Frank Thistlethwaite, *The Great Experiment*, in which he writes that sharecropping, even though it kept tenants bound to the landlord and his land, “was admirably suited to the employment of ignorant, dependent and shiftless freedmen, and to safeguarding the interests of landowners and therefore of the old social order” (178). Furthermore, he states that “some means had to be found of teaching the Negro his place

as a member of a backward race in a society whose natural governors were the civilized whites” (Thistlethwaite 178). Similarly, stereotyping is present in Francis Gaines’ *The Southern Plantation* (1962), which states, “The negro is instinctively kind and affectionate, contented in unambitious fashion, quick to respond to the stimulus of joy, quick to forget his grief. . . . Thus the slave accepted this lot with complacency” (224). Holding these stereotypes as a truthful telling of history is not considered politically correct today. As Taylor found, there were few texts offering an uplifting view of blacks in historical context.³² This is the milieu in which Taylor grew up and the reason she wanted to write a different history.

In contrast to how books usually portrayed black characters, Taylor presented them with a full range of emotions and with a number of experiences typically available to only white characters. Taylor brings formerly marginalized African American characters to the center of the story and moves white characters to the periphery in order to reverse the trend in all-white books. In this way, she re-designates the place of African Americans in literature. For instance, rather than “happy with their fate” (“Newbery” 405), Taylor’s fictional family, the Logans, are angry about how men like Jim Andersen, Harlan Granger, Stuart Walker, Charlie Simms, and the Wallaces treat them and others in the African American community. In the context of her historical fiction, Taylor helps to reshape the public’s perception of African Americans. She states that she wants to show “happy, loved children” and trusts that when readers encounter the Logans. They would

³² Julia Mickenberg notes one text that varied from the historical representation of blacks in America, *Pictorial History of the Negro* (1956), which was not used as part of approved school curriculum. She states that this book “filled a gap in children’s book offerings; certainly no textbook provided this type of information” (277).

be delighted by their vitality and verisimilitude and would state, “Hey, I really like them! I feel what they feel” (Taylor, “Newbery” 405). Her characters are engaging and likeable because they are endowed with the traits of courage, perseverance, and intelligence.

A second way that Taylor’s intentions reflect Du Bois’s objectives was in her effort to reveal an African American family differently from the stereotype offered in books and other media. For Taylor, the books written by white writers fail to capture “the warmth or love of the Black world” and “to understand the principles upon which Black parents brought up their children and taught them survival” (Taylor, “Newbery” 405). Taylor makes certain that her protagonist Cassie and her brothers are bolstered by one another and undergirded by their parents, not disabled or maimed by circumstances. Thus, Taylor wants “to show a Black family united in love and pride” (Taylor, “Newbery” 405). She conflates her description of David Logan and the Logan family with Wilbert Taylor and the Taylor family, stating that “[t]hrough David have come the words of my father, and through the Logan family the love of my own family” (“Newbery” 403). Taylor further explains that the qualities she found in her family are reproduced in “the strong family ties” of the Logans (Taylor, “Newbery” 403).

Taylor offers her rationale for portraying the African American family when she asserts, “[C]ontrary to what the media relate to us, all Black families are not fatherless or disintegrating. Certainly my family was not” (Taylor, “Newbery” 403). Taylor is motivated to display a two-parent family headed by a husband/father, a family model that reflects her experience. First, she portrays “strong fathers” who are an important part of their families. She states that she felt a need “to show black people like I saw us. There

was a need to show strength. There was the need to portray men like my father, my uncles, and my grandfather” (Taylor “Mildred” 277). She sees the men in her life as being connected to their families, not as independent of them.

Second, showing a “concerned” mother is strategic to Taylor in her portrait of the African American family (Taylor, “Newbery” 405). She articulates “the need to portray women like [her] mother, [her] aunts, [and her] grandmothers,” who were also strong, capable, and dignified (“Mildred” 277). The African American women in Taylor’s books work in their own homes, not in the homes of white women, and take care of their own children, not the children of white women. One woman, Mary Logan, is a professional educator. The physically strong Logan women in Taylor’s books work in the family’s garden and in the family’s fields, not in white people’s homes or fields. Another woman, Caroline Logan, Cassie’s grandmother, is a self-trained medic, often called upon in the community to tend the sick and injured by using her herbal ointments and teas. Taylor dismisses the stereotypes she read in “all-white books” when designing the family.

The balance of Taylor’s intentions for creating the family involves parents training children in the home. She wants young people to become active in social concerns through this training, similar to Du Bois’s desire for youth to be equipped at home with a spirit of sacrifice for definite occupations and duties. As Du Bois advocates that black children have “a code of honor and action in their relations with white children” (“True Brownies” 286), Taylor uses the elder Logans to guide the younger Logans in the rough terrain of Jim Crow. Consequently, she creates plotlines in which adult Logans model resistance to Jim Crow so that readers “appreciate and understand

[the] principles by which [African American families] lived, in order to [help them] better respect themselves and others” (Taylor, “Newbery” 407-08).

The third way that Taylor’s intentions mirror Du Bois’s objectives is by writing historical fiction so people would know about the accomplishments of black people. Taylor explains that history classes troubled her growing up since the history she heard in classes was so different from the history she learned from family storytellers. She admits that books were not completely devoid of black people’s contributions since textbooks always mentioned Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, Marian Andersen, and Dr. Ralph Bunche (Taylor, “Newbery” 404). However, for Taylor, those meager inclusions of famous persons are not enough. She disdains the uninspiring history classes and textbooks from her childhood that barely mentioned African American people or else portrays them as unmotivated and unconcerned about their servile status. Instead, she includes vital experiences of real people in her fiction (Taylor, “Newbery” 406). In so doing, she conveys what she considers to be a more accurate picture of black people and their history (Taylor, “Newbery” 405).

Taylor refutes the negative images from her childhood literature through her choice of a protagonist through whom she “mirror[s] a Black child’s hopes and fears from childhood innocence to awareness to bitterness and disillusionment” (Taylor, “Newbery” 407). Taylor intends to guide a reader through the eyes, heart, and mind of Cassie Logan as the young girl learns and experience life in segregation. In addition, she states that she wants to impress upon young people “the tremendous influence that Cassie’s generation—[her] father’s generation—had in bringing about the great Civil

Rights movement of the fifties and sixties” (Taylor, “Newbery” 407). From her vantage point in the mid-1970s, Taylor writes about the 1930s, trying to explain why there was a need for the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Taylor wants to validate the contribution of black people by displaying on the pages of her books “black heroes [and] heroines” missing from the books they had read (Taylor, “Newbery” 407). Though Du Bois uses historical figures to establish that blacks are famous and useful, Taylor makes famous the “representative” black people who do, she ironically states, “nothing more spectacular than survive in a society designed for their destruction” (“Mildred” 275). As a result, she hopes that readers “understand and cherish the precious rights of equality which they now possess” (Taylor, “Newbery” 407-08). Taylor believes that young people could not fully appreciate these cherished rights unless they realize the price that others paid in order to secure their rights.

Just as Du Bois was instrumental in helping African Americans begin to realize the potential of their youth in the cause of resisting racial discrimination and oppression (Schweinitz 2), Taylor engineers the characterization and plots of the Logan stories to demonstrate how children create a trajectory of resistance in the face of oppression. Writing half a century after *The Brownies’ Book*, Taylor responds to Du Bois’s objectives and instantiates his ideology in her early novels.

Table 2 Du Bois's Objectives and Taylor's "Manifesto"

Du Bois's Objectives Taken from "True Brownies"	Taylor's "Manifesto" Taken from "Newbery Acceptance Speech"
Re-imaging African Americans	
<p>(a) To make colored children realize that being 'colored' is a normal, beautiful thing.</p> <p>(f) To point out the best amusement and joys and worth-while things of life.</p>	<p>* To "paint a truer picture of Black people" (405).</p> <p>* To show "happy, loved children about whom other children, both Black and white could say, 'Hey, I really like them! I feel what they feel'" (405).</p>
Re-casting the African American Family	
<p>(e) To turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition, and love of their own homes and companions.</p> <p>(d) To teach them delicately a code of honor and action in their relations with white children.</p> <p>(g) To inspire them to prepare for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of sacrifice.</p>	<p>* To "show a Black family united in love and pride" (405).</p> <p>* To "distill the essence of Black life, so familiar to most Black families" (403).</p> <p>* To show "strong fathers and concerned mothers" (405).</p> <p>* To show "life guides that have always been mine" and "principles by which [Black families] lived" (407, 408).</p> <p>* To "make the Logans an embodiment of that spiritual heritage" (403).</p> <p>* To help readers "identify with the Logans who are representative [...] of many Black families who faced adversity and survived" (407).</p>
Writing African Americans into History	
<p>(b) To make them familiar with the history and achievements of the Negro race.</p> <p>(c) To make them know that other colored children have grown into beautiful, useful and famous persons. ("True Brownies 286)</p>	<p>* To "show black heroes or heroines" (405).</p> <p>* To "mirror a black child's hopes and fears from childhood innocence to awareness, to bitterness and disillusionment" (407).</p> <p>* To teach "children of all colors the tremendous influence that Cassie's generation . . . had in bringing about the great Civil Rights [M]ovement" (407).</p> <p>* To enable them "to understand [and] cherish the precious rights of equality which they now possess" by showing what "generations before [them] endured" (407).</p> <p>* To help them "better understand and respect themselves and others" (408).</p>

Chapter III

“HE CAN’T SPEAK NO MORE”: TAYLOR CHALLENGES PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN HER EARLY STAGE BOOKS

Mildred Taylor responds to W. E. B. Du Bois’s call and reflects his ideas about children’s literature, especially in the books she writes in her early stage: *Song of the Trees* (1975); *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976); and *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* (1981). She presents African Americans in realistic contrast to how they are presented in books from her youth. In her texts she describes African American characters who are not one-dimensional, uninteresting, and impotent; rather they are multifaceted, engaging, and motivated. She portrays the African American family in a way that challenges depictions in the news and in literature before the 1970s. She depicts what she considers to be a more realistic rendition of an African American family in the Logans. She portrays a two-parent family led by a strong father and concerned mother united in love as they and their children oppose racists. And she also writes stories that show what she understands to be a truthful telling of African American history according to her family’s oral stories to negate untruths printed in textbooks and novels. She shows black people in America as strong and able to endure trials arising from racism in a way not presented in history books. She determines to show heroic men and women who exercise their choices to stand up for their rights and the rights of their loved ones in the face of the dominant culture that sought to belittle them. She states she wants to write stories so “children of all colors” could perceive a more realistic representation of black people

than was currently portrayed in the media, rendering what she deems to be a “truer picture” (“Newbery” 405, 407).

An incident in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* represents Taylor’s intention to present a different dimension of the black experience. Eight-year-old Cassie Logan describes Mr. John Berry, who was badly burned when he tries to stop the Wallaces from lynching his nephews: “A still form lay there staring at us with glittering eyes. The face had no nose, and the head no hair; the skin was scarred, burned, and the lips were wizened black, like charcoal. . . . [T]he wheezing sound echoed from the opening that was a mouth” (97). Mrs. Berry informs the Logans, “He can’t speak no more” (*Roll* 97). Not only is his voice stripped away because of the racial violence, his chance for justice is taken because Sheriff Hank Ropp refuses to hold the Wallaces culpable (*Roll* 40). Although it seems like the black community has no recourse for the evils done to them by white racists, Taylor demonstrates resistance through the efforts of the Logans. Mary and David Logan, Cassie’s parents, raise their voices on the Berrys’ behalf. They organize a boycott of the Wallace store in protest and arrange for the black families to shop at a store in Vicksburg. Instead of accepting the Berrys’ situation as hopeless, the Logans choose to take a stand against evil.

The African American oral and literary traditions relate stories long after the people whose stories are conveyed are no longer around to recount them. In the same way, Taylor’s storytelling compares to *Roots*’ author Alex Haley and others whom Paule Marshall calls “mouth-kings” because they broadcast stories about those who should not be forgotten (Harper 75). Mr. Berry dies in the story, and all hope of his speaking again

seems to be lost. However, in their role as mouth-kings, Taylor and the characters enact a semantic analysis of Mrs. Berry's statement, "He can't speak no more." In the vernacular, the double negative implies emphasis, that Mr. Berry will never speak again (Rahn 253). In Standard American English, however, the double negative reverses the statement, and Mrs. Berry's words signal that her husband still speaks. He speaks metaphorically in that the story of Mr. Berry's courage and others' smoldering outrage of his malicious treatment by bigots is believed by the thirty families who participate in the boycott of the Wallace store. Through her fiction, Taylor has the Logan be mouth-kings for Mr. Berry and others who can no longer speak for themselves.

Taylor Re-Images African Americans

Taylor's goal to characterize African Americans differently from how they were presented in contemporary books necessitated her finding a narrative voice through whom to convey her stories. Shy as a girl, she was distraught to find that she could not adequately verbalize to her sixth grade classmates the history she learned from family stories, which makes it no surprise why she chose to let her skill as a writer be the means by which she could help people understand. A high school teacher had encouraged Taylor to write her stories in first person. Taylor admits that the first person is most like the narrative of the Taylor family storytellers, but she still gravitated to writing third person narratives to emulate her favored authors like Ernest Hemingway and Jane Austen ("Mildred" 277). In earlier versions of *Song of the Trees*, she used third person narrators, telling the story from a boy's perspective and then a grandmother's, but both versions were rejected by perspective publishers (Taylor, "Mildred" 283). She explains that in the

fall of 1973 when revising the story for a Council of Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) contest, she chose Cassie Logan, a girl protagonist with a “fighting spirit, a great curiosity, and an unyielding pride” to be the first person narrator (“Mildred” 283). She states that telling the story from the girl’s point of view helped her get her “foot in the door” of publishing (Johnson and Giorgis 44). Taylor explains that even though Cassie Logan embodies many of her own girlhood experiences and emotions, Cassie has the personality of Wilma, Taylor’s sister, and an aunt, both of whom were more outspoken than Taylor’s childhood self (“Mildred” 282).¹ Cassie remains Taylor’s choice of first-person narrator in two of the four books in her early stage.

Cassie’s outspokenness helps move the plot along as Taylor wants to show a child’s growth from innocence to understanding, but her candor is problematic as well. Often her brother Stacey and others instruct her to be quiet, sometimes for her good and sometimes for the good of others. Stacey calls for her silence in order to protect her from racial backlash when she voices displeasure about treatment by the white owner of Barnett’s Mercantile in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, as well as when she questions why she cannot use the drinking fountain in the courthouse in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*. At other times, he tries to quiet her so that she will not be rude or “offend company” (*Let the Circle* 223). In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, her mother scolds

¹ Elizabeth Muther asserts that Toni Cade Bambara popularized the “feisty girl” African American narrator with the child narrator Hazel in her 1972 collection of short stories, *Gorilla, My Love* (Muther 449). Cassie resembles Hazel, and like Bambara, Taylor entrusts her stories to a child’s voice.

Cassie for criticizing Jeremy Simms' gift of nuts. When Cassie calls Governor Bilbo² a "rascal" and a "devil" during a class discussion, her teacher, Mrs. Crandall, asks her to keep her political comments to herself, so she will not lose her job as did Cassie's mother (*Let the Circle* 107-8). Roberta Seelinger Trites observes attempts by Stacey to silence Cassie (49-50), but she recognizes that Taylor ultimately gives Cassie a voice as her chosen narrator; thus Cassie's "inner voice is never silenced" (51). When plot and custom expect silence from Cassie, Taylor allows her to retain a voice as narrator.

The discussion of Cassie as narrator is necessary because Taylor's use of her in the middle stage varies from its use in the early stage. Libhardt et al. faults the narrator in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, finding that "eleven-year-old Cassie is written to sound so intelligent for her age that this contradicts the storyline." Leona Fisher considers the narrator in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* to be an older Cassie looking back on earlier times and privileging her younger self to be the main focalizer, the one who explains what is happening (160). This writer argues that Taylor actually chose the younger Cassie to be the ostensible narrator because she wants the action, what is focalized (Wylie 188), to be seen through the eyes of a young child. This writer is not convinced that Taylor intends the reader to see the narrator as an older version of the child because she does not identify Cassie as an adult looking back on her childhood as she does in some of her later books. (Taylor has Jeremy Simms identify himself as an older person in *Mississippi Bridge* and David Logan and Paul-Edward Logan identify themselves as

² Governor Theodore Gilmore Bilbo served as Mississippi governor for eight years, between 1916 to 1920 and 1928 to 1932, and as United States Senator from 1938 to 1947. He was an outspoken white supremacist throughout his administration, as well as a member of the Ku Klux Klan. At one time, he called the National Guard, but not to protect a black person as did other governors during the reign of the Klan, but to track down a black man (McMillen 248).

older in *The Well* and *The Land*, respectively.) But this writer recognizes another, more learned voice in all of the books in the early stage books. This writer would argue that the second voice is not an older version of Cassie but is the author herself. In “On Wearing Masks,” Jill Patton Walsh explains that in a child’s book the author creates a persona, and she states that the persona embodies the author’s “professional ‘stance’” (169). For Walsh, the author must wear a mask and hide behind the persona because revealing his or her true self and feelings distract the reader from the subject (170).

The author’s authorial presence in Taylor’s early stage books is recognized in the variations of language. Taylor allows Cassie’s dialogue to be in the vernacular, but as is often the case in a narrative, the authorial narrator employs Standard American English. A passage in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* in which Cassie’s internal monologue juxtaposes with her dialogue on the same subject clarifies the two voices. The following is Cassie’s internal monologue:

If she [Lee Annie Lees] had her way, she was going to try to register, and I hoped she would. I felt right proud of her. I had heard enough to know that it would be tough, even dangerous, for her to attempt it, and I trembled at all I had heard. But then I thought about all those afternoons Mrs. Lee Annie and I had spent reading together, studying the constitution. I thought of what she had said about her father voting and how he had been beaten because of it. I thought about what Mr. Jamison has said about jurors being selected from the list of people who could vote. I thought about T. J. (*Let the Circle* 331-32)

The internal dialogue is expressed in Standard American English even though it includes the colloquial expression “right proud” which helps to create verisimilitude. The “Miz” is changed to “Mrs.” in the more sophisticated language of the author. What follows is Cassie’s spoken language in which she explains her intentions to her parents:

Been thinkin’ ’bout Miz Lee Annie and her goin’ to register. . . . I wanna go with her. Well, I figure me and Miz Lee Annie, we been in this constitution-reading business together since she got them books of hers. And she done told me ‘bout her papa and all and how powerful much she wanna vote well, I jus’ figure I oughta be goin’ with her. ’Sides, I’m kinda interested in the law and all. (*Let the Circle* 332)

Even though her thoughts are recorded in Standard American English, Cassie’s speech is in the vernacular. The spoken message has contractions, slang, and verb irregularities. The authorial narrator’s sophisticated language substantiates the experiences of the young first-person narrator. That persona can explain with details beyond the child’s perspicacity. Since Taylor uses a young child as narrator to explain the events, she also provides for the reader explanations that augment the younger narrator’s grasp on the situations being presented in the books. To ensure that the reader fully understands, she includes her own voice as author to provide more sophisticated details than the child narrator would likely be able to provide. At other times in the novel, Taylor provides explanations about various issues through adult characters, such as Cassie’s parents, grandmother, or Uncle Hammer.

The author's voice supplies the sophisticated and even poetic descriptions. She tells about the earth being draped in a "cloak of gray mist" and the black trees that were "still holding the night" that Cassie viewed from her window in *Song of the Trees* (7). The authorial narrator compares the Great Faith Elementary and Secondary School for black children with the Jefferson Davis School for white children in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, giving information about the buildings that a child as young Cassie would not have likely articulated:

Jefferson Davis County School [is] a long white wooden building looming in the distance. Behind the building was a wide sports field around which were scattered rows of tiered gray-looking benches. In front of it were two yellow buses, our own tormentor and one that brought students from the other direction, and loitering students awaiting the knell of the morning bell. . . .

The Great Faith Elementary and Secondary School, one of the largest black schools in the county, was a dismal end to an hour's journey. Consisting of four weather-beaten wooden houses on stilts of brick, 320 students, seven teachers, [and] a principal. . . . (*Roll* 15)

In *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, the Logan family's reaction upon hearing that Cousin Bud married a white woman in New York is presented in the authorial narrator's voice, not Cassie's:

I knew that by his words, Cousin Bud had separated himself from the rest of us. From their faces I could tell that the boys knew it too, for white

people were part of another world, distant strangers who ruled our lives and were better left alone. When they entered our lives, they were to be treated courteously, but with aloofness, and sent away as quickly as possible. Besides, for a black man to even look at a white woman was dangerous. . . . A white woman was foreign, dangerous, and her Cousin Bud had gone off and married one. (162)

The language in this passage, though attributed to Cassie's voice, demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the color line that is more likely the authorial narrator's input. The significance of Taylor's use of the authorial voice in the early stage becomes important in the final book in the middle stage when Taylor keeps the narrative in the point of view and language of the younger narrative.

Her choice of Cassie Logan as narrator helps Taylor convey her intentions for the early stage and speak for those who can no longer speak because of injury or death or the threat of either. Taylor says that in her choice of having a child narrate, she intends to reflect a black child's growing wariness about Jim Crow society and how African Americans endure in spite of it ("Newbery" 407). In the early stage, Cassie focalizes events that take place in a rural Mississippi community from 1933 to 1935, presumably in Hinds County, which is where Vicksburg, a nearby city mentioned in the saga, is located. The author uses Cassie's impressions and circumstances to clarify the perseverance of the African American characters in the Jim Crow South.

Characterization in Taylor's Early Stage Books

Taylor re-images African Americans by depicting characters, especially the four Logan siblings, who are not one-dimensional but are dynamic and rounded. Taylor does not minimize or marginalize the Logan children in the plots, and her careful characterization of the children makes it impossible for readers to stereotype them and dismiss them as uninteresting or unimportant. The youngest of Cassie's siblings, Little Man,³ is two years younger than Cassie and small for his age. Although he has a penchant for cleanliness and is "a finicky dresser" (*Song* 10-11), he forgoes his inclinations in order to help his siblings get the lumbermen off their land (38). In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, he is willing to sacrifice his clean clothes to dig a hole in the muddy road one rainy day in order to sabotage the white children's school bus as revenge on the white children and bus driver, who antagonize the Logans. In another incident, Little Man is crestfallen when assigned the eleven-year-old, dirty, tattered, cast-off textbook from the white school (*Roll* 24). However, it is the markings on the book's inside cover detailing that the textbook has been transferred from a white child to a "nigra" that enrages him (*Roll* 25). His is not an uncommon response to disrespect. In 1938, Marjorie Hill Allee states in "Books Negro Children Like" that reading the word "nigger" in a book was cause for an indignant black child to scratch the word off the page (qtd. in Rahn 232-33). Although the media presents black characters in the time period as compliant, Taylor shows through Little Man's actions that he is compelled to be resistant against perceived injustices.

³ Taylor adds verisimilitude to her characterization of Little Man by basing him on her favorite uncle, James Taylor, also nicknamed Little Man, who was a surrogate father for Taylor after her father died (Taylor, "Letter to the author").

Another of Cassie's brothers, Christopher-John, is more than one-dimensional as well. A year younger than Cassie, he is "short [and] pudgy" and is, therefore, understandably the slowest when they all race in the woods (*Song* 15, 18). Christopher-John is kind-hearted and loyal. A people-pleaser and a follower, he is torn between displeasing his parents by participating in forbidden children's activities and displeasing his siblings by not joining them. In contrast to dominant stereotypes of the time of broken, dysfunctional families and flat child characters, Taylor portrays Cassie and her brothers as "children about whom other children [readers], both Black and white, could say, "Hey, I really like them! I feel what they feel" ("Newbery" 405).

In the Logan saga, Taylor includes the coming-of-age story of Stacey, Cassie's oldest brother. Taylor's use of the *bildungsroman* reflects Duboisian ideology of helping black children achieve their potential and helps to describe African Americans differently than their traditional depiction in children's books. The books in the early stage trace Stacey from age eleven to almost fourteen and portray his growing up process. Socially, he sees himself as a man and so shakes his uncle's hand instead of hugging him, which is the manner of his younger siblings in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. In *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, he refuses to share confidences with Cassie and shows a romantic interest in pretty Jacey Peters, an older girl at school. Physically, Stacey grows a foot taller in a year, sprouts a mustache, and acquires a deep voice overnight. Psychologically, he is "looking for room" to grow and needs the guidance of his father (*Let the Circle* 253). Emotionally, Stacey is more volatile, treating his mother disrespectfully and questioning her authority. Financially, he becomes aware of his family's money concerns, so he runs

away to Louisiana to work for a cane harvester. Chris Crow considers Stacey's decision to run away to obtain work to be a "misreading of his father's example" (74), who also leaves home to find work. Stacey's decision is foolish: an adult leaving home to find work on a railroad is far different from a youth running away from home to work on a sugar cane plantation. David Logan is free to leave the railroad, but Stacey is held captive at the unfair work site. Yet Stacey's struggles move him along toward manhood over the course of the novel.

By depicting the process of Stacey growing up, Taylor portrays African Americans as maturing, a depiction opposite the popular practice of infantilizing them in fiction. Historically, African Americans were not characterized as empowered adults in literature, as were whites (McDowell 223-24). Routinely in the 1930s in Mississippi, a white man called an African American counterpart "boy," which is how Jim Andersen, Harlan Granger, and others address David Logan, who is in his forties (*Song* 42; *Roll* 255). Calling a black man a "boy" denied him an equal standing in society (McMillen 23). David Logan, Stacey's father, refers to the concept of infantilization when he discourages Stacey from pursuing a friendship with Jeremy Simms, a white boy:

Far as I'm concerned, friendship between black and white don't mean much because it usually ain't on a equal basis. Right now you and Jeremy might get along fine, but in a few years he'll think of himself as a man but you'll probably always still be a boy to him. (*Roll* 157)

Calling a black man "boy" was a way to assert power and control over his possibilities.

Similarly, in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, registrar Samuel Boudein infantilizes the sixty-five-year-old woman, Lee Annie Lees, when she attempts to register to vote with his belittling comment: “[T]he older they get, the more childlike they become” (362). An important aspect of Taylor’s story of Stacey’s maturation is that his “growing pains and self-discovery are universal” (McDonnell 11). Thus, Taylor indicates that Stacey is like every other young person.

The Logan chronicles contain other characters besides the Logan children, of course, and two are particular examples of Taylor’s goal of depicting African Americans anew in her books. One character is a New York cousin, Suzella Rankin, the beautiful and intelligent daughter of Bud Rankin, Mary Logan’s second cousin, and his white wife, Lydia. Taylor includes Suzella, who has light skin, long wavy hair, and graceful ways, in order to establish variety—to show that African Americans live in varied circumstances and have a variety of strengths, weaknesses, and ideas. The young mulatto treats the Logans and their friends with respect and, in turn, is well liked. Her light complexion makes her an appealing anomaly, an exotic, in the African American community. Suzella’s appearance in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* helps add a new dimension to Taylor’s characterization of Cassie since she is jealous of her cousin’s accomplishments and popularity.

The Logans express the opinion that interracial relationships are harmful, so Taylor’s inclusion of Suzella complicates that belief and demonstrates the challenges for the female mulatto who crosses the color line by passing. Taylor emphasizes Suzella’s tenuous presence in the African American community because the young woman will not

fully accept her identity with “colored” people; instead, she prefers to describe herself as “mixed blood” (*Let the Circle* 214). According to Suzella, her mother Lydia wants her to pass, and Suzella agrees it would make her life easier, but she recognizes that it comes with a cost. When passing as white, Suzella hides her African heritage and, in so doing, she denies her kinship to her relatives, the Logans. Taylor indicates that Suzella could be a viable member of the African American community if she would not succumb to passing in order to achieve the benefits accrued to white people by disassociating herself from black relatives. Mary correctly asserts that when Stuart learns that Suzella has passed herself as a white girl, “he won’t be so polite. . . . He’s not going to like being fooled that way” (*Let the Circle* 256). She is correct because Stuart forces the black man to take off his clothes in front of Suzella and the Logan children. Fortunately, Mr. Morrison comes along before more harm is done, but the humiliating act leaves Bud Rankin demoralized and the children chagrined. Taylor presents passing as an alternative to accepting white domination, but she does not determine it to be a viable alternative for most black characters.

Taylor balances Suzella’s fluidity across the color line by the varying perspectives offered by the Logans. Cassie and Mary concur that, if they had the opportunity to pass as white, they would choose not to but would remain in the black community. Mary states, “I love the people in this black world too much” (263), implying that she would dislike how passing would squelch her relationship with blacks people. Taylor intimates through Mary that one cannot belong to both black and white communities and be a strong force in the black world. Interestingly, Taylor offers another perspective to the

cross-race dilemma through David. He explains that he is the product of an interracial union since his grandmother, who was part Native American and part African, was a slave and his grandfather was her white master; he is proud of his heritage. Furthermore, he questions what will happen in the future: “Maybe in fifty or a hundred years, folks won’t have to even think ‘bout it . . . whether you’re black or white” (*Let the Circle* 180). Certainly in the 1930s it was understandable for him to explain to his daughter:

There’s colored folks and there’s white folks. They don’t want nothing to do with us ’cepting what we can do for them, and Lord knows I don’t want nothin’ to do with them. They leave us alone, we leave them along. And it wouldn’t worry me one bit if a whole year’d go by and I wouldn’t have to see a one of ’em. (*Let the Circle* 180)

Taylor seeks to present a contemporary and a long view of the color line as well as a possible viewpoint about the future.

Another character Taylor includes in her effort to depict a different kind of African American is Stacey’s school friend, T. J. Avery. Taylor describes T. J. as weak-willed and self-absorbed. Instead of supporting the black community as Taylor would advocate, he undermines it. By his choices, he often personifies the opposite of the attractive attributes that make the Logan children endearing. He is disingenuous and self-centered; for example, he implicates Stacey when cheating on an exam and tricks Stacey into giving him his new coat, further tarnishing their friendship. T. J. gives a bad report about Mary Logan to a school board member, Kaleb Wallace, saying she destroys school property, is not good teacher, and is responsible for people not shopping at the Wallace

store. T. J.'s machinations cause him to incur the disfavor of the African American community when they learn his part in Mary being fired from teaching. His acceptance of an insincere friendship with two older, white teenagers, R. W. and Melvin Simms, leads him to the feet of a lynch mob. Instead of realizing his value as an African American youth, he looks to white people to shape his identity. Therefore, he loses what he desires most—respect, attention, and connectedness with the African American community. Taylor's portrayals of T. J.'s shenanigans squelch any notion that Taylor re-defines the African American in only a positive—and thus unrealistic—light.

Taylor's skillful portraiture of major African American characters in her early stage books helps all readers, regardless of ethnic background, to have a truer perspective of African American people and to grow in understanding of and respect for themselves and others. Taylor re-images adult characterization as well, which is evident in the next two broad categories that reflect Du Bois's intentions.

Taylor Re-Casts the African American Family

By her account, Taylor was reared in a family with a strong, caring father and a loving, concerned mother, and she states that she enjoyed a close relationship with her large extended family ("Mildred" 272, 285; "Newbery" 403-04). Taylor's family experience growing up was far different from what was presented by the media. She particularly takes exception to the family model presented in the media, stating that "all black families are not fatherless or disintegrating," citing hers as example (Taylor, "Newbery" 403). As she grew older and realized that not all families were loving and close like hers, she still was certain that black families were significant. Her desire to

paint what she considers to be a truer picture of the black family involved “distill[ing] the essence of Black life so familiar to most Black families . . . [and] mak[ing] the Logans an embodiment of that spiritual heritage” (“Newbery” 405). Unfortunately, her manifesto does not spell out what she meant by either the “essence of Black life” or “that spiritual heritage,” but her statement invites readers to look closely at the Logans. In the books in her early stage, Taylor reacts to the negative impression of the African American community rendered by the media by portraying a strong African American family; thus, she reflects Du Bois’s call to establish the patriarchal family.

The African American family, as portrayed in Taylor’s early stage books, is epitomized in David Logan’s response to a question from Cassie, in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. After witnessing the disappointing termination of the Wallace store boycott, Cassie asks, “Papa, we giving up too?” (206). Her father replies with a parable:

You see that fig tree over yonder, Cassie? Them other trees all around . . . that oak and walnut, they’re a lot bigger and they take up more room and give so much shade they almost overshadow that little ole fig. But that fig tree’s got roots that run deep, and it belongs in that yard as much as that oak and walnut. It keeps on blooming, bearing good fruit year after year, knowing all the time it’ll never get as big as them other trees. Just keeps on growing and doing what it gotta do. It don’t give up. It give up, it’ll die. (*Roll* 205-06)

David appraises the fig tree in the Logans’ yard in rural Mississippi, but Cassie knows that his description of the tree—its size, its root system, its claim to belong—is more than

a nature lesson. David concludes, “There is a lesson to be learned from that little tree, Cassie, girl, ‘cause we’re like it. We keep doing what we gotta, and we don’t give up. We can’t” (*Roll* 206). In his parable, David explains that the Logans’ capitulation in the face of the seeming failure of the boycott or against other insurmountable odds is not an option. Thirty families drop out of the boycott of the Wallace store, but the Logans do not. Taylor uses David to speak to the resolve and tenacity of an African American father and family in a white-privileged society.

Taylor portrays a two-parent family who is unified in their love and motivation to be agents of change in society. She depicts the Logans with a “strong” father, a “concerned” mother, and “loved” children (“Newbery” 407). Taylor shows adults who are involved in teaching their children principles of survival, establishing that a black family will “keep doing what it gotta do.” The black family has deep roots. Through David, Taylor implies that by staying connected to the roots of the family, the children are productive, and the black family endures.

David Logan epitomizes the strong father who leads the family, is loved by the family, and upon whom the family depends. The white community in general and one character in particular do not wish to acknowledge David as a powerful leader of his family. In *Song of the Trees*, Andersen anticipates that David’s mother, Caroline Logan, or Big Ma to her grandchildren, is a more malleable person with whom to discuss his business proposition and thus considers her “the head of the family” (*Song* 25). Nevertheless, in the crisis when the businessman is sawing trees off Logan land, the family looks to David for leadership, solidifying his headship in the home. The children

voice their confidence in David's ability to make Andersen leave the Logans' property once he gets home.

Even though he is the patriarch, David is often absent because he must travel to Louisiana to work on the railroad in order to earn money to pay the mortgage and taxes. In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, Cassie and all the children desperately want David to stay home. In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Cassie anxiously awaits her father's arrival so that she can get his advice about how to seek vengeance on Lillian Jean Simms. Similarly, in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, Stacey awaits his father's next visit home in order to talk with him about employment opportunities (269). In both cases, the children consider their father, not their mother, their confidant. Even when absent, David is still a viable part of the family and the recognized leader in the home. As is true of him in *Song of the Trees*, David's strength and "spirit and presence is felt on every page" of the other two books in the early stage books (Dussell 601).

Within the Logan family, Taylor depicts a "concerned" mother, who is supportive of her husband and their children. Taylor shows that Mary, a key component of the Logan family, depends on her husband, recognizing him as capable and strong. It is to her husband that Mary appeals rather than relying on herself when she wants to remove Andersen and his lumbermen from Logan land. In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, when Uncle Hammer bristles and threatens violence against Charlie Simms for manhandling Cassie, Mary counsels him to look to her husband for guidance: "There might be another way, Hammer . . . like I told you. Now don't go do something foolish. Wait for David

[Hammer's brother]—talk to him” (138). In *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, Mary realizes that she cannot relate to her eldest son at a tumultuous time in his life and that his father must guide him into manhood, so she pleads with David to stay home for all the family, but particularly for Stacey's benefit. Taylor makes clear in her early stage books that despite her individual competence, Mary is reliant upon her husband, whom she considers to be the head of the family.

Besides showing a father and mother actively rearing children in family life, Taylor depicts the Logan children as “united in love and pride” (“Newbery” 405). Love the children feel from their parents is shared with one another and shown in many ways. When Cassie realizes that Stacey has set off on horseback to Louisiana to fetch their father to stop Andersen from taking trees in *Song of the Trees*, her empathy for her big brother is exemplified in her whispered petition: “Go on Stacey, boy. Ride for me, too” (*Song* 28). Rather than showing sibling rivalry when Stacey is “whipped” by his mother/teacher, Cassie exhibits sympathy (*Roll* 80). The siblings support one another in a unified front to resist oppression, such as joining to stop Andersen from cutting down more trees (*Song* 36-49) and getting revenge upon the white bus driver and the white children on the bus (*Roll* 51-55). The children steal off to the Wallace store together to support Stacey (*Roll* 82), sneak out of the house to accompany the injured T. J. home (*Roll* 250), and play hooky in order to attend T. J.'s murder trial (*Let the Circle* 44-48). The strength of Cassie's commitment to her brothers supersedes her desire to tell her mother her fear about night riders. If she divulges that she thinks the night riders are after her and her brothers because they sabotaged the bus, she will have to break her promise

to Stacey. The four siblings form a cord not easily broken and demonstrate that they are a viable part of the “Black family united in love and pride, of which the reader would like to be a part” (Taylor, “Newbery” 405).

Taylor further establishes the African American family in a Duboisian fashion in her early stage books by showing how David and Mary train their children. Logan adults model the behaviors followed by families who “faced adversity and survived” (Taylor, “Newbery” 407-08), and they intone principles of survival. David Logan models resistance to those who oppress him. In *Song of the Trees*, he sets out dynamite and threatens to blow up the trees and kill Andersen if the white man does not vacate the premises. In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, David surreptitiously starts a fire in his field to stop the mob from lynching T. J. Avery. In *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, David participates in a racially mixed labor union and allows the group to meet on his property. David models fitting conduct for his children by disciplining himself to choose his words carefully and deliberately and by being self-controlled, especially when confronting ill treatment by white people.

David teaches his children strategies for resisting oppression. One important principle he teaches Cassie is to use her head, especially when dealing with white people. He guides her to let go of the resentment about the treatment she receives in Strawberry from Charlie Simms and his daughter, Lillian Jean, advising her, “[C]lear your head so you can think sensible. There are things you can’t back down on, things you gotta take a stand on” (*Roll* 176). Cassie obviously admires her father since she awaits his return to ask what to do about Lillian Jean instead of talking to her mother. After listening to his

counsel to be sagacious about choosing her battles and not to avenge Lillian Jean's offense, she takes her father at his word and makes her own decision. Cassie finds a way to punish the white girl without getting the Logans in trouble. In "*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry: A Culturally Specific, Subversive Concept of Child Agency*," Kelly McDowell argues that Taylor's principle of encouraging children to think for themselves is different from what is generally promoted in classic children's literature. McDowell asserts that the protagonist's father in Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* tells his daughter: "Do as you are told and no harm will come to you" (qtd. in McDowell 213). In much of children's literature, parents want to socialize children to ensure their safety, but McDowell finds that Taylor resists that protocol. Whereas the parenting in *Little House* promotes dependence, McDowell asserts that David's method of parenting creates independence, indicating the child is learning to make inroads to freedom in Jim Crow society, a society that seeks to subject African Americans (224). Taylor has the Logans teach their children to think for themselves and dare to oppose status quo.

Like her husband, Mary Logan also models resistance to racial oppression under Jim Crow in each book of Taylor's early stage. In *Song of the Trees*, Mary Logan has no authority to stop Andersen from taking trees from Logan land since the land belongs to her mother-in-law, Caroline Logan. However, Mary does not wither under Andersen's intimidation even when the white man threatens her husband. Cassie describes her mother's posture, words, clenched fists, and piercing looks, all of which register

disapproval of Andersen's sense of entitlement and supposed superiority.⁴ Mary raises support for the boycott of the Wallace store by speaking to many families in the African American community. In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Cassie hears her teacher/mother boldly tell African American history differently from how it is conveyed in the approved textbook. She hears her mother tell the bigoted white school board members that she is deviating from the textbook because "all that's in that book isn't true" (*Roll* 184).⁵

Mary approves Cassie's efforts to oppose racism. Rather than censoring her for refuting Andersen, Mary stops mid-chastisement and gives her a hug (*Song* 28). Mary commends Cassie's refusal to accept the derogatory term "nigra" written in the textbook (*Roll* 30). Mary understands her daughter's desire to accompany Lee Annie Lees to register to vote, even though it is dangerous:

I'm just as scared as anybody about walking up to the registrar's office and voting. But I've got this feeling. Cassie's seen so much . . . learned so much about what it means to be black in these past few years. . . . If Cassie witnessed it, it could just mean a lot to her one day. (*Let the Circle* 332)

⁴ Understanding how Taylor uses the parents to model the principles they want to pass along to their children is important in light of a comment made by Zena Sutherland: "[T]he characterization of the children [in *Song of the Trees*] is minimal, while that of the adults is stronger" (35). Sutherland's assessment lacks an appreciation of what Taylor has accomplished. Both the adult Logans and their children are sufficiently characterized in *Song of the Trees* to show that the children are abiding by the pattern modeled by their parents.

⁵ An example of the inadequate history provided for children in the 1930s is present in Pearl Vivian Guyton's *The History of Mississippi*, a history textbook "dedicated to the school children of Mississippi" (n. pag.). In it she applauds Black Codes after the War Between the States because they forced black people to work since "legislators realized that freed negroes would not work unless they were made to" (183). Additionally, she states that Northerners misunderstood the purpose of Black Codes (184).

Mary's actions indicate that she wants to help her daughter find a way to speak out against injustice.

Mary challenges her children to use their heads and make good decisions, especially when confronting white people. Although Cassie and the others are deeply saddened by the outcome of T. J.'s trial in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, Mary uses T. J.'s circumstances to prod her children to attain higher goals for their lives by enumerating his faults. She argues that T. J. is not innocent in his predicament with the law, that he was wrong for "running around with those white boys," for being "too hardheaded to listen to anybody," and for "breaking into that store" (*Let the Circle* 33). The object lesson about T. J.'s failings is a powerful way to steer the Logan children away from falling into his spiral of destruction. Mary charges her children to make better choices for their lives. She teaches them that they can make decisions that will bring about good for themselves and others, such as choosing with whom they will associate, to whom they will listen, and how they will spend their time. Allowing children to make their decisions is a powerful principle the Logan parents teach their fictional children, and it reflects the real-life principles that Taylor and her contemporaries learned growing up. The training that Mary and other Logan adults pass along to their children demonstrates that people in Cassie and Stacey's generation are being prepared by their elders to continue the struggle for civil rights. Thus, Taylor's readers can also learn from David and Mary Logan the lessons that the fictional children in the novel learn.

Taylor demonstrates that a strategic principle of survival embodied in the "essence of Black life, so familiar to most Black families" is self-respect, which was a

principle Taylor had learned from her father (“Newbery” 402-04). In *Song of the Trees*, David informs Andersen that like any black man, he must be willing to die doing the right thing, for “I’ll always have my self-respect” (*Song* 46).⁶ Taylor positions David as willing to commit a murder-suicide, a situation which is not usually portrayed in a book for younger children, but in so doing, she emphasizes to readers the importance of valuing self-respect as much as life itself. Those who helped to bring about the Civil Rights Movement had to have the courage derived from self-respect to be willing to die for a worthy cause. David speaks to Cassie about the importance of self-respect: “You have to demand respect in this world, ain’t nobody just gonna hand it to you. How you carry yourself, what you stand for—that’s how you gain respect. But, little one, ain’t nobody’s respect worth more than your own” (*Roll* 176). Thus Taylor’s characters demonstrate how the essence of the black world is self-respect.

It would seem, according to what the Logans convey to their children, that one principle of survival important for African American children of the 1930s is that African Americans should associate with or rely on white people as little as possible. Besides telling Stacey not to befriend Jeremy because eventually he may prove untrustworthy, David explains, “We Logans don’t have much to do with white folks. You know why? ’Cause white folks mean trouble. You see blacks hanging ’round with whites, they’re headed for trouble” (*Roll* 158). David’s warning foreshadows the downfall of T. J., who

⁶ Betty Lanier Jenkins states that *Song of the Trees* displays “a pleasant solidarity story” (60). Using “pleasant” to describe what takes place is vacuous. Even though Taylor expresses some pleasantries about the children frolicking at the beginning of the book, their efforts, especially David’s threat of murder-suicide to defend the family dignity and land, are not “pleasant.” Jenkins wrote her comments in 1975 when culturally conscious books, as described by Rudine Sims (15), were just beginning to appear in the market place. In all fairness, Jenkins may be commenting on the pleasantness of having a book that tells a story about a happy and wholesome black family and one that is not a reflection of the negativism of mainstream books for children or brokenness of the black family conveyed in the Moynihan Report.

does not learn this lesson from his parents. Stacey accepts his father's admonition about befriending Jeremy; however, he does not heed his mother's advice to refrain from "bowing and scraping to white people" until he is older (*Let the Circle* 204-05): Stacey's disobedience almost costs him his life because he runs off to work on a cane farm. David teaches Cassie the importance of not trusting white Mississippians, such as when Granger offers to pay the taxes on their land, as a way to gain control of it (*Roll* 99). Cassie reiterates her parents' advice to stay clear of white people: "White folks are always doing something or other and you know Papa says you can't much trust none of 'em" (*Roll* 222).

Just as Du Bois endeavors to inspire readers to sacrificial service, another principle Taylor demonstrates through the examples of Logans and others the need to fulfill one's duty and to make sacrifices for others. Several people embody a willingness to sacrifice themselves in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*. Caroline leads a cow on the two-hour walk to the widower Turner and his household of children to replace the Turner's dead cow. She also uses her skills with plants for healing as a way to serve the black community. In the same vein, Mary, who is "born to teaching like the sun is born to shine" (*Roll* 183), helps Lee Annie Lees study the Mississippi Constitution. Mary organizes Saturday school to help students study for their school exams. The Logans are grateful for the widow Aunt Mattie Jones, who takes to heart the biblical exhortation to visit strangers in jail and applies her skill as a medic to tend to Stacey and Moe. In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Hammer models the practice of giving for the good of others by trading his prized late model Packard to help the Logans pay taxes: "What good's a

car? It can't grow cotton. You can't build a home on it. And you can't raise four fine babies in it" (*Roll* 236). Ordinary people do extraordinary acts, and in so doing, they model sacrificial giving to others for the next generation.

Not only does Taylor exalt the black family, showing its warmth and unified strength, she also couples with their love for one another a love for the Logan land. Crowe identifies the existence of the dual themes, family and land, in Taylor's books. Being land owners in Mississippi in the 1930s, especially as black men, raises their esteem in the eyes of others. Dubé Cross, a seventeen-year-old day laborer who is still in the fifth grade, views the Logans' land and remarks, "Y-y-y'all some kkkk-kinda lucky" (*Let the Circle* 129). Moe Turner, a sharecropper's son, admires the Logans for having their own land and dreams of his family owning land some day. In "Representations of the Black Male," Myrna Dee Marler determines that it is his being a landowner that is the backbone of David's masculinity, his respectability in the community; so he is a man of integrity respected by his family and others.

The Logans' land is emphasized in the early books in that some aspect of the land is the subject of a plot or subplot. For example, in *Song of the Trees*, the Logans join to stop Andersen from chopping their beloved trees from the land. He presumes upon his white privilege: "These folks [the Logans] ain't got no call for [their trees]. I do. I got me a good contract for these trees and I aim to fulfill it" (*Song* 23). David asserts his position over the possession of the trees and intimidates the white men off the land. The family and their land, though marred by the felled trees, are still intact by the end of the story.

In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Harlan Granger wants to regain land the Logans now own, land that had been a part of the Grangers' 30,000-plus-acre plantation before the Civil War. He offers to buy it, but the Logans refuse to sell. David is determined to keep his land: "You being white, you can jest 'bout plan on anything you want. But I tell you this one thing: You plan on getting this land, you're planning on the wrong thing" (*Roll* 170). Granger continues to vie for Logan land: he offers to pay taxes on the land, knowing that getting his name tied to the land means that some day he could step forth and claim the land. As school board member, Granger threatens the Logans' livelihood by having Mary Logan fired from her teaching job. Presumably Granger is responsible for the bank calling up the note for the Logans' land even though the contract allows them four more years until it was due. Granger represents the white community's sense of entitlement that often robs or tries to rob the black community's pride, self-respect, and possessions.

By way of furthering her portrayal of the strong black family, Taylor emphasizes the positive aspects of the Logans' parenting by introducing a negative example, T. J. Averys' parents. Using the Joe and Fannie Avery as a foil, Taylor demonstrates not only the variations of family dynamics in the black family but the harm that comes when parents do not pass along to their children survival skills. Joe and Fannie must have begun the process of training their son how to navigate the Jim Crow society. Whereas Cassie demonstrates that she does not know how to act with subservience around white people in Barnett's Mercantile, Stacey is certain that T. J. "knows exactly how to act": with compliance (*Roll* 113). However, T. J.'s parents must not have completed their

training because he does not abide by the practice of loving and respecting his family. He schemes to run an errand so he will get out of doing work at home. His parents do not succeed in teaching him other principles that would enable him to survive, such as not trusting white people.⁷ He also chooses friendship with white boys over his commitment to his community. Mary states prophetically that Joe and Fannie Avery had “better figure out some way of getting that boy back on the right track because he’s headed for a whole lot of trouble” (*Roll* 208).

To define the African American family differently from how it was portrayed in books, Taylor not only portrays the strong patriarchal family model Du Bois advocated at the beginning of the twentieth century, but she also shows the strength of the unified black family as they successfully resist the oppression of Jim Crow a few decades later. In *If We Could Change*, Rebecca de Schweinitz demonstrates how African Americans children and youth of the period, often rooted in the principles and skills of their parents, produced fruit for decades to come in terms of the Civil Rights Movement.

Taylor Reconsiders African Americans in History

In Taylor’s efforts to tell family stories, she presents an alternative to what was presented in history books. She shows that blacks are not lazy, docile, or subservient in the face of the oppression by the dominant culture, as the history books indicated, but that they are motivated, active, and courageous. Like Du Bois, who highlights the

⁷ As part of his defense in the murder trial, Wade Jamison intimates T. J.’s “gullibility” regarding whites as he explains T. J.’s willingness to comply with Melvin and R.W. Simms (*Let the Circle* 81). Seeking to transform the tide of public opinion, Jamison postulates: “If we teach [African American people] to follow us in what we deem is good, isn’t it logical that they follow us in what is not good? We demand they follow us docilely, and if they should dare to disobey, we punish them for their disobedience, as Melvin and R.W. punished T. J. by beating him. T. J. murdered no one. His guilt lies more in his gullibility than two white men cared about him, than in anything else” (*Let the Circle* 81).

accomplishments of numerous black persons in history and among his contemporaries, Taylor writes about everyday people who resemble the people of her family's stories. Yet unlike Du Bois, who includes stories about real people in contemporary life and in history, Taylor mentions only two famous black persons and their books in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. T. J. finds W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Negro* on Mary Logan's desk at home, a book which she presumably uses as a textbook for her class (*Roll* 76). David Logan gives their children two books by Alexander Dumas, *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. He proudly explains that the books were written by a black Frenchman whose father was a mulatto and his grandmother a black woman from the island of Martinique (*Roll* 193). Taylor writes stories about the exploits of fictional characters who resemble the everyday black persons from her family's oral storytelling tradition.

Many of the plots and subplots are derived from family stories, of real people Taylor's father, her uncles, or others had known. Crowe records events from Taylor's books that mirror events from family stories: Wilbert Taylor let his friend talk him out of a coat his uncle had given him by calling him "preacher" just as Stacey had T. J. in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*. Additionally, uncles had often given advice and money when they came to live with the Taylors in Toledo, Ohio, as Hammer does for the Logans in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* (Crowe 43). Sharing family meals, telling stories, and singing were also a part of her life which she incorporated in her early stage books. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* is based on a story her father told her of a black youth who befriended two white youths and together robbed

a store, killing the store owner. The whites successfully framed the black boy for the crime (*Women Writers*). Those are some of the aspects of the books that bring verisimilitude to her writing, showing what she considers to be a picture of black life that coincided with her family's experiences.

Education

Telling details that illustrate the precarious nature of the African American in the South of the 1930s are scattered throughout the Logan saga. One example of something that depicts what life was like for blacks in Jim Crow society is Cassie's description of the flags flying on the white school's lawn in *Roll of Thunder*. In the center of the spacious lawn in front of the educational institution for white children, aptly called Jefferson Davis School, stands a pole displaying two flags. There is no mistaking the significance that at the top of the pole is Mississippi's flag, "the Confederacy emblazoned in its upper left-hand corner" (*Roll* 15). Below the state flag hangs the American flag. To ensure that the reader perceives the significance, Taylor allows her authorial mask to slip and reports to the reader that the flags are "transposed," reversed from the normal order (15). By describing the flag, Taylor reminds the reader that in the 1930s in Mississippi, states' rights and Jim Crow laws took precedence over federal concerns like the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the United State Constitution. The reversal of the flags symbolizes what it meant to be a black person in Jim Crow society. The respect and love that Cassie's family and the black community afford her is not replicated outside the home by most white Mississippians. Both the strong Logan family and the harsh racial attitudes in her books are drawn from history.

The realm of education is one arena in which Taylor documents inequities among Mississippians due to race and demonstrates how individuals and groups in the black community respond. Despite the language in *Plessy v. Ferguson* calling for separate but equal treatment of people of color, education for blacks was not equal to their white counterparts. In *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow*, Neil McMillen explains the discrepancies between the educational conditions of blacks and whites. In the mid-1930s, the state spent \$11 on each black child and \$147 for each white child. For every dollar spent on white schools, seven cents was spent on black schools (McMillen 84). Black teachers earned one-third or one-quarter of what white teachers earned. For instance, in 1939, black teachers earned \$237 a year and white teachers earned \$750 (McMillen 87). By 1940, only twenty-five of the eighty-two counties had a high school (McMillen 85). Northern Foundations provided money for the purpose of developing black schools. However, the money did not always get to its intended recipients due to machination of the white Southerners in charge (McMillen 84). Money from these organizations decreased in the Depression Era (Fairclough 171-73). Those facts and many others that McMillen's history identifies verify Taylor's account of the Logans' experience at school and counter the media depictions of the mid twentieth century.

The statistics outlined by contemporary histories correspond to Taylor's description of the segregated schools for blacks and whites. Whereas Jefferson Davis School had a nicely painted white building, expansive playing fields with bleachers, new books, two buses, and a longer school year, Great Faith School meet in four unpainted

weather-worn buildings, receives cast-off books, boasts of no buses, and has a shorter school year so the black children could work in the fields. Denied access to public transportation to school, the Logan children walk an hour to school, and Stacey's classmate, Moe Turner, walks three hours each way to attend school. In Taylor's stories for children, she shows that black students are not treated fairly in the 1930s but that they endured despite this inequity. Local black churches subsidize the few funds that came from the county to support Great Faith School. Although Taylor does not note or explain "separate but equal" predicament in her books, she portrays its reality. Students of Great Faith School are segregated from white children attending Jefferson Davis School, and white students have nicer facilities, a longer school year, and newer books.⁸

The Logans realize that equality of education does not exist, and they find ways to protest the inequities. The Logan siblings are not lackadaisical about their ill treatment at school because of racial injustices, but oppose it. Little Man rejects the "new" school textbooks recently given to the black school and rages when he reads the page in the textbook that labels him, the recipient of the book that year, a "nigra" (*Roll* 25). His mother concurs with her son and informs his teacher, Miz Crocker, that just because others considered the blacks inferior "doesn't mean [the students] have to accept" it (*Roll* 30). The Logan children are incensed when the white bus driver tries to run them off the road and the bus riders joined his disrespect with their "moronic rolls of laughter" and name-calling (*Roll* 13, 48). Therefore, they sabotage the road to disable the bus. Despite

⁸ When Taylor's family took their annual trip from Ohio to Mississippi to visit relatives still farming the land, she and her sister attended the school that their father attended as a boy for a week or so at a time. According to her father, the school had not changed since he was there, so Taylor had the opportunity to be in a school like the one she portrayed in her early stage books (Taylor, "Mildred" 272).

her account of the second rate education in the black community, Taylor shows that black families honored education and had “great faith” in its ability to benefit them and enhance their lives.

Judicial System

Besides privileging whites in education, Mississippi society in the 1930s also benefitted whites in the realm of the law. Historically, blacks were considered guilty, not innocent, in the judicial system, which was dominated by white lawyers, white judges, and white jurors (McMillen 215). Evidently, trials for blacks went more quickly than for whites, making it more difficult to build a solid defense and easier for the jury to render a guilty verdict (McMillen 205).

Taylor portrays the court system from the vantage point of T. J. Avery’s murder trial and sheds light on the black experience in the courtroom. Cassie comes to understand that according to the Jim Crow practices, the privileges awarded all citizens do not apply to blacks. Wade Jamison, a white attorney, explains that the law is “basically for whites” (*Roll* 163). As pointed out in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, in the 1930s, black defendants faced white juries, since counties had no black voters to draw upon. Despite T. J.’s mere one day murder trial, Jamison mounts a strong case that casts doubt on T. J.’s culpability and implies that the real murderers are Melvin and R. W. Simms. Even the murder victim’s widow and only witness is uncertain of her ability to pinpoint T. J. as the one who hit her husband. T. J.’s fate is sealed because the jurors’ sensibilities cannot allow a black man to go free and white men to be charged in his stead. Wade Jamison, an advocate for the black community and respected by the Logans,

remarks that although there were many white people who disapprove of the treatment of black people in cases like this, “there are not enough of those same people who would admit how they feel” (*Roll* 161-62). As an elderly black man recites after T. J.’s murder trial: “Trial or lynching, it always be’s the same. Sho’ is” (*Let the Circle* 85).

Jamison wants to keep Stacey away from T. J. while he is in jail and on trial because he knows that some people would assume Stacey’s guilty by association (*Let the Circle* 35). There is historical precedence for their fear of reprisal. In the mid-1930s, Arthur “Yank” Ellington was accused of killing his employer, a white man named Raymond Stewart, due to circumstantial evidence. He was black, he was in the vicinity because he went to pay his respects to the dead man’s family, and he was talking quietly to some other black men. Although innocent, he was beaten brutally by a mob and forced to confess (McMillen 197-201). In Jim Crow society, black people were not given the benefit of the doubt. In “Whiteness as Property,” Cheryl Harris⁹ writes that “within the worlds of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation, whiteness has value and whiteness is expected to be valued in law” (287). With these incidents with the Logan children and in other

⁹ In “Whiteness as Property,” Cheryl Harris deals with the concept that white skin or whiteness in America allows its bearer rights to property and other benefits that are not allotted to those who are not white. She gives the historical precedent for this belief and demonstrates its truth in the late 1900s. Critical race theory (CRT) discusses this topic that has come to legal spheres in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Refer to *Critical Race Theory* by Crenshaw et al. for a lengthy discussion. Two critics apply critical race theory to Taylor’s texts. In “Racial Identification and Audience,” Jani L. Barker discusses Taylor’s attempt to show implied readers—whites—in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* the harm of racism rather than the wickedness of the white race by helping them identify with the Cassie Logan, Jeremy Simms, and others (130). In “An Author as a Counter-Storyteller: Applying Critical Race Theory to a Coretta Scott King Award Book,” Wanda Brooks looks at Paul-Edward’s counter-story in *The Land*. She advances three tenets of CRT: counter-storytelling, property ownership, and continued manifestation of racism (38). How Paul-Edward feels about his land is expressed by “inspiration and adoration,” “privilege and entitlement,” and “freedom and security” (39). Taylor’s story of race resistance which leads to her protagonist’s success contradicts the norm in the mores of the South. His success at land ownership contradicts expectations allotted by the white community.

incidents in her books, Taylor is carefully drawing for her readers an accurate picture of the legal system being weighted on the side of white people.

Voting

The right to vote was not freely shared with black men in Mississippi. Mississippi voted three black men in as state representatives in 1892 and one in 1898. After that no black person was voted into office on the state level in Mississippi until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (McMillen 60). Thus, African Americans did not hold seats in Congress in Mississippi for the first half of the twentieth century, nor did they widely vote. In the chart, “Mississippi Voting Age Population and Voter Registration by Race, 1868-1964,” McMillen indicates the rise and fall of voter registration among black Mississippians. Beginning in 1868, ninety-seven percent of all black males voted, which totaled 86,973. The end of the Reconstruction Era and the rise of black codes critically reduced the number of voters in the following years. In 1882, only 8,922 blacks voted. Numbers increased in 1896 when 16,234 blacks voted, and three years later, in 1899, the number rose even more, to 18,171. But by 1940, the number had dropped to show that only four-tenths percent—2,000—of the adult population of blacks voted (McMillen 36). Thistlethwaite asserts that to keep black citizens from voting, white southerners armed themselves with a plethora of chicanery, which included “poll taxes, literacy tests, moral and physical intimidation” (178). Restrictions were made so only the literate could vote or only land holders or only those paying the poll tax (McMillen 44-45). Reportedly, blacks registering to vote in Hinds County had to supply the answer to imponderable questions such as “How old was Christ when he was born?” (McMillen 45).

Taylor demonstrates the struggle a black person faced in order to vote in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*. Lee Annie Lees explains how proud her father and she are when he voted after the Civil War, presumably in the late 1860s. Despite his exhilaration at his accomplishment, the night following the vote, he is attacked by a mob of night riders who beat him up and dragged him along the road. Lees states that many black voters faced the same treatment. Her father did not vote any more. Sixty-five-year-old Lees takes several months to study and memorize the Mississippi Constitution, and with her poll tax in hand, heads to the county court house to register to vote. Upon hearing her request to register to vote, registrar Samuel Boudein barks the same question at Lees that Jim Barnett bullies nine-year-old Cassie in his mercantile in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*: “Whose nigger are you?” (*Let the Circle* 357; *Roll* 102). Before the mixed labor union assemblage demanding rights in front of the courthouse, Granger chides Lees for “gettin’ beyond herself” by trying to vote and entertains murmurs in the crowd calling for her to be beaten (*Let the Circle* 373). Not only is she denied the vote, Lees is also penalized for her efforts since Granger says she can no longer remain on the land she sharecropped for years: he renders her jobless and homeless.

Lynching

Another aspect of Jim Crow that favored whites over blacks was lynching. Historically, lynching was supposed to be the white man’s way to protect white women, but in actuality it was the white men’s way of controlling a portion of the population who outnumbered them and whom they feared: black men (McMillen 240). The NAACP reported that only 12.7 of the lynchings in Mississippi from 1889 to 1935 were attributed

to the suspicion of rape (McMillen 235). Accusations of murder of a white rather than rape was the usual cause for lynching (McMillen 236). The rest of the lynchings were carried out because of the black person's inappropriate behavior, such as "insubordination," writing an "insulting" letter, organizing sharecroppers, and owing as little as fifty cents, and "being too preposterous" (McMillen 236). According to McMillen, Mississippi was the biggest advocate of lynching, with the greatest number,¹⁰ the most female lynching victims, the most victims taken from police jurisdiction, and the least likely to prosecute lynch mobs (230). Mississippi also had little support from the white population in efforts to staunch lynching. In churches, the clergy determined to say little or nothing about lynching so as not to discomfort or rile church members, who may or may not have been a part of lynch mobs (McMillen 246). Interestingly, Hinds County, Mississippi, had the highest number of lynchings in the state from 1889 to 1945 (McMillen 230-31).

Notwithstanding the fact that lynchings decreased in the Depression Era, Taylor shows how lynching is a part of the milieu in Mississippi. Even though lynchings in the state decreased in the 1930s, Taylor does not ignore them but cites their occurrences in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*.¹¹ In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Jamison stands alone against the mob trying to lynch T. J. Avery, whom

¹⁰ Lynching is a term used to identify any mob attack, which includes hanging from a rope, burning, maiming, and mutilation, on a marginalized group member.

¹¹ In the 1929 NAACP *Twentieth Annual Report*, the number of reported lynchings dropped from one hundred in 1909 to twelve in 1933 (4). In the *Twenty-fourth Annual Report*, in 1932, the NAACP reported ten lynchings in 1932. In 1933, twenty-eight lynchings were reported, but only two of those were in Mississippi (20). In *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, Charles Payne attributes the drop in cotton price in the Depression Era (19). Presumably there was less of a need to control the blacks in Mississippi because they were as poor as many whites, so they did not present imminent treats to them (Payne 19).

they decide is guilty of murder (*Roll* 255). Sam Tatum is tarred and feathered for accusing Jim Barnett of lying about his account at the Mercantile (*Roll* 74-75). Lynching a black person for calling a white person a liar is realistic as exemplified by the account of Jim Brady in 1910 that McMillen includes. He states that Brady thought a planter had not settled his account correctly and brought it to the white man's attention. The altercation led to the black man returning the white man's blows and was followed by Brady's flogging and then his hanging (McMillen 140).

Grotesquely referred to as "Negro Barbeques" by a newspaper (233), burnings occurred at least fifteen times in Mississippi in each of the first four decades of the twentieth century (McMillen 234). This punishment was usually reserved for those accused of sex crimes, such as newspaper journalist I. Q. Ivy, an accused rapist, who was burned at the stake in Rocky Fort, Mississippi in 1925 (McMillen 234). In 1929 a mentally challenged man in Jackson, Mississippi, was tortured and burned for seven hours (McMillen 234). In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, two of Mr. Berry's nephews are accused of flirting with a white woman. The Wallace brothers accost the Berrys and pour gasoline on them. In his attempt to help his relatives, Mr. Berry is included in the dousing and then all are set on fire. All three men eventually die of their injuries (*Roll* 39-40).

Apart from the lynchings, the threat of the mob was also used to create fear in the black community and thus to maintain control. Taylor demonstrates that groups of white men invade the sanctity of the black community just as they rupture the Logans' realm of safety. Mr. Avery warns the Logans that the night men are riding, trying to keep the

black community in “their place” (*Roll* 60). Cassie is traumatized by night riders, gun-toting men who drive up their driveway late one night while Big Ma guards the family with her rifle. That night the mob is not after Cassie and her brothers for damaging the white school bus, as she fears; they are after Sam Tatum, whom they catch the following night. Taylor does not portray the night riders wearing sheets, and she does not refer to Ku Klux Klan, which is historically correct because the Klan was not organized in Mississippi until 1964 (Cunningham n. pag.). However, beginning in Reconstruction, white men still formed in groups to attack black people who had offended white people in one way or another.

Taylor shows how sharecroppers were kept in virtual servitude and poverty. McMillen explains that landowners supplied the land, tools, and seeds for the sharecroppers to use for farming and then took most of the money made from the crops the sharecropper could produce. He explains that landowners extended credit to sharecroppers who were expected to shop in their store. Additionally, the shopkeepers affiliated with the landowners kept records that often conveniently (for the landowners) determined that the accounts were even or nearly so at the end of the year, so sharecroppers could never remove themselves from financial constraints to better improve their lot (McMillen 131-33). In her depiction of Moe Turner’s family, Taylor demonstrates the hopelessness of never getting ahead. The Turners’ financial condition makes it impossible for them to obtain their own land, but land ownership is something Moe wants for his father.

One incident in which the Logans demonstrate their concern for their neighbors in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* is their organization of the boycott of the Wallace store. To tacitly protest the public's lack of concern for the burning of the Berrys, Mary and David garner the support of thirty families who decide not to shop at the Wallace store and instead to trade at a store in Vicksburg. David offers to pick up the items, and Wade Jamison agrees to co-sign for all the families. The boycott lasts three months and threatens the Wallaces' revenue. This author could not find accounts of boycotts during the 1930s in Mississippi. A short-lived boycott of a small store in an out of the way community might not be worthy of recording for historians, but it was part of the Logans' family oral history.

Labor Unions

Taylor included a labor union in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, which was a viable aspect of the black experience in Mississippi. Taylor most likely based this subplot on the formation of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union (STFU) that began in Arkansas and expanded into some counties of Mississippi (McMillen 136). STFU had reached some counties of Mississippi by the early 1930s and was successful in five counties of the Black Prairie and Delta regions. The STFU numbered three hundred to five hundred members at its peak in 1938 (135-36). Both black and whites were involved in the STFU, but Mississippi whites were determined to squelch all attempts to unionize (McMillen 136). History reported that Wilder McGowan and the Reverend T. A. Allen were killed in 1935 for organizing Mississippi sharecroppers into a union (Payne 21). Hinds County residents were not involved significantly in the STFU.

Taylor uses the formation of a mixed race labor union where the Logans lived to explore one way African Americans strive to oppose the injustices against black people. A day laborer, Dubé Cross, sees the labor union as the only way for him to get ahead financially. Their efforts at unionizing are belittled by influential whites like Granger who eventually succeeds in intimidating the struggling union into disbanding. Yet whites are not the only people who disparage those who want to start the union. Big Ma shakes her head at the community's effort to form a labor union: "Maybe the union make out 'long Arkansas way, but these here white folks in Mississippi ain't never gonna stand for no union. 'Specially no mixed union" (*Let the Circle* 142), so she is against David's attempt to help start one. Taylor shows the skepticism and hope of the black and white members of the mixed race labor union striving to improve circumstances for their children. Much about this portion of the story is based on true experiences with labor unions except that most likely there was not a mixed labor union in Hinds County, Mississippi, in the 1930s (McMillen 135-36).

In her historical fiction, Taylor creates "faction," which Alex Haley defines as fiction based on fact (Harper 65), to show how ordinary individuals courageously attempt the extraordinary. Through Cassie's narration, Taylor demonstrates the bravery of those black members who are motivated to fight for labor rights, despite the hardships of humiliation and threat of bodily harm by those against unions. In these and other incidents in her books, Taylor tells stories that shed new light on history as it was told to her by her family's oral tradition. She showed that even though justice was not blind in the segregated society of Mississippi in the 1930s and that "law was basically for whites"

(*Roll* 163), black persons were not content to accept this racial inequity unopposed. This author hastens to acknowledge that regardless of the intelligence and courage and fortitude of these black people, apart from the Logans keeping their land, none of Taylor's black characters are able to effect significant changes in the Jim Crow South. Her stated intentions are not to break down the barriers for black people but to show their endurance despite the strength of the dominant culture. Many of the characters succeed in their endeavors, but they do not achieve a victory against racism in society.

A Bridge Text

The shift that evolves in the books from stage to stage takes incremental steps, with these steps beginning by the end of the early stage. As a bridge text between the early and middle stages, *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* has characteristics that are a part of both early and middle stages in the area of plot and family dynamics.

In *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, plots focus on two aspects of the Logans and on concerns that are not specifically in the Logan family. The plot focus on the Logans are their financial concerns regarding their land and the search for Stacey who has run away to earn money. Most of the subplots that do not deal specifically with the Logans still involve them in some way. For example, T. J. Avery's murder trial concerns the Logan siblings because they care about their erstwhile companion, so they sneak into Strawberry to view the trial. Also, Lee Annie Lees wants to register to vote, so Cassie and Mary help her learn the Mississippi Constitution. Hardworking neighbors seek to make a better living for themselves and agree to participate in the Farmers Workers Union, so David supports it. Suzella Rankin, a mulatto, visits the Logans and is a source of Cassie's

jealousy, and she demonstrates passing in her encounter with Stuart Walker. In the middle stage books, the Logans are no longer the primary focus, but Taylor fulfills her intention of not letting the Logans “fade into oblivion” (“Newbery” 407). In the bridge text Taylor demonstrates an inclination to write about characters besides Cassie Logan and her family.

Although David is an “ideal husband . . . [,] romantic and courtly,” showing affection and sharing laughter in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Marler 165), the tone of David and Mary’s relationship changes in the sequel, in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*. A difference in the family is present in the marital relationship between Mary and David and in their parental involvement in the lives of their children. Mary is less certain of her husband’s ability to lead their family. She wanes in her support for David’s choice to return to Louisiana and waxes in her criticism of his going. Mary insists that David’s place is at home because all the children, especially Stacey, need his paternal guidance. She disparages David when he cannot find Stacey and chides him that their son would not have run away if David had been home. The marital friction between David and Mary unsettles the Logan children. Christopher-John reports that his mother blames his father for Stacey’s running away. Cassie overhears Mary question David’s marital commitment when she suggests that he likes “being a single man on the railroad” (187). Cassie hears David question whether Mary still loves him. Cassie confronts her mother and asks, “Mama, don’t you love [Papa] anymore?” (302). Cassie’s, Christopher-John’s, and Little Man’s happiness is impeded by their parents’ discord.

Stacey is affected by his parents' treatment of him in another way. David and Mary do not adequately parent Stacey as he is trying to find his way into the adult world. David is not home to guide his son in important decisions, and Mary is not able to get through to their thirteen-year-old son. Just as Mary is critical of the Averys' faulty parenting of T. J. in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Taylor suggests that David and Mary could have made better choices regarding their children in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*. By this point in Taylor's oeuvre, she seems to be more willing to honestly portray both weakness and strengths in the Logan's parents.

These examples of familial discord in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* foreshadow changes in family that appear in middle stage books. Family disagreements and disunity are not major plot points and only seem glaring when isolated, but their presence cannot be dismissed when considering nuanced changes between stages. At the end, all is well with the family because together the parents locate and bring Stacey home, and Stacey assures readers that home is "the very best place to be" (394). Taylor stills seems to be honoring the patriarchal model as Du Bois advocated, but she allows characters to question David's position as male leader of the Logan family. As will become evident in the next chapter, Taylor deviates from the Duboisian family model more pronouncedly in her middle stage books.

Summary

Writing half a century after *The Brownies' Book* was published, Taylor repeats Du Bois's call, providing a primer for both parents and children through her early works. Like him, she wanted to show readers a new way to perceive the black people by

providing well-defined characterization of those who are doing something meaningful. The Logans are a united force against the onslaught of racism that is meant to crush them. Without actually footnoting the key incidents in her work of historical fiction to show how fiction intersects with historical reality, Taylor presents her plot points so that the reader can feel better informed by the end of each book. Taylor portrays African Americans as citizens who do not complacently abide by unfair laws or merely cater to the whims of individual racists. These characters persevere despite unfairness. She highlights the aspirations and achievements of the Logans, Moe Turner, and Lee Annie Lees, who represent real people ignored in history books who acted heroically. Taylor's characters and plots demonstrate how children were on a trajectory of resistance in the face of oppression. Taylor illustrates her endeavors in the early stage in the words of Mr. Morrison, who tells the story about his parents' sacrificial act to save his life from a mob in the days following the Reconstruction Era: "I makes myself remember" and tells other people's stories (*Roll* 150). Taylor gleaned history from her family's oral storytelling tradition and was a mouth-king telling stories of those who can no longer speak for themselves.

Chapter IV

CHANGING FOCUS IN TAYLOR'S MIDDLE STAGE BOOKS

Various changes occur that point to a shift in ideologies in Mildred Taylor's middle stage books: *The Gold Cadillac* (1987), *The Friendship* (1987), *The Road to Memphis* (1990), and *Mississippi Bridge* (1990). While themes of racial injustice continue in each of her middle stage books, aspects of their focus differentiate them from those in her early stage. Another change is that their plots, which focus more on people outside Cassie's immediate family. Also, the plots do not pertain to the Logan land. Taylor uses different narrators in her middle stage books. Reflecting incidents in Taylor's life and family, these books de-emphasize the patriarchal family, questioning the authority of the husband/father and minimizing the importance of parental training and protection. Finally, these books suggest that African American characters have a growing sense of their agency and that the seemingly impenetrable fortress of white dominance is weakening. Together these changes demonstrate a shift in Taylor's political ideologies that is not fully evident until her late stage books.

Change in Subject

The subjects in Taylor's middle stage books differ in that although the Logan children are generally present, they are not always the focus of the main story, and neither is their land. In *The Gold Cadillac*, the first middle stage book, Cassie and her family do not appear at all. Even though Taylor insists that the book is part of the Logan saga (Crowe 77), the story is about 'lois and her family in Toledo, Ohio, and takes in the 1950s, two decades after the conclusion of *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*. The story begins

when 'lois's father, Wilbert, purchases a new Cadillac, which troubles his wife, Dee, since he uses money they were saving for a new house. The remainder of the book includes 'lois telling about pleasant outings with relatives and friends and then of the family's fateful trip in the new car to visit relatives in Mississippi, when 'lois sees things she never forgets.

In *The Friendship*, Taylor brings the Logan children in the early 1930s back to print, but with a difference. Although the Logan children are present in *The Friendship*, they do not play a prominent role in the main plot, for this is Tom Bee's story. In the course of several hours one day, Cassie tells what happens in and around the forbidden Wallace store. Little Man Logan is horrified when Dewberry and Thurston Wallace, John Wallace's sons, tease him about his dark complexion, saying his hands are dirty and should be cut off with an ax. The incident helps to characterize the Wallaces' bigotry and sets the stage for Tom Bee's oppositional stance. The elderly Tom Bee decides he will make John Wallace own up to a promise made years before when he said that the black man was always going to be able to call him "John" and not the prescribed "Mister John" (39). Prodded by his sons to teach Tom Bee a lesson for his effrontery, the white man shoots his old friend in the leg. The Logan children witness Tom Bee's stand against the status quo, the primary plot of the story.

The Road to Memphis again involves the Logans; this time, in the last few months of 1939, up to the bombing of Pearl Harbor and America entering World War II. Various plots center on the Logans, and others involve them tangentially. Cassie (17) and Stacey (20), now living in Jackson, Mississippi, face challenges that relate to a handful of their

friends. Incidents centering on the Logans include Cassie being assaulted when she tries to use a toilet intended for white patrons and having a romantic encounter with Solomon Bradley. Stacey buys his first car. The Logan children and their friends are hunting when Harris Mitchum is terrorized by Statler and his dogs and breaks his leg. Other incidents only involve the Logan children peripherally. One of Stacey's friends, Clarence, finds he is the father of the unborn baby of Sissy Mitchum, Harris's twin, and Cassie tries to be a peacemaker between Sissy and Clarence. Clarence appeals to a hospital for relief from his excruciating headaches, but the white doctor refuses to help a black man even though he is an American soldier dressed in his military uniform. Nevertheless, the main plot involves Moe Turner, who needs to flee the south when his outrage against Statler's sexual insinuations about Cassie lead him to attack Statler and his two brothers—three white men—with a crowbar.

Set in the early 1930s, *Mississippi Bridge* is Jeremy Simms' account of what happens on a rainy day inside the Wallace store and on the bridge at Rosa Lee Creek. John Wallace chides Rudine Johnson for wanting to try on a hat in his store, but he encourages Miz Hattie McElroy, a white woman, to do so. Charlie Simms, Jeremy's father, resents Josias Williams for saying he has prospects of a job for "cash money" since Charlie thinks black men should not have jobs when white men need them. He intimidates Josias into falsely saying that he does not really have such a job. The Logan children accompany their grandmother, Caroline, who buys a bus ticket, and help her get a seat on the back of the bus. A late arriving white family has priority on the bus, so the bus driver forces all the black passengers to give up their seats, despite Josias's refusal.

Shortly after departure, the bus careens off the slippery bridge and plunges into the Rosa Lee Creek, killing all on board.

Change in Narrator

An aspect of the change in the focus in Taylor's middle stage books is that Taylor makes a different choice of narrators, the voices through whom she tells the stories. She incorporates important changes in narrative voices in two ways. First, she uses Cassie's child voice as narrator—her only narrator in the early stage books—just once in the middle stage books, in *The Friendship*. Second, Taylor adds older people as narrators, all of whom privilege their younger self for the storytelling: adult 'lois in *The Gold Cadillac*, young woman Cassie in *The Road to Memphis*, and adult Jeremy Simms in *Mississippi Bridge*.

In realistic fiction, first person point of view helps create verisimilitude. Terminology used by Andrea Wylie in "Expanding the View of First-Person Narration" illuminates the two kinds of narrators Taylor employs. The immediate-engaging-first-person narrative is one in which the narrator is a young person who tells about events that occur within the past year. The narrator's nearness in time to what is focalized (the circumstances that he or she is discussing) provides immediacy and engages the reader (Wylie 188). The distant-engaging-first-person narrative is one in which an older narrator allows his or her younger self to tell about events that happened long before (Wylie 190). Narrators in distant-engaging-first-person narratives are separated in time from what is focalized, which Wylie indicates is a time difference of more than a year (190). She explains that the author will allow the older narrator to identify himself or

herself, which is how the reader knows that the narrator is older but is privileging his younger self (189). Distant-engaging narrators engage the reader because of the younger self's close approximation to the event. Normally an older narrator who tells the story through his younger self will supply information or insights inaccessible to his or her younger self in order to enlighten the reader (Wyile 194). Taylor adds this second type of narrator, the distant-engaging-first-person narrator, in her middle stage, a change from her early stage books in which she used only immediate-engaging-first-person narrators.¹

With the second book in the middle stage, *The Friendship*, Taylor uses an immediate-first-person narrator for a final time in the Logan saga. Nine-year-old Cassie tells about one day in her life when she and her brothers do an errand for Aunt Callie at the Wallace store and meet up with Tom Bee. She tells how Little Man is demoralized when Dewberry and Thurston Wallace tease him. She also tells about white people being persnickety about making sure people of color refer to them with “mister” or “missus” in front of their names (28). Her narrative differs from the earlier books because instead of letting the reader hear Tom Bee's plethora of stories about what he remembers about slavery and the Civil War, as Cassie had Mr. Morrison, Caroline, and David do in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, she lets the reader hear only one story, Tom Bee's relationship with John Wallace and the promise John had made him:

He says to me, I'm John t' you now, gonna always be John t' ya, cause
you been like a daddy t' me I couldn't never 'spect my daddy to go callin'

¹ Taylor does not use Wyile's third type of first person narrative, the distance narrative in which an adult narrator conveys the story and never enters into his younger self to tell the story (Wyile 198).

me mister. He done promised me that. Promised me he wasn't never gonna forget what I done for him. (38-9)

But John reneges on his promise, and Tom Bee thinks it is time to call his attention to the lapse.

Cassie's role as narrator in this book is different from that in the early stage books. Whereas Cassie is willing to give her opinion about offensive people and circumstances in early stage books, she serves as more of an observer of the action than the subject of what is focalized. In the manner of a Greek chorus, Cassie repeats what others have said about Tom Bee's mode of opposition, such as stating that Big Ma believes that Tom Bee is foolish for calling a white man by his first name without adding the "mister" to the front of it. When Little Man is troubled by the unkind teasing of Thurston and Dewberry Wallace, Cassie does not upbraid the white men for their teasing but merely remarks to herself, "Wasn't nothin' 'bout it funny to me" (*Friendship* 20). She does not comment on John shooting Tom Bee with a shot gun, tearing a gash in his leg, or even express concern or outrage about the incident. Nor does she tell what becomes of Tom Bee. The last words are Tom Bee's outcry that he will continue to call John Wallace by his first name: "Ya hear me, John? Till the judgment day! John? *John! JOHN!*" (53). Unlike Taylor's earlier desire to show a child's growing understanding, taking her from innocence to awareness and bitterness, in *the Friendship*, Taylor simply recounts the injustice. Cassie does not talk about her disillusionment or show bitterness at the shooting but is strangely quiet. And Taylor's authorial persona does not "drop the [author's] mask" to add details or insight (Walsh 168).

With the first book in the middle stage, *The Gold Cadillac*, Taylor introduces a distant-engaging-first-person narrator, 'lois, the youngest in a family of four. The adult 'lois does not reveal herself until the last page: "I wouldn't soon forget either the ride we had taken south in [the Cadillac]. I wouldn't soon forget the signs, the policemen, or my fear. I would remember that ride and the gold Cadillac all my life" (43). Though an adult, the narrator privileges the memories and impressions of her naïve younger self. 'Lois tells what happens when Wilbert brings home a brand new Cadillac purchased with money his wife thought was to go for a new home, and she relates the marital friction that ensues. Then she tells about her impressions on the family's trip to the deep South and her dark night of the soul when she believes she must arm and protect herself because her parents, especially her father, is not able to do so. The older narrator privileges the younger self by not offering insights or opinions that an adult might have about the childhood experience. By maintaining the younger 'lois's perspective, Taylor bypasses an explanation about the implications of 'lois's reaction to her father's lapses in judgment and efficacy.

With *The Road to Memphis*, Taylor returns to a distant-engaging-first-person narrator. The events in this young adult novel take place when narrator Cassie is seventeen years old. However, at the end of *The Road to Memphis*, Cassie states, "We did not see Jeremy Simms again" (290), offering a perspective that would come only with the passing of an undisclosed number of years. Similar to Cassie's narrative in *The Friendship*, this older version of Cassie also tends to withhold her opinion of some of the instances of racial injustice, so she reports rather than rebukes. She does not try to get the

white men to stop harassing her friends. She knows her attempt would only bring more trouble for them. She does not reproach the gas station attendant or his white patrons, for she acknowledges that the law is on their side. She chooses not to tell her brother and his friends about being molested by the gas station attendant because she wants to protect them from dangerous retaliation. Cassie does not bother to register a complaint mentally or to verbalize to her friends about the white hospital personnel not letting Clarence receive medical attention when, as the doctor informs them, “Y’all niggers know y’all have no business here” (206). Although in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Taylor allows adults like David and Mary Logan, Mr. Morrison, Uncle Hammer, Caroline, or Wade Jamison to offer explanations, insight, and back-story, Taylor rarely allows the older Cassie or anyone else to provide additional insight in *the Road to Memphis*. Both Cassie and the authorial narrator withhold commentary.

Taylor continues to add to the array of narrative voices in the fourth and final book of the middle stage, *Mississippi Bridge*. In a departure from her usual style, she does not call upon the Logan family, or even a member of the African American community, to narrate this story she gleaned from her family’s storytelling tradition: the story is told in first-person by Jeremy Simms. Jeremy, the distance-engaging-first-person narrator in *Mississippi Bridge*, identifies himself as being older early in the book: “I was only ten then” (*Mississippi* 9), although he does not say how long before his narrative that the incident takes place. Much of the narrative is Jeremy’s interior monologue told in the vernacular intermixed with dialogue. Jeremy explains what happens after Josais tells the men at Wallace store that he is not really going to get a job:

Pa sneered, just like he know'd that all the time. R. W. and Melvin, they gone to grinning to Josias's humiliation and started mumbling about how Negroes lie. They was proud of Pa for making Josias admit the truth and they let him know it too. The other men, they done the same. (*Mississippi* 20)

The authorial narrator rarely supplies descriptions in Standard American English but allows the younger Jeremy to keep the vernacular. As in the previous books of the middle stage, although the narrator is older, he adds no insight about the troubling issues raised in the book even though he might have gained those insights with the passing of time.

Taylor uses the narrator in *Mississippi Bridge*, a white male, to open for readers a white person's perspective of the black experience. By using Jeremy as narrator, Taylor accomplishes something she could not do when using an African American narrator: Taylor enables readers to discern life for black characters from the perspective of a sympathetic white person. Additionally, Taylor uses him to answer some of the tacit questions Cassie has wondered about in prior books, such as why Jeremy tries so hard to be the Logans' friend. The reader learns that Jeremy admires the Logan for their close family relationships, something lacking in his family. Despite his father's view of the Logans, to him, "folks was just folks" (*Mississippi* 51). He wants to be the Logan's friend, but he does not begrudge their unwillingness to accept his overtures of friendship because he respects their boundaries. Jeremy is grieved by the mean-spirited and unkind behavior he sees in his father and the Wallaces. He also sympathizes with the harsh

treatment some black characters must endure because of racial prejudice. This demonstrates that not all white southerners in the 1930s adhere to the white supremacy myth. By using the white narrator, Taylor gives her readers a more complicated and realistic vantage point from which to view racial conflict.

Jeremy Simms offers a unique insight to the tragic drownings in *Mississippi Bridge*. Along with African American character Josias Williams, Jeremy considers what place God has in the drowning of a bus load of white passengers when the bus careens off the Rosa Lee Creek Bridge. In Taylor's other books, black men are lynched, David Logan suffers a gunshot wound, and black and white labor union members are attacked. However, at no other time in the Logan saga are a group of white persons the only victims of death. Since only white people are killed in this tragic occurrence, Taylor intimates through Josias's and Jeremy's comments that the bus accident is a divine response to racial injustice. Josias explains the occurrence as a mysterious work of God and that people "[c]an't go questionin' the ways of the Lord" (*Mississippi* 60). However, Jeremy questions whether God's judgment is just since innocent people die:

I couldn't understand anything about the day, about how come Miz Hattie and Grace-Anne was on that bus, and Josias, and Stacey's and them's grandmamma and Rudine and her mama wasn't. Mysterious way, Josias done said. Well, if the Lord was punishing, how come Grace-Anne and Miz Hattie? They ain't hurt nobody. (61)

Taylor does not allow the perspective of distance to tutor younger Jeremy's view on the matter. She allows Jeremy to consider opposing viewpoints about the tragedy: Was it

divinely ordained or a matter of happenstance? With Jeremy as narrator, Taylor can relate the story from her family's history in which the bus of white people who had just evicted black passengers is swept into their watery grave. The readers are not directed to exalt in glee about Caroline Logan's safety and thus minimize Jeremy's internal quandary.

In the narratives of her middle stage books, Taylor privileges the younger narrators and chooses not to allow the older narrators and herself as author to add an adult gloss as she does in the early stage books. In all four books, the author rarely drops her mask to explain or offer insight. She leaves it up to the younger narrators to relate what happens. In the early stage, Taylor assigns David or Mary Logan or Caroline or Hammer or Mr. Morrison to give words of explanation, instruction, or insight to her child characters (and her child readers) about some challenge or unfamiliar subject. That rarely happens in these books. Readers are expected to ascertain nuggets of understanding on their own. Missing from *The Gold Cadillac* is an explanation about Wilbert's autonomy despite white men's attempts to subdue him. Missing in *The Friendship* is a follow-up explanation of whether Tom Bee survives the gunshot wound. Missing in *The Road to Memphis* is what happens next, with Cassie's romantic interest in Solomon, with her going to college, with Moe going to Chicago, and with Stacey going to war. Missing in *Mississippi Bridge* is a distant viewpoint about the tragic drowning. Taylor leaves the reader to make conjectures. In this way her texts are less didactic.

Before leaving a discussion of Taylor's narrative choices in the middle stage books, one additional change needs to be mentioned: Taylor grants herself

autobiographical disclosure through elements in *The Gold Cadillac* in which she voices her girlhood experiences. This narrative is a departure from her prior books that told stories primarily learned from the Taylor family's oral storytelling tradition; in this book, Taylor draws from incidents in her early life. In the author's note to *The Gold Cadillac*, she explains that she wove memories from her life into the story, permitting her fiction to come closer to facts relevant to her life and not just repeat stories family members told about people they knew. Additionally, in the note she explains that she had lived in a big house in Toledo in which uncles, aunts, and cousins were welcomed while they acclimated to life in Ohio after leaving the South, just like in the book. She states that her extended family took day trips to ball games and picnics, like 'lois's relatives in the book. Wilbert Taylor had also bought a fancy Cadillac, as did the character Wilbert.

To reiterate her connection to the story, Taylor uses her immediate family members' names for the fictional family. 'Lois is a derivative of Taylor's middle name Delois. 'Lois's father is Wilbert, which is Taylor's father's name, Wilbert Lee Taylor. 'Lois's mother's name is Dee, which is a nickname for Taylor's mother, Deletha Marie Davis Taylor. 'Lois's sister's name is Wilma, which is Taylor's sister's name, Wilma Marie Taylor. Taylor states that she modified the names so people would not be confused about the fictional nature of the book. However, her use of the names emphasizes the story's connection to her life. With the attention Taylor draws to herself in the author's note, she indicates that she has moved away from her father as the storyteller and the source of this story. She suggests the start of her individual legacy.

Change in Family

Taylor's depiction of the African American family in the middle stage books differs from the way she portrays it in her early stage books and from Du Bois's patriarchal family model. First, Taylor de-emphasizes the role of the husband and the father as the undisputed leader of the family. Second, she limits the role of parents as trainers, protectors, and guides of their children. Tendencies to question the patriarch and limit parental input are evident in *The Gold Cadillac*. Taylor allows Dee to criticize her husband's decision to buy the new Cadillac. Dee not only disagrees with Wilbert's decision, but she also displays her consternation in front of others by refusing to ride in his new car on family outings. The marital disunity is visible to their children and to those outside the immediate family, who chuckle at Dee's obstinacy. Additionally, she disagrees with Wilbert's decision to drive the Cadillac to Mississippi since it is too dangerous. Furthermore, she disregards Wilbert's plan to go alone and states that she and their daughters will accompany him on the trip. Marital harmony is not fully restored until the final pages of the book.

In addition to allowing criticism of Wilbert as a husband in this text, Wilbert's role as father is questioned in *The Gold Cadillac*. Once the family crosses into Kentucky, Wilbert forbids 'lois and Wilma from saying a word to outsiders, promising that he and Dee will take care of them. However, circumstances cast doubt in 'lois's mind when she realizes that her father's rights are limited by the "WHITE ONLY, COLORED NOT ALLOWED" signs that forbid any African American adult or child from using water fountains, restaurants, hotels, and public toilets (*Gold* 29). She learns that what she has

considered a twenty-hour picnic on their trips from Ohio to Mississippi is actually a forced period of segregation since restaurants will not allow them food, and hotels will not allow them lodging.² When white policemen frisk Wilbert, question him, and take him away for three hours, she realizes his ability to guide and protect his family is limited, and she is afraid.

Upon his return from the police station, 'lois's personal crisis continues. While she is reticent to voice her fears aloud, 'lois admits to herself that she doubts Wilbert's ability to keep her safe when he parks their car in the dark woods and falls asleep. Her fear is so visceral that she is inclined to seek another source of protection to take the place of her father: "I figured I had to help protect us too, in case the police came back and tried to take my father away again. There was a long, sharp, knife in the picnic basket and I took hold of it, clutching it tightly" (*Gold* 35). 'Lois is not comforted the next day when her father awakes; still dazed from sleep, she reflectively lifts her hand to fend Wilbert off. It is also a move that transfers trust from her father to herself. This is a narrative moment that Taylor uses to demonstrate 'lois's loss of her childhood trust in her father, as Cicely Cobb articulates in "The Day Daddy's Little Girl Is Forced to Grow Up." However, I do not think this moment depicts 'lois "an African American young woman now fully cognizant of all the tensions to which she previously unaware," as Cobb asserts. Rather, 'lois is a frightened little girl, not an almost grown young woman, who realizes she must become more self-sufficient. In prior books, Taylor emphasizes the special relationship the Logan children feel toward their father, sometimes favoring

² Taylor describes her "climbing nausea" one summer when she began to understand the serious nature of the "twenty-hour picnics" to Mississippi where she learned her trip south was a lesson about Jim Crow laws and segregation ("Newbery" 402-03).

his guidance over their mother's. However, in *The Gold Cadillac* Taylor allows young 'lois's doubts about her father's power to linger since the adult 'lois does not comment on young 'lois's actions or feelings, such as suggesting that she was foolish to doubt her father or that she was wise to begin to self-protect early on. Rather, Taylor only admits to being bothered about the occurrence for years to come.

Taylor's emphasis on parental influence and power diminishes in other middle stage books. In two of the books, *The Friendship* and *Mississippi Bridge*, neither David Logan nor Mary Logan makes an appearance; therefore, they are not available to supervise, train, or protect their children. The books lack the parental supervision which is almost ubiquitous in all three accounts of the Logan children in the early stage. No parent is on hand to sympathize with Little Man when he faces humiliation in *The Friendship*, nor is one there when the crack of the shotgun reverberates inches from their ears. No parent is on hand to assuage the children's fear about their grandmother's wellbeing or to talk about the tragic deaths of so many aboard the fated bus in *Mississippi Bridge*. Although the children are not orphans in the true sense of the word, in this book they are geographic orphans because the author chooses to remove children from their parents and home. The reader can assume that the Logan children would have conferred with their parents upon their return home in both *The Friendship* and *Mississippi Bridge*, but Taylor does not include those conversations in the pages of the texts. For some reason she determines it is not imperative to include the children's interaction with their parents in the middle stage books. If this were a script, Taylor could be said to have

removed the Logan parents from the list of cast members. This author would argue that this is evidence of her shifting ideologies.

Having absent parents is not unusual for juvenile fiction, perhaps, but it is a stark reversal of the hands-on parenting Taylor touted in her early stage books. For example, the recurring interaction with parents is seen in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Mary offers understanding when Little Man and Cassie suffer corporal punishment for refusing to take the insulting textbooks. She is there when Cassie is fearful of the nightriders even though Cassie chooses not to explain her fears. One or both parents are nearby throughout the book, especially when the children spy T. J. Avery lying at the feet of a lynch mob. Similarly, in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, both Logan parents are there to talk to their children about the forming of the mixed labor union. Mary talks to Cassie following Suzella's attempt to pass as white with Stuart Walker. Both parents help to rescue Stacey from jail and bring him home. In her early stage novels, the parents are always written into the script. And when the Logan children need disciplining, they know that will be forthcoming as well: "I knew perfectly well that Papa'd whip us if he found out we'd been shooting marbles again," and she was right (*Let the Circle* 16, 23). In the shorter book, *Song of the Trees*, the Logans' parents are also there—their mother after the children find the interlopers on their property, and their father, who arrives in time to force the white men off their land. But in the two aforementioned middle stage books, no parents show up.

Taylor's emphasis on limited parental involvement continues in *The Road to Memphis*, her first young adult novel. David and Mary Logan make only an occasional

appearance in *The Road to Memphis* in which Stacey and Cassie are on the brink of adulthood. It is not unusual to limit the parental involvement in a young adult novel. In this text, Taylor has David admit his diminished presence in Cassie's life by stating that her mother and he raised her best they could, but they would not always be around to help her (*Road* 104-05). The Logan children struggle with how to help their friend Moe Turner after he becomes a fugitive of the law, but Stacey says there is no time to consult parents, so they make their own decisions. In his review of *The Road to Memphis*, Joel Chaston states that Cassie and Stacey, now approaching adulthood, "are no longer able to hide behind their father, . . . [as they] go on a journey during which they must confront racial hatred directly" (3891). Additionally, when Cassie is terrified by her run-in with the gas station attendant, it is not merely the absence of her parents that causes her to receive no comfort from them. Even her memories of them when she is trying to console herself fail to provide the solace she expects. Upon her return home, she is unable to completely unburden herself to them.

Change in the Author's Life

Many things could have affected Taylor's choices when writing her middle stage books, just as an array of life events can affect anyone's propensity to make different choices, including aging, developing friendships, ending relationships, losing loved ones to death, facing current events, reading others' books, self-evaluating, and rethinking one's own writing. Taylor has not divulged many details about her life in relation to changes in the focus of her books or in answer to curiosity of fans or critics.

Nevertheless, of the facts known about her, a few significant changes are reflected in her middle stage books.

One life change that affected Taylor's early and middle stage texts came as a result of the unexpected death of her father, Wilbert Lee Taylor, at age fifty-six, six months before she finished *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Since he has been her "greatest literary source" ("Mildred" 285), his death left a big gap in her life. The lacuna Wilbert Taylor's death carved in her life was filled in part by her developing a closer relationship with her mother, Deletha Marie Davis Taylor (Crowe 40). Additionally, Taylor extols Deletha for her quiet and sustaining presence and wisdom. Even though Taylor testifies to the struggle of writing after her father's death, she states that her mother provided her encouragement to go on. Taylor said that even though she had been outspoken about her father's influence, her mother's influence had been just as important (Crowe 40). As though demonstrating a break from her father's influence and perhaps from his legacy, Taylor began her middle stage with a pronouncement of her mother's presence in her life and her influence in her writing by dedicating *The Gold Cadillac* to one person: "To Mother-Dear, who has always been there for all of us with her love and strength and understanding" (n. pag.). Similarly, in the obituary for Deletha Taylor in 2013, Taylor describes her mother as the "family matriarch" ("Deletha Marie Davis Taylor").

Stark changes in the first book in the middle stage suggest a shift in Taylor's thinking. Taylor sets *The Gold Cadillac* closer to her contemporary life and location. The book takes place in the 1950s in Toledo, Ohio, when and where she grew up, and in

the book, Taylor recounts experiences in her life instead of drawing from her father's memories. Through the voice of 'lois, Taylor narrates a story that is not a flattering account of the father. Although 'lois verbally supports her father Wilbert's decision to buy the flashy Cadillac, Taylor is careful to have 'lois relate her mother Dee's dissenting opinion. Even more, the outcome of the story reveals that Dee's opinions about Wilbert's car purchase prove to be better for the family. The sentiment of a woman questioning her husband's choices is a continuation of Mary's disapprobation of some of her husband David's decisions in the bridge text *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, which was written several years after Wilbert Taylor's death and before *The Gold Cadillac* was written. In the prior books, written when Wilbert Taylor was alive or recently departed, Taylor has only praise for the wisdom and strength of Cassie Logan's father. By her words in her Newbery acceptance speech, she chooses to praise her father and the positive impact he made on her life. But with the perspective of years, Taylor is willing to place him in a less than favorable light. In *The Gold Cadillac*, published a decade after his death, the character in the book who resembles herself sheds doubt on the father who resembles her deceased father by recording Wilbert's wife's response to his purchase. The change in the father's characterization suggests a shift in Taylor's political ideology as categorized by Robert Sutherland.

Another characteristic of middle stage books that reflects Taylor's changing views of family is the decreased role of the father as protector and guide for his children. The father's diminishing role as protector is evident in the level of violence that Taylor allows her child characters to be a part of or to witness. There is nothing unusual about an

author of juvenile fiction including incidents in which the child protagonist faces fear, danger, pain, or death. Allowing for such real-life occurrences are expected in works of realism. Taylor does this in her early stage books. However, in her Newbery Award acceptance speech, Taylor explains that she had nightmares after she wrote an early draft of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* in which she places Cassie in the scenes when the Wallaces ambush the Logans wagon and shoot David and when the Logans fight fire that is ravaging their cotton crop. She explains that she had to write Cassie out of some of those scenes because she knew her father would not have allowed his daughters to be a part of such “dangerous missions.” She states in that article that she decided that she has to let the characters remain true to themselves and let them act as she perceived her father would have acted (“Newbery” 407). Her reticence to involve children in serious danger seems to have lessened in later books, perhaps without the presence of Wilbert Taylor’s viable influence. A decade later, while writing *The Friendship*, Taylor allows Cassie and her brothers to witness the shooting of their elderly friend, Tom Bee, from just a few feet away. In *Mississippi Bridge*, she allows the Logan children to view the aftermath of a bus accident when dozens of lifeless bodies are pulled from the Rose Lee Creek. She does not record the parents comforting or protecting their children. Nor does she discuss any nightmares she might have suffered by including the children in the danger in the middle stage books. In the early stage, Taylor honors her father’s sensibilities about how to rear children, but in the middle stage, she makes different choices for how involved her child characters are in the tragedies played out in their community and how involved their parents are in their lives.

In dedicating *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* to her father, Taylor explains that her early books are influenced by his life, his stories, and his teaching. Her assurance that the book was a product of his life and influence was so strong that a quarter century later, in a foreword of the twenty-fifth edition, she contends that she still considers the Newbery Medal as belonging to him (n. pag.). However, in the years following his death, Taylor's life experiences prompted her to write books that do not reflect Wilbert Taylor's ideas and influence. The father is not the focus of the children's lives, and the husband is not the family's hero in every circumstance. Nor does she indicate that any other award is in his memory.

One other event in Taylor's life that may well have motivated changes in Taylor's books is conspicuously left out of Crowe's biography,³ *Presenting Mildred D. Taylor*. It is a change related not by a death, but by a birth. Taylor became a mother, presumably in 1987 or 1988. In 1996, in her ALAN Award acceptance speech, Taylor states that she had an eight-year-old daughter ("Acceptance"). She also mentions her daughter on the dedication page for *The Well* in 1995: "This book is dedicated . . . to my beautiful, exquisite daughter, P. Lauren,⁴ who has enlightened my life" (n. pag.). Porsche Laurén was born more than a dozen years after divorce ended Taylor's three-year marriage to Errol Zea-Daly ("Mildred" 281), and Taylor has not remarried. Taylor's role as head of a single-parent household contradicts the Duboisian model of the patriarchal family that

³ Crowe talked to me about Porsche Laurén Taylor in a phone conversation in September 2009. He told me that Taylor prefers to keep much about her personal life private, and so he chose not to make mention of Taylor's daughter in her biography out of respect for the author. He said that Taylor had not remarried.

⁴ Porsche is pictured in a news article in which Mildred Taylor accepted an award posthumously for her sister Wilma Lee Taylor on 26 Sept. 2007. Porsche is listed as Deletha Taylor's sole surviving granddaughter in her obituary ("Deletha Marie Davis Taylor").

she emphasizes in the early stage and that she references as the model for a “strong black family” in her early stage books (“Newbery” 405).

Although Taylor has not said much publicly about her relationship with her daughter, the little she has said offers insight into the way her life as a mother intersects her books. She asserts, “I am hurt that any child would ever be hurt by my words” (“Acceptance”). In the same speech, she balances that concern with a conviction that:

[A]s a parent I do understand not wanting a child to hear painful words, but as a parent I do not understand not wanting a child to learn about a history that is part of America, a history about a family representing millions of families that are strong and loving and who remain united and strong, despite the obstacles they face. (“Acceptance”)

Interestingly, in her middle stage texts, she suggests that the strong and united black family she portrays is not always headed by a man. Sometimes the families she depicts are headed by a man who makes mistakes, a man whose decisions the family questions, and a man who is not present when children face crises. However, her books suggest that she is not capable of maintaining in her middle stage books that a strong black family is headed by a woman.

She explains her method of parenting her daughter when she is confronted with unpleasant aspects of life in the books she writes:

Before reading any of my books to my own eight-year-old, I talk to her about what life was like when I was a child and when her grandparents and great-grandparents were children; and we continue to talk as the story

unfolds. I want only the best for my child in her learning of the past and of her heritage, just as we all want the best for all the children.

(“Acceptance”)

Perhaps she was conscious that her child being reared in a single parent home was different from the two-parent family in which she was reared and which she had proposed as the quintessential “strong black family.” Therefore, she might be more circumspect about insisting that a two-parent home is the only or even best family for a child. This is supposition on the part of this author, based on the changes of her representation of the black family after the early stage books once she becomes a single parent. She does not promote the importance of the father in the family as before. Taylor’s role as mother and single parent suggests a reason for changes in the way she represents the family and complicates familial relationship in her middle stage books.

Taylor modifies her portrayal of family in her middle stage books, which may well be to accommodate some changes in her own family—the loss of her father, the fresh perspective her mother offered, and the beginning of a family while single. Taylor’s middle stage books show that a family can be whole without the presence of a strong father and that a family can be fatherless and not disintegrate. Taylor shows that children in her middle stage books may depend on siblings or themselves in times of difficulty when they may not be able to depend entirely on parents.

Change in Agency

The middle stage books suggest that Taylor’s tone has changed from her “manifesto” in which she explains her interest in showing that black people in history

were not as school books up through the 1960s indicated—the docile, subservient people happy with their fate at the hands of white supremacists. Taylor is compelled to show the strength and perseverance of those who endured racial injustice, to show how families survived adversity and how they implemented survival skills, and to show that this understanding should foster respect for one’s self and for others (“Newbery” 404-05). While displaying greater agency, a goal which is not fully realized until her final stage books, in middle stage books Taylor holds up for readers various situations that show characters maintaining the status quo in Jim Crow Mississippi while opposing the principle of white privilege. As many of the black characters in her early stage books are portrayed as resistant to the dominant culture, the nuanced change from endurance to dissent is subtle, so some explanation is needed.

Juxtaposing passages from books in the early and middle stage demonstrates the difference of the mood and tone in the two stages. The first passage from *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* shows Mary Logan’s reaction to disrespect from a white man. The Logans take cotton to the Granger-Walker gin and are met by Stuart Walker, who calls Mary by her first name without “missus” preceding it:

I saw Mama bite her lip before she spoke. I bit my lip as well, remembering that Mama had told me to keep my mouth shut. But it was hard. Mama was a good fourteen years older than Stuart, and for her to have to show him respect when he did not do the same for her was galling.

There was a strange smirk on Stuart’s face as Mama answered.

(*Let the Circle* 272)

The reader assumes that Mary answered him “Mister Stuart” since that is how any black person should refer to him in 1930s Mississippi. Mary, like Cassie, does not like the lack of respect from whites. But they dare not verbalize their displeasure about it. A reader can appreciate Mary’s self-restraint since no good would come from a confrontation.

Restraint is still expected of the black community in middle stage books, as evidenced in the following examples from *The Road to Memphis*. The first is when Cassie spies the three Aames brothers teasing Harris:

Statler Aames and his brothers got a big kick out of teasing colored folks, and for the most part all colored folks could do was stand and take it, for white folks ruled things, and talking back to them with a smart mouth could only get you into big trouble. Hitting one of them could get you killed. That was the way of things. (*Road* 11)

The three white men also tease Clarence on another day in Strawberry, claiming they want to rub the black man’s head for luck. Cassie muses that Clarence, bigger than all the Aames brothers, could not beat up one of them “and expect to sleep well tonight. He could never expect to hit a white man and sleep well” (*Road* 117).

Despite the oppression by whites, a different attitude is enacted by Moe Turner, who retaliates but not merely for himself and not without life-changing consequences. Moe rebels against white superiority when he hears Statler’s insinuating remark regarding Cassie: “Yeah, you must got a powerful lotta luck in you, boy [Moe], you courtin’ a gal like Cassie Logan here. Put that head on down, boy, let me get a good feel at it. Who knows? May I get lucky with Cassie myself—” (*Road* 123). Moe reflexively

swings the crowbar he is holding and knocks down all three white men in a matter of seconds. Although it is understood that blacks are powerless to right a wrong against a white man without serious repercussions, the enraged Moe takes action. Nevertheless, he must leave town immediately, presumably never to return.

Also in *The Road to Memphis*, Stacey exhibits restraint but with the purpose of showing opposition. Cassie records what vandals do to Stacey's two-year-old 1938 Ford: The white men make a "deep, ugly scratch that ringed the car and festered like a sore under the rising sun" (191). Stacey decides not to take revenge against the white men, but he does not repair the car to restore it as if nothing has happened. Instead, he announces that he wants to remember the damage and the white men who caused it. This is a more aggressive action than the response of his mother in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* when she covers the textbook page to hide the insulting word.

Comparing a passage from the early stage bridge text *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* and the middle stage book *The Friendship* further demonstrates Taylor's movement toward greater empowerment for her African American characters. Lee Annie Lees gives her rationale for wanting to learn the Mississippi Constitution and eventually register to vote:

All my life whenever I wanted to do something and the white folks didn't like it, I didn't do it. All my life, it been that way. But now I's sixty-four years old and I figure I's deserving of doing what I wants to do, white folks like it or not. And this old body wants to vote and like I done said, I gots my mind made up. I's gon' vote too. (*Let the Circle* 195-96)

As noble as Lees's aspirations are and as far as she comes to meeting her goal, since she memorizes nearly all of the three hundred sections of the Mississippi Constitution, she does not succeed. While denying her the right to register, Harlan Granger humiliates her publicly so that the townspeople ridicule her for "getting above herself" (373). Even though the reader may commend Lees, Taylor does not present her as successful in the eyes of the community.

Akin in many ways to Lees, Wilbert expresses his heartfelt reason for buying the gold Cadillac:

All my life I've had to be heedful of what white folks thought. Well, I'm tired of that. I worked hard for everything I got. Got it honest, too. Now I got that Cadillac because I liked it and because it meant something to me that somebody like me from Mississippi could go and buy it. It's my car, I paid for it, and I'm driving it south. (*Gold* 26)

He drives the fancy Cadillac south and although white policemen try to humiliate Wilbert, they do not damage the car. He ends up switching his car with a relative in Memphis before he finishes his trip to Mississippi to forgo further harassment. And within a month, he decides to trade in his Cadillac for a Ford, perhaps to bring harmony to his marriage. But he makes the decision to give up the car; it was not taken from him by whites as was Lees's decision to vote.

A similar sentiment is expressed by Tom Bee when he decides it is time to make a stand for something he believes in, and his actions are allowed more success by Taylor. Tom Bee explains to the Logan children his rationale for violating a white man's taboo:

“Now I been thinkin’ lately maybe it’s time I make [John Wallace] keep his word. I figures I’m close ’nough to meetin’ my maker, it don’t much matter he like it or not. I ain’t studying that boy!” (*Friendship* 36). With a devil-may-care attitude, Tom Bee calls the white man John, not Mister John. John, goaded by his sons’ criticism, refuses to stand by his youthful promise to Tom Bee and attacks the elderly man. However, Taylor gives Tom Bee the satisfaction of stating the last word after he is shot when he claims that he will continue to call Wallace by his first name “til judgment day” (45). He does not plead with John for mercy or apologize for his disrespect. Tom Bee lays claim to his humanity despite the consequences for such an action. He is not killed for his continued effrontery toward the white man; John does not take a second shot, and no mob comes after Tom Bee with a rope to teach him a lesson. The author makes it clear that the black man has the last word. This is far different from for Lees in the early stage when Granger’s final blow is to strip Lees of her livelihood and residence.

In *The Road to Memphis*, Cassie, too, refuses to accept the status quo determined by white Southerners. She dares to challenge segregation and tries to use the “WHITE LADIES ONLY” toilet even though the gas station attendant has already told her to find a bush in the woods (*Road* 171, 177-79). She is humiliated when the gas station attendant rebukes and bullies her, so this may not seem like much evidence, but her reason for opposing the stricture indicated by the sign is unyielding:

I know perfectly well what I should walk right on past [the restroom designated for whites only] and go down behind the bushes at the end of the path, but it make no sense to me that I had to go stopping behind a bus

when there was a perfectly good toilet right behind the door. I knew perfectly well the kind of trouble I'd be in if I disobeyed the signs. I knew perfectly well that I would be breaking the law if I did. Still as I stood there facing those signs, I felt such an anger, such a hostility, such a need to defy them that I couldn't walk right on past. (177)

Cassie pays dearly for her resistant efforts; she ruins her stockings and covers her clothes with dirt and vomit, suffers with nightmares, and is deeply humiliated. But her action is based on verbalized determination as strong as Lees's, Tom Bee's, Wilbert's, and Stacey's. Taylor's characters are more likely to directly confront the perverseness of Jim Crow society in middle stage books.

In *The Road to Memphis*, Taylor demonstrates what it looks like when African Americans are no longer willing to be conciliatory toward those who abuse them. The inclusion of an array of incidents like these in *The Road to Memphis* may be why Susan Schuller calls the novel "more of a string of events than a narrative with strong characterization" (138). Perhaps Nancy Vasilakis finds the book "not a tightly constructed whole" because revolution is not a tidy construct but an attempt to upset order. The serial nature of the events reinforces the revolutionary action of many of the book's characters. Stacey buys a car. Moe heads for a new life in Chicago. And although Cassie does not accomplish what she hopes when she crosses the color line to use the toilet, she plans to pursue a law degree and discover how the law can be a tool to change society.

Besides the characters making incremental moves to empowerment, another aspect of middle stage books demonstrates a weakening of white domination. Taylor intimates that even God is on the side of the disenfranchised at the end of *Mississippi Bridge*, suggesting that He is meting out judgment against Jim Crow laws and those who endorse them. In the climactic event, white passengers on a segregated bus plunge to their watery death. Black passengers who lose their places on the bus due to the Jim Crow law that privileges whites do not face the same fate. One could suggest that the outcome is meant to be a matter of luck—good luck for the blacks who lost their seats and bad luck for the white passengers. Regardless of the reader’s belief system, Taylor attributes the incident to a work of God. In a discussion of Taylor’s use of balance in the Logan saga, Karen Smith suggests that in *Mississippi Bridge*, Taylor “attempts to balance rage and injustice with a deep sense of spirituality” (260). Even though the bus accident is not presented as an African American character’s act of resistance, it has a place in Taylor’s middle stage books. Incidents in other books show members of the black community suffering and, in the case of the sharecroppers’ fate with the crop reduction and the mixed labor union, black and white people both suffering. But this is the only instance in which only white people are killed. Both Josias and Jeremy interpret the occurrence by the bridge over Rosa Lee Creek to be an instance of God sparing the lives of black people.

A Bridge Text

As a bridge text between the middle and late stages, *Mississippi Bridge* has in common with the late stage books the presence of an adult male first-person narrator, a

shift from the female voices Taylor uses in the early stage and middle stage books. Interestingly, Jeremy is white—the only non-black narrator Taylor uses in her saga. She mentions in her SAAS article that while an undergraduate, she used a pen name Mr. M. D. Taylor and sent a book length manuscript, “Dark People, Dark World,” to a publisher (“Mildred” 278).⁵ The plot concerns a white blind man who lives in the black ghetto of Chicago. She employs a white man as first-person narrator in the book since she thought it would bear more credence in the eyes of readers. Her opinion that a white adult male narrator is a more powerful voice for engaging readers in a novel written in the 1960s foreshadows her contemplation of the effects using of a white male narrator could have, though it was not a technique she used until *Mississippi Bridge*. Her choice of adult male narrators in her last middle stage books continues in her last stage books.

Conclusion

The books in the middle stage differ from early stage books in many aspects. As observed above, Taylor sets aside her father’s stories in the first book and includes her childhood experiences in one of the books. She creates new variables in the realm of family life. She demonstrates ways that African American characters are placing themselves in danger in order to oppose racial injustice. She waves off the child’s need for parental supervision and lets children handle traumas on their own. She also lessens the amount of text in which a parent figure guides children. Not only is an older narrator neglecting to offer insight and details in the books, but the authorial narrator is also less willing to lift her mask in order to explain. By omitting commentary from either the

⁵ An editor sent Taylor a three-page rejection letter for “Dark People, Dark World,” and Taylor said she made a good decision by putting the manuscript in a drawer and never picking it up again (“Mildred” 278).

older narrator or the authorial narrator in her middle stage books, Taylor invites the reader to enter the subject position and be more involved in the action of the book (McDowell 225). The books become less didactic as she steps back from over-explaining and leaves more for readers to interpret.

Chapter V

“WE’S FREE NOW!” AND “USE YOUR HEADS”:

AGENCY AND EFFICACY IN TAYLOR’S LATE STAGE BOOKS

Changes emerging in Mildred D. Taylor’s middle stage books are fully realized in her two late stage books—both prequels: *The Well: David’s Story* (1995) and *The Land* (2001). *The Well* takes place on the Logan land in 1910 and tells about incidents in the lives of ten-year-old David Logan and his thirteen-year-old brother, Hammer Logan. During a time of drought when most wells are dry, parents Caroline and Paul-Edward Logan welcome anyone, black or white, to freely partake of their fresh well water. Charles Simms and his brother, Ed-Rose, resent what they construe to be Hammer’s uppity manner and sabotage the well water by throwing animal carcasses into it. The white boys are punished for their malevolence by their father. *The Land* begins in the Reconstruction Era and extends past the turn of the century. It tells about the Logan patriarch’s journey from Georgia to Mississippi, with a sojourn in Texas, and how he obtains the Logan land so cherished by the family and coveted by others in Taylor’s other books. One of the changes in these books is that the main characters exhibit more agency and efficacy than in prior books. A second change is that in their struggles against racial discrimination, African American main characters work primarily for their individual goals or for the needs of their immediate families rather than for needs of the black community as a whole. A third change in Taylor’s latest two books is in the way she uses verbal and written contracts in furthering characters’ goals. Finally, in late stage books, Taylor distances her books and her characters from a Duboisian family model by

further diminishing the power of the father, enhancing the strength of the mother, and by dramatizing an even more complicated Logan family structure.

Change in Efficacy

As she does in her earlier books, Taylor continues to re-image African Americans in her late stage books, but she moves from indicating their endurance through the challenging and dangerous times in Jim Crow Mississippi despite their inferior status. Instead, she displays increased empowerment by African American male and female characters in both books. In *The Well*, David recounts Hammer's, Caroline's, and Ma Rachel's potentially dangerous experiences with racist Mississippians. David's narrative instantiates the Logans' self-respect and underscores their agency despite the dominant culture. David explains for the reader the serious predicament for a black person:

Now back then white folks ruled everything. A white man said jump, and most black folks did. White man said move out of the way, and most black folks did. White folks could say and do what they wanted, just because they rule things; because just one word out of them against a black person—man or woman or even a child—and that black man or that black woman or that child could be hanging from a tree, even just for mouthing off. (*Well* 12)

Taylor's move to greater agency and efficacy for her African American characters is articulated by two characters in *The Well*. Ma Rachel, emancipated for thirty-five years, is livid when she spies white men in front of the Logans' home forcing her daughter, Caroline, to whip David and Hammer. Indignantly, she calls out to Caroline,

“They’s makin’ you whip them boys jus’ [her grandsons] like they done whipped my mama! On our own land! Don’t ya do it, girl! We’s free now!” (*Well* 58). But Caroline is not treated as free since she is coerced into whipping her sons publicly, which she does to obviate their being incarcerated by the sheriff, beaten to death by McCalister Simms, or lynched by a mob. Thus, the reader realizes a disconnection between the three little words of liberation—“We’s free now!”—and the beating. Ma Rachel states what readers in the twenty-first century likely believe to be true, but the scene highlights the racial discrimination that black Americans faced in 1910.

Taylor uses another character in *The Well* to indicate the method by which African American characters can assert their rights and achieve their goals in light of their freedom even though they dwell in the South. Steeped in Jim Crow society, Ma Rachel’s son-in-law, Paul-Edward Logan, explains to David and Hammer that physical aggression against white people can only lead to their harm:

You boys better start learning how to use your heads, not your fists, when it comes to white folks. You learn to outsmart them, ‘cause in the end you can’t outfight them, not with your fists. They got the power, but we got our heads. (*Well* 72-73)

Paul-Edward’s brief admonition—“use your heads”—challenges his sons to move beyond merely enduring the inequities that abound in a racist society or even doing things that will lead to their harm or even death. He prods them to formulate and act upon wise plans to bypass white domination. The two-pronged message, “we are free” and “use

your head,” points to the basis on which the characters achieve their goals in the late stage.

Paul-Edward learns the messages from his father in *The Land*. Reared with many privileges his white half-brothers enjoyed, Paul-Edward considers himself their equal. However, his father knows that unless he realizes that he is not considered equal according to deeply held beliefs of many white people, he will likely be lynched. As a black man, Paul-Edward must learn how to survive in a society that considers him inferior. One fateful day when Paul-Edward strikes his brother Robert and another white teenager, Edward publicly thrashes him with a bullwhip. Edward later explains that he does it to teach Paul-Edward to be circumspect around white people:

This here is white man’s country, and . . . you’ll never get anyplace using your fists. All using your fist’ll get you, leastways against a white man, is hanged or worse, if you can think on that. So you best be thinking on putting that steel-trap mind of yours to work. Use your head, Paul-Edward,¹ not your fists. You hear me, boy? (*Land* 87)

The painful lesson works. Paul-Edward never responds in violence to white people when they abuse him verbally, treat him disrespectfully, or cheat him. He always holds his temper.

One female character whom Taylor re-images in late stage books is Caroline Logan, Cassie’s grandmother, Big Ma. When juxtaposing Caroline as an older woman in early and middle stage books with the same character as a younger woman in her

¹ Officially this second child from Edward’s union with Deborah is named Paul. Nevertheless, in private conversations, both Deborah and Edward call him Paul-Edward but cannot call him that publically since none of his other sons have their father’s name. Paul-Edward is his preferred moniker.

appearance in late stage books, readers are likely to view Caroline as more empowered in Taylor's latest books. Caroline's characterization over the course of the nine books is evidence of a shift in Taylor's ideologies regarding what constitutes a strong black woman. Taylor states that she intends to present strong black women (*Meet the Newbery Author*), explaining she has a need to show the strength of black women, that they are heroic, and she portrays Cassie's "Big Ma" as what she must have deemed to be a strong female character in each of the early stage books ("Mildred" 277). Yet when she mentions Caroline Logan in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Taylor conveys ambivalence about the character.

The ambiguous nature of Caroline's strength is depicted by Cassie. The inefficacy of Caroline is hidden in the early books because Cassie explains that Caroline has some undeniably strong qualities. Caroline is "tall and strongly built" (*Roll* 32; *Let the Circle* 29). She is a sixty-year-old who can do field work like a twenty-year-old woman. She is "good with medicines" and useful for helping the sick and injured (*Roll* 9). She is the *griot* of the Logan household, and Cassie enjoys hearing her recount family stories (*Roll* 89-94; *Let the Circle* 335). In the middle stage book, *The Road to Memphis*, she depicts Caroline as a crack shot riflewoman. None of these aspects casts aspersions on Caroline's agency and efficacy.

Despite the qualities that depict Caroline as a strong black woman, Cassie's feelings about her grandmother are less positive because while she describes her physical strength and her ability to protect herself, she also describes Caroline's docile behavior toward white racist Mississippians. In *Song of the Trees*, Caroline submits to Mr.

Andersen's veiled threat that David could face an "accident" and allows him to cut trees on their land (*Song* 27). Cassie juxtaposes Caroline's response to Andersen to that of Mary Logan noting that Caroline twists her hands and cowers under Andersen's intimidation, but Mary stares the white man down and questions his authority. Caroline is also a big disappointment to Cassie when they go on Cassie's first trip to Strawberry, Mississippi, in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* where Cassie is in the midst of a town which honors white supremacy. It is in this town which Cassie first encounters racial discrimination in the marketplace.² Cassie perceives her Big Ma has no gumption as a business woman since she parks away from customers to steer clear of "white folks' wagons" (*Roll* 106). Cassie holds a grudge against her grandmother after the elderly woman does not stand up for her like Cassie thinks her Pa would have when Charlie Simms pushes her off the sidewalk in Strawberry. Cassie is not the only one who perceives weakness in her grandmother. Caroline doubts her own ability to withstand Harlan Granger's schemes to take away the Logans' land. Therefore, she deeds the Logans' four hundred acres to her sons so that she will not be intimidated into losing the land to Harlan Granger.

Not only does Cassie observe that Caroline is reticent to oppose white racists or institutionalized racism, she also notes that Caroline does not encourage others to do so either. In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Caroline cautions Mary and David not to buck

² Some of my African American colleagues who read *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* find that aspect of the book to be unsatisfactory because they do not think it was realistic to protect children to that extent. However, Taylor explains that her parents and others she knew wanted to protect their children as long as they could and therefore kept them away from some circumstances in which they would be affected by racial bigotry as long as they could (*Women Writers*). Therefore, it was logical for Cassie to be kept from going to Strawberry until she was eight.

the Jim Crow system and attempt a boycott. In *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, instead of admiring her friend Lee Annie Lees for trying to register to vote, Caroline discourages her, admitting fear. In *The Friendship*, Caroline criticizes Tom Bee for daring to call a white man by his first name. Caroline is not characterized as efficacious in Cassie's narratives, the books that comprise the early and middle stages of Taylor's corpus.

Furthermore, illustrators lead readers to view Caroline as lacking agency. Jerry Pinkney's illustrations further a conception of a weaker Caroline in *Song of the Trees* since the older lady is looking down and wringing her hands together in front of the white man (*Song* 27). Likewise, in *Mississippi Bridge*, Max Ginsburg describes her pictorially as having bent shoulders and a stocky, a physical picture that downplays Caroline's height and personal strengths. He shows her with downcast eyes when she is in the Wallace store (30). These illustrations do not support Taylor's affirmation that Caroline is based on her maternal grandmother: "She was very strong. There were lots of strong women around, and I wanted to show that [they were strong]" ("A Conversation").

However, in the last two books, *The Well* and *The Land*, Taylor portrays Caroline Logan as more empowered. Caroline does not passively assent to the presumed white man's rule in these late stage books. She asserts her rights with the mental acuity implied in Paul-Edward's admonition to "use your heads" when dealing with white men (*Well* 72). Taylor presents Caroline Logan as having agency in *The Well* when she faces Sheriff Peterson Rankins. He comes on behalf of McCalister Simms, who erroneously claims Hammer and David beat up his son, Charlie, with a piece of lumber. Caroline acts decisively and sagely, quickly formulating and carrying out a plan to protect her sons.

She does not require her husband's or any man's help, even sending Tom Bee away so that she can handle Sheriff Rankins on her own when he comes to investigate Charlie Simms's charges against her sons. She builds a rapport with the sheriff and with the alacrity of the biblical Abigail, makes a loaf of molasses bread to which he is partial. She speaks wisely but submissively, pleading leniency for her sons by stating the facts. Caroline is clearly "using her head" to resist white intimidation here, and there is no hand-wringing or fearful backing down, as in the earlier books.

Another example of Caroline having agency and efficacy in *The Well* occurs when she faces off against Simms, of whom everyone is afraid (47). Rather than being fearful of and compliant with the belligerent Simms, Caroline is vocal, oppositional, and unwavering: "Your boy done hit my David and ya can see he gots a bad leg here, and my Hammer done hit your boy 'cause of it!" (*Well* 50). Although David was on crutches, he offers to hold the wagon so Charlie could replace a broken wheel when Hammer refuses to help. Charlie hits David when he drops the heavy load. Years later David does not change his assessment of his mother's actions, but relates, "I could still hear the pride in her voice over Hammer standing up for me" (*Well* 51). On another occasion in *The Well*, Caroline boldly confronts Simms when the well is contaminated and asks him if his sons vandalized it like Hammer suggests. Despite David's caveat that "one word" can lead to a hanging under Jim Crow (*Well* 12), Caroline's outspokenness does not lead her to physical harm. Instead, her words cause the white man to find an answer to her question about who spoiled the well water, an answer that implicates his sons.

In *The Land*, Taylor portrays Caroline as strong in various ways. Paul-Edward is attracted to Caroline as a single young woman, describing her as kind and strong-willed. Paul-Edward admires her work ethic as she labors alongside him and Mitchell, her first husband, to clear the forty acres and plant a sizeable garden. Caroline is also outspoken against injustice. In contrast to Paul-Edward who chooses “to stay out of other folks’ business” (*Land* 166), Caroline cannot stand by when white boys taunt a hair-lipped black boy; instead, Caroline scolds them. Elsewhere, she clings tenaciously to her dream of owning land despite her grief upon the death of her husband, Mitchell, refusing to leave the worksite even though Paul-Edward insists that it will not look right for her to remain with him, a man to whom she is not married. Paul-Edward is inspired to continue working the forty acres and complete his goal due to “Caroline’s stubbornness and her determination to stay” (*Land* 325). In “Legacy,” *The Land*’s epilogue, Paul-Edward gives her the credit for encouraging him to write the story of his life and of how he obtains their land (366). Throughout *The Land*, as well as *The Well*, Taylor presents Caroline as strong on various levels, demonstrating strength she does not exhibit in the earlier books.

There may be three possible reasons for this seeming contradiction in Caroline’s portrait. One is the time period in which the stories take place. These last two books take place following the end of the Reconstruction Era when the United States government designated the Freedmen’s Bureau to assist freed slaves to assimilate into society. Paul-Edward Logan was born shortly before the beginning of the Civil War. Caroline, about ten year younger than he, was born approximately in 1869. The Freedman’s Bureau was

established in 1865, and for about ten years, during Reconstruction, more blacks voted and held public offices. But the time was short-lived since the Bureau ended in 1872. Within a few short years, white racists in the South found a way to establish superiority by the use of black codes that soon became Jim Crow laws. Thus, Taylor could be trying to evoke the aura of possibility for young newly freed persons of color by presenting Caroline as more empowered. Yet historically speaking, by the time these stories take place, Jim Crow laws had taken over. Too, Caroline could be portrayed as having more personal agency as a younger woman since she has fewer life experiences that would cause her to be more cautious and to withdraw from confrontation with the dominant culture. Thus the change could be in the character and not society. But a third reason for Taylor's contradictory portrait of Caroline seems more likely. The author could have come to identify with the character differently through owning her own land, as this author will discuss later in this chapter.

Change in Endings

An additional argument for increased efficacy of characters in Taylor's late stage books is seen in the dramatic contrast between the endings of her early and middle stage books and the endings of *The Well* and *The Land*. This change indicates that Taylor's books reflect the author's ideological shifts toward greater efficacy. Scholars of juvenile books generally agree that writers in the African American children's literary tradition do not generally end books in a happily-ever-after way. R. D. Lane asserts that writers of African American children's literature are aware of harsh realities of life for black readers who "often possess a sense of realism that transcends their age" (128). Lane

states that the lives of young black readers, therefore, do not identify with “warm and fuzzy” plots and endings (128). Dianne Johnson concurs with Lane’s claims and asserts that happy endings are not realistic for African American youth (*Telling Tales* 2).

To underscore the presence of a lack of happy endings in African American children’s literature, Johnson states that there are “no clear and simple endings to our stories, let alone happy endings” (*Telling Tales* 36). In light of Lane’s and Johnson’s assertions about the paucity of happy endings in African American children’s literature, it is reasonable that Taylor’s first seven books end as they do. For as Karen Smith suggests, due to the hardships experienced by African American characters in Taylor’s novels, it is right that readers should experience a “certain rage at injustice rendered” (249), which would preclude a happily-ever-after ending. Lane, Johnson, and Smith underscore Taylor’s propensity to leave readers with a somber tone at the end of her books.

The plots of Taylor’s early and middle stage books vary, and good things occur in the final pages of each of them, but Taylor maintains a consistency in the way she concludes them in a less than exuberant manner. When circumstances at the end of a book are such that characters can be joyous about the outcome of a problem, Taylor emphasizes a past sadness, a mitigating fear, or an ongoing struggle. By so doing, she reiterates her intention to show how a black child’s awareness leads her to disillusionment. In *Song of the Trees*, the Logans could celebrate David’s success at closing down Andersen’s lumbering operation on Logan land; instead, the Logans mourn the fallen trees. In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, the Logans are able to pay their bills

and keep their land, but Cassie fears the worst for T. J. Avery in his upcoming murder trial, and she grieves the loss of a quarter of their crops. The ending to *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* is more optimistic in that the Logans rejoice in Stacey's return, but the reader sees that he has acquired a limp and that he has no money to share with his family.

In the four books following the early stage, the endings continue to reflect the same lack of fulfillment and optimism, despite the small successes meted out to characters who oppose Jim Crow. In *The Gold Cadillac*, 'lois's family arrives safely back home from her disconcerting trip to the South, and 'lois rejoices that her parents are reconciled. Nonetheless, Taylor does not leave the reader with a tone of jubilation but of apprehension since the years that follow hold for 'lois fears that she cannot forget (*Gold* 43). In *The Friendship*, the wounded Tom Bee delivers his invective to John Wallace, but Taylor does not indicate what effect the words have on John Wallace. In *The Road to Memphis*, even though Moe escapes to Chicago, the death of Clarence and other distressing events overshadow Cassie's ability to be at peace at the end. *Mississippi Bridge* ends with the narrator's assurance of Caroline Logan's safety, but the Logan children are anxious to see for themselves that she escapes drowning. Moreover, Jeremy is understandably disturbed that God's working in "mighty mysterious ways" includes the death of his "innocen[t]" friends (*Mississippi* 60-61). A solemn tone predominates at the end of each of these novels.

Ending stories with a sober tone works to achieve Taylor's purpose, which is to help readers understand what black people in generations before the Civil Rights Movement had to endure. While presenting what she deems to be a truer account of what

happened in the 1930s according to the stories she heard about life in Mississippi, Taylor shows readers the black community's moral and physical struggles. These endings make it difficult for readers to gloss over the harsh realities her stories convey. Ending books optimistically would not have furthered Taylor's purpose. The discussion about endings in Taylor's books extends beyond the realm of the African American children's literary tradition into the arena of all juvenile fiction. In *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature*, Maria Nikolajeva finds that in contemporary juvenile novels of realism, the happy ending is less obvious and not obligatory (171). In *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, John Stephens states that although a happily-ever-after ending is not a requirement for a satisfying ending, the ending should be an outcome that provides a fixed meaning that complies with the sensibilities of the dominant culture or that the culture's expectations establish the appropriated characteristics of endings (41). The fixed meaning Taylor leaves with her readers in her first seven books is that times have been hard for African Americans in history, and they have endured racial inequities, but they have thrived despite hardships. Stephens's assumption suggests that in the ambiguous or less optimistic endings that Taylor creates for most of her books, she leads readers to think more deeply about their own values and assumptions (43). Maintaining sober and even pessimistic endings in which the African American characters have not achieved all the good things they sought helps Taylor accentuate their inability to negate the systems of racism with which they have to contend.

In the two late stage books, Taylor introduces positive endings that show the triumph of blacks in spite of the oppression from the dominant culture. In light of the

sober endings of her first seven books and the guarded optimism of her eighth book's conclusion, the victorious ending in the ninth book, *The Land*, is startling. The ending of *The Land* does not suggest a forewarning of challenges to come as do the early and middle stage books. In the last pages of *The Land*, Paul-Edward acknowledges that he is "blessed" to own land and is rich with "something of his own" (*Land* 369), thus fulfilling one of his dreams. He starts a family of his own by asking Caroline to be his wife and fulfill his other dream. The language and the action show that Taylor intends for the reader to realize that Paul-Edward has achieved the goals and is optimistic about his future.

Taylor further draws attention to the happy ending in *The Land* by adding an epilogue which validates assumptions made in the novel, implying what John Stephens terms a "real time connection" (43-44). Other books by Taylor include author's notes; *The Land* is the only book that concludes with an epilogue instead. Taylor's use of epilogue in the point of view of her narrator rather than her authorial persona in *The Land* validates what happens to Paul-Edward and implies that what happened still has significance in the present (Stephens 44). Taylor does not diminish the physical and emotional trauma wrought from familial disunity and racial violence in Paul-Edward's earlier years. As she does in other books, Taylor could emphasize some unfortunate occurrences in his life by the end of the book, but she does not. Instead, Taylor allows readers to see that Paul-Edward settles many of those issues and that he is content with his life's accomplishments despite the hardships. He realizes he does not need to understand or judge his parents' relationship. He expresses certainty that both his mother

and his father loved him and would be pleased with him. He takes his sons to his father's home and receives a silent but heartfelt blessing from his father on his death bed. Paul-Edward explains that he successfully negotiates the tenuous white-black color line to continue a relationship with one of his half-brothers, but he does not belabor the fact that he is estranged from his half-brother, Robert. Taylor furthers Paul-Edward's sense of acceptance with his past by having him explain that he names his sons after two of his white half-brothers and his father.³ His life with Caroline has brought both sorrows and joys, but he stresses the joys. Caroline and he mourn the death of two infant daughters but they focus on the sons who are living and not the two daughters they lost (*Land* 356). They pay off the loan, buy more land, build a home, and buy a buggy and horses. All of these aspects of the ending of *The Land* make it obvious that Taylor creates a happy ending.

Notwithstanding Marla Harris's findings that "[b]y the end of Reconstruction, it was apparent that there would be no Horatio Alger-style happy endings for African Americans" (96), Taylor creates an ending that loosely resembles a rags-to-riches tale, or at least places the black man in the middle class (Sanchez-Eppler 825). Paul-Edward is by no means rich, but his good work ethic and fortuitous occurrences allow him to establish himself as a landowner and a farmer. Harris's point is interesting because the Horatio Alger stories end with the character achieving a place in middle class society. Paul-Edward owns land, but it is not a tremendous amount of land, only four hundred

³ In *American Childhood*, Joseph Illick explains that a common practice among Africans was marking the day, month, or season of their children's birth and eschewing names common among English families (38). However, it would seem that Taylor chose not to follow that practice in the naming of the black Logan children.

acres. Plus, he works the land himself, so he is a laborer, not a gentleman farmer. Paul-Edward's story is akin to Horatio Alger's because his self-discipline, his good work ethic, and luck have helped him achieve his desired goal and achieve a place in middle-class society. The optimism embedded in the ending of *The Land* is a sharp contrast to Taylor's earlier books and is an indicator of the change in her ideologies.

The American dream is considered to be accessible to every American who works hard and does not give up. In this sense, the “happy endin[g] reconverge[s] on the dominant ideology” in twenty-first century America (Hollindale 20). This was not the message Taylor conveyed in the 1970s and 1980s when she began writing. She does not end her books happily in her early and middle stage books. Instead, she shows how life was hard for the Logans and they could not expect it to change much in the near future. Yet in these late stage books, the characters have the power to change their futures by acting in the present.

Change in Focus

The second significant change that manifests in late stage books is a turn from group advancement to individual betterment. Years before Taylor began her Logan saga, while a graduate student at the University of Colorado, she began to question “whether or not individual goals must be suppressed to the will of the group in order for the group's goals to flourish” (Taylor, “Mildred” 282). She states that during the time she was in the Black Student Association in the 1960s, “there was a feeling which had permeated the group that each of us with his or her own unique skills was responsible to the group” (“Mildred” 282). Taylor tells about a situation that brings the discussion to a climax for

her. She explains that editors for *Life* magazine were familiar with what she had written for her college newspaper and asked her to write an article about black studies at the University of Colorado. She wrote the article, but before submitting it, she allowed fellow BSA group members to edit her work. Subsequently, *Life* editors rejected her submission. Taylor concluded that she had allowed others to dilute her writing, thus smothering her voice and intentions. She says this caused her to rethink her goals, to consider the writer's purpose and responsibility ("Mildred" 282).

In her late stage books, Taylor resolves the issue of the group versus the individual by showing main characters achieving greater agency and efficacy as they work toward personal goals. African American characters are less involved in changing society for others and more involved in changing their corner of the world, creating a better life for themselves and for their families. That Taylor endorses these individuals' quests is seen in the success she allows them in their endeavors.

In early stage books, the primary focus is on acts of resistance that will benefit the black community. For example, in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* the boycott of the Wallace store is orchestrated to punish the white men who burned the Berrys and to free the black community from financial exploitation. The sabotage of the white children's bus is an act of revenge by the black children whose school has no transportation. David Logan sets his crops on fire to prevent a lynching. In *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, several characters work as change agents for the community. David Logan, Dubé Cross, and other African Americans form the Farm Workers Labor Union and rally for better pay for agricultural laborers. Lee Annie Lees wants to register to vote to make a difference by

having a black presence in a jury box since only registered voters can serve. In both books, these efforts echo Du Bois's ideas that children and adults can be agents of change in society.

In her middle stage books, Taylor demonstrates her characters' concern for changing society while showing they are equally concerned with resisting racism as it relates to them personally. Taylor shows in *The Road to Memphis* that several individuals are still civic-minded. Solomon Bradley publishes a newspaper to help African Americans know the ramifications of social issues. Mort, one of Solomon's employees, believes all African Americans like himself should fight in the upcoming war because it will help bring equality to them in America. Cassie wants to study law and make laws benefit the African American community. But individuals also take steps to better their own lives and fulfill personal goals. Stacey's friend, Moe Turner, wants to join the army, but his goal is not to serve his country or to help the African American community. He wants to gain training and become someone of whom Cassie can be proud. David buys a car to forego the humiliation of having to ride in the back of a segregated bus. In *The Friendship*, Tom Bee wants a white man to respect him by keeping a promise. In *The Gold Cadillac*, Wilbert buys a Cadillac because he wants to show he can afford it, and it makes him feel good about himself to have it. He wants to drive it down to Mississippi whether white people like it or not. In *Mississippi Bridge*, Josias Williams rebels at having to give up his place on the bus because he needs the bus to take him to a job, but he does not try to rally other African Americans to join him in a bus boycott.

In her late stage, Taylor portrays main characters whose primary focus is on taking care of individual or family interests, not those of the African American community. Main characters are not striving to be change agents for the black community, even though opportunities are present to do so. In *The Well*, Hammer wants to take revenge upon Charlie Simms for his haughty attitude and hateful ways. Despite criticism from her family members, Caroline Logan offers water to the community because her faith in God dictates that sharing His blessings with others is the right thing to do. She is not doing so to improve community relations with racist bigots or stop institutionalized racism. Hammer, David, and Paul-Edward stop Charlie Simms from teasing Joe McCalister, in a move calculated to protect a friend instead of promoting racial equality.

In *The Land*, a much longer book that spans significantly more time than *The Well*, thus having potential for more diverse acts of resistance and achievement to do so, Taylor continues to focus on an individual's attempts to fulfill his personal goals. Paul-Edward aspires to a number of tasks to advance himself, aiding other people only when their uplift benefits himself. In *The Land*, Paul-Edward wants to obtain his own land; all his efforts go toward fulfilling that dream. His partnership with Mitchell and all it involves—teaching Mitchell to read, aiding him on the road, accepting jobs contingent on Mitchell's employment as well, letting Mitchell's wife join them on the land—are not acts of altruism. Rather, they allow Paul-Edward to share Mitchell's resources. Likewise, Taylor does not include her characters in causes that would benefit the black community as she had characters do in previous books. Whereas in *Roll of Thunder*,

Hear My Cry Mary holds Saturday school for black children and tutors one adult (Lee Annie Lees), in *The Land*, Paul-Edward does not offer to teach reading and writing to the other boys whose fathers work on Edward's farm; he only offers to teach Mitchell in return for self-defense lessons. Nor does Paul-Edward try to form a labor union for lumberjacks or one for jockeys when he is exploited, although in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, David helps form a farm workers' union to benefit his neighbors even though he is not subject to sharecropping protocol. Taking steps to change society at large is not Taylor's concern in *The Well* or *The Land*.

Change in Family

A third change in the late stage books is that although Taylor continues her trajectory of reconsidering the African American family, she moves away from a strict Duboisian family model. In *The Well*, Taylor returns to the black family in which the parents are involved in the rearing of children, although with a twist. In this book the mother is not just "concerned" ("Newbery" 405); she is just as capable at handling family crises as her husband. In *The Land*, Taylor shows that black families are various and constructed, rather than simply biological, and that they are not always patriarchal.

The Well features the blended family of Paul-Edward and Caroline Logan, which includes ten-year-old David and his older brothers, Hammer, Kevin, and Mitchell (a child from Caroline's first marriage). Though the parents are a united couple when Paul-Edward is home, when he is absent, Caroline is able to act astutely without him. She handles crises resolutely and independently, on one occasion suggesting that she can handle the crisis better without men around. She agrees to whip David and Hammer

when her husband is not at home since Simms demands that the boys must be punished. She believes the white man when he claims that if he handles it his way, “they won’t be raisin’ their fists again t’ ’nother white man” (50), implying that the black boys would be dead. Paul-Edward is also absent when Caroline has a face-off with Simms about the well water. The Logans’ well water has been tainted so that no one can drink from it, and she forthrightly tells Simms that Hammer claims that his sons are responsible for it. She does not flinch when he threatens to kill her but coaxes him to reasonably consider who vandalized the well. Caroline is not the sole parent responsible for the Logan boys, but she acts with strength and wisdom in her husband’s absence. Paul-Edward resumes a leadership role in the family when he returns home. For example, he accompanies his sons to and from the Simms’ farm to ward off potential problems. Thus, in the late stage books, Caroline and Paul-Edward model resistance as well as survival. By their good work ethic and circumspection, they model wise behavior. Taylor again portrays a two-parent family, but she does not insist on the patriarchal model, substituting a joint headship of the family.

In *The Land*, instead of maintaining the patriarchal black family as superior, Taylor depicts four different family units of which the protagonist is a part, all of which are helpful to his development: his slave birth family, his white father’s family, the family he joins as a young adult, and finally, a blended family that he establishes with Mitchell’s widow, Caroline. The first family of which Paul-Edward is a part lacks a father, the second family lacks a mother, the third has neither, and the fourth has a mother and a father. Only Paul-Edward’s fourth family is patterned after the patriarchal model

of family, except that his three sons have a step-brother, the child who is fathered by Mitchell, Caroline's first husband. Taylor has Paul-Edward identify each of these relationships as one of his "families," so the reader cannot mistake Taylor's emphasis on the variety of the family model. Instead of eschewing the idea presented by the media from the 1960s, that the black family is broken and fatherless, she shows four family models that are a viable part of Paul-Edward's life and, presumably, an acceptable part of the community.

Paul-Edward's first family is his immediate family, and it continues to be a stable basis throughout his life. From this family, he learns independence. His first family is the slave family into which he was born and with whom he lives as long as he stays on his father's property in Macon, Georgia. This family is headed by his mother, Deborah, who had a Native American father and a black slave mother. Deborah was a slave until she was emancipated after the Civil War, when Paul-Edward was six or seven years old. Paul-Edward's only sibling is an older sister, Cassie. Both Paul-Edward and Cassie are light-skinned, a reflection of their white father, Edward Logan, their mother's former slave master. Obviously, although Edward takes care to rear Deborah's children along with his white children whose mother died in childbirth, he does not marry her. Deborah chooses to remain on her former master's property, serving Edward's household as his cook and maid, even after her liberation. Cassie surmises that if Deborah leaves, then Edward would claim custody of their children and would not allow Deborah to take his children away from him. Deborah shows her independence from Paul-Edward's father, telling her children that even though their father is good to them, she never plans to

depend on a man. Furthermore, she shows her independence by buying ten acres of land on which she rears her two children. Paul-Edward inherits the proceeds from the sale of the property. As Paul-Edward grieves at Deborah's death, he states that he feels as though his sister Cassie is the only "real family" he has left (*Land* 94). This family remains important to Paul-Edward, and he and Cassie remain committed to one another even though Cassie lives in Georgia and he lives in Mississippi, two states away.

The second family of which Paul-Edward is a part provides him with many benefits that white affluence could offer but without offering him the full privileges that accompanied whiteness. Headed by his father, Edward Logan, Paul-Edward's second family is comprised of three half-brothers: George, Hammond, and Robert. His first family is still a part of this family because his mother, Deborah, is what others call Edward's "colored woman" (*Land* 53). She is also his half-brothers' surrogate mother. Paul-Edward's second family is unique in that although it was understood that white slave masters fathered their slaves' children, it was far less acceptable or expected for white fathers to acknowledge their mixed-race progeny and treat them as their own (Hampton 85). In this affluent family, Edward is active in Paul-Edward's life; both Paul-Edward and Cassie believe their white father loves them, and they love him. Edward rears Paul-Edward and Cassie with his white sons, educating them, sharing meals with them when there is no company, fostering sibling love among all his five progeny, and giving them heirlooms. Edward helps Paul-Edward develop his innate skills in horse riding and horse training. Yet Edward also gives Paul-Edward some harsh lessons to ensure that Paul-Edward would never hit a white man. Edward does not acknowledge

him as his son in public, a fact which hurts Paul-Edward deeply. Paul-Edward's nearly-white skin and straight hair and his higher level of education separate him from both the black and the white community. He longs for the place in society that being white affords, but he does not desire a place in the community as a white person. Having these two families creates challenges for Paul-Edward and complicates his life.

Paul-Edward's two birth families shape him differently from how main characters are shaped in Taylor's earlier books. Paul-Edward is confused about his parents' relationships since his mother and father are not married, nor do they live in the same house. He resents his parents for what they did to bring him into the world, alternately blaming one and then the other. Paul-Edward tries to make sense of why his father took up with "a colored woman" and why his mother chooses to stay with her former slave master. He states that he never saw his parents share more than a cup of coffee and conversation, never a meal or an embrace. Paul-Edward appreciates benefits he incurs from his white family, but he resents having to straddle the black and white communities because of his mixed parentage. He and his mother are ridiculed and ostracized because of Deborah's relationship with Edward. Paul-Edward feels the ambiguity of his father treating him as a son at home but ignoring the relationship away from home, such as when his father calls him his "boy" not his "son" in public (*Land* 103). Far from showing a black child who is happy and loved, as Taylor had stated as her intention in her manifesto, she shows Paul-Edward as struggling to see where he fits in a family and where a family fits in his life. Paul-Edward is not envied by his peers for being part of a white and a black family. Instead, he is taunted and hated for being so light-skinned. He

is called a “white nigger” by blacks and whites (*Land* 25, 36). Taylor nods to Du Bois’s double consciousness since Paul-Edward sees himself as he is and how white people view him (Hampton 84). She acknowledges the existence of the complicated family situation when Paul-Edward states that he comes “to the true realization that [he] ha[s] two families” (*Land* 46). His relationship with the second family is most challenging for Paul-Edward, causing him the most confusion with his personal identity. Interestingly though, Paul-Edward is grateful for his diverse ethnic background brought by his two families. He is proud to have both an African and a Native American background on his mother’s side of the family, and he is proud of a white father.

The third family Taylor depicts for Paul-Edward, the one that helps establish his presence in the black community, is the family he creates with his nemesis-turned-comrade, Mitchell Thomas. Mitchell, the child of a former slave who still works on the and lives on Edward’s plantation, is older, bigger, and stronger than Paul-Edward, and often beats him up. The two begin their relationship with a truce near the beginning of the book, and their relationship becomes a friendship as mutual trust develops. Mitchell helps build Paul-Edward’s self-confidence when he teaches him how to fight. Mitchell also helps him identify with the black community, which had formerly ostracized him for being a mulatto. When they run away together, they forge a brotherhood, and Paul-Edward considers Mitchell as his family and the only person on whom he can. The two men commit to helping one another, which explains why Paul-Edward tells his prospective employer, Miz Crenshaw, that he will not take a job on her horse ranch unless she hires Mitchell. Whereas Mitchell does not hold any long-range plans or

dreams, he shares in Paul-Edward's dream of owning land. Mitchell agrees to help Paul-Edward clear off forty acres, and in turn, Paul-Edward promises to give him half of the land. According to Paul-Edward, he and Mitchell were "most like brothers," and upon Mitchell's death, Paul-Edward is deeply grieved: "My friend, my brother, [is] gone" (*Land* 3, 307). He identifies closely with his blackness in his relationship with Mitchell, and he also is most succinctly his own man because of their relationship.

The time comes when Paul-Edward recognizes the need to establish his own family; he creates a fourth family that is a culmination of his three other families. Paul-Edward's fourth family is closely connected to his third family since he marries Mitchell's widow, Caroline Perry Thomas. The commitment he feels for Mitchell carries on after his death. Paul-Edward considers the baby Mitchell fathered to be his "first born child," but he names the infant after his father (*Land* 365). He and Caroline name their other children after two of his half-brothers (George and Hammond) and his father, Edward. Paul-Edward maintains a relationship with his first family, who resides in Atlanta. He describes the trip in which he takes his children to Macon, Georgia, to introduce his children to his second family, including his dying father Edward. It is interesting that while his white man is unable to speak; Paul-Edward, Edward's black son whose story it is, speaks to and for him. In this way, Taylor exhibits Paul-Edward's agency in the sphere of his "white" family. Paul-Edward accentuates the connection his fourth family has with his third family. He explains that his "first born" son is able to meet the Thomases, the family of his biological father, Mitchell, as well.

Paul-Edward's involvement with his complex and expanding family units is further evidence of Taylor's shift in ideologies. She shows that he is free to move among his established families and to acknowledge beneficial familial relationships. Taylor's experimentation with family demonstrates a shift in her ideologies in that she empowers the black individual rather than establishing the prominence of the black family patriarch. Unlike Du Bois, who endorses a two-parent family model led by the father with a mother who subjugated her needs to those of the family, Taylor acknowledges the strength of multiple family models.

Paul-Edward's involvement with his white family is a change from the emphasis on the strong black family structure Taylor stresses in her manifesto. His involvement with relatives is also problematic because Paul-Edward does not completely separate himself from white people, which was behavior expected by Logans in prior books. He not only acknowledges his relationship to his white family, he also honors it. As he begins his family with Caroline, he wants his children to know their white relatives too. With Paul-Edward's success, enabled by his various families, Taylor shows the validity of each of these family structures, even those that cross the color line.

Change in Contracts

One final change in Taylor's late stage books reflects the changing American society in which they take place, the 1870s through 1910, which involves the rise of legal contracts for black persons. Taylor uses contracts, verbal or written agreements, in all her books. When present in early and middle stage books, the use of contracts typically

works to a white character's advantage. However, in *The Well* and *The Land*, contracts are tools that the Logans use to achieve their desired results.

In *American Literary Realism and the Failed Promise of Contract*, Brook Thomas acknowledges that Americans formed contractual negotiations before the Civil War; however, he states that contracts became more commonplace in American life afterwards. The increased use of contracts are due in part to the passing of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, which introduced a new element in the fabric of American society regarding how white people related to persons of color. The federal government's attempt to acclimate the formerly enslaved men, women, and children into mainstream American life in the former Confederate states was short-lived since the Freedmen's Bureau (1865-1872) came to an end after less than a decade due to pressure from white southerners. Notwithstanding the downward spiral of their diminishing privileges, many blacks who had not formerly been able to do so as slaves negotiated contracts for labor and possessions. Thomas argues that writers of Realism, as seen in the fiction of William Dean Howells, Henry James, Mark Twain, Charles Chesnutt, Kate Chopin, and others, reflect society's interest in legal issues. Thomas recognizes an encapsulation of the changing black-white social relationships depicted as a form of contract in one iconic scene in literary history. For instance, he asserts that Huck Finn's willingness to humble himself to a "nigger" by apologizing to Jim for betraying his trust is an example of a social contract, for he related to the runaway slave as his equal (Thomas 5).

Thomas's discussion is helpful because he recognizes that contractual negotiations are a promise to exchange goods or their equivalent between two equal parties or partners. Contracting individuals are free to negotiate on their own terms and do not have to abide by laws related to status or class limiting their behavior. Thomas explains that rather than separating individuals by status (such as former slaves and former slave owners) or by classes (rich and poor), the post-Civil War society recognized a growing use of contracts, which carry with them an assumption of equality. Thomas states that each party has something the other values, noting that a contract "draws people together" rather than separating them (1). Thomas distinguishes the opportunity available to individuals who are free to form ties, but he does not minimize the reality that the formation of contracts does not offer unequivocal equality for the freedman. Thomas's ideas about contracts emerging in the last part of the 1800s, particularly those in regard to blacks, offer a framework in which to explore the nature of Taylor's earlier books.

Although this study on Taylor's late stage books is informed by Thomas's discussion about the relevance of contracts in the late nineteenth century American life, this author recognizes differences between this study and Thomas's. He discusses texts written in the last half of the nineteenth century. Taylor's late stage books were written a hundred years later. Writers in the tradition of literary Realism wrote about fictional incidents that could have happened in the late nineteenth century. According to her author's notes, Taylor's stories are based on people who lived during that time period and passed along events to subsequent generations through the oral storytelling tradition (*Well* 7-8; *Land* 371-73). Although Thomas concludes that promises made by contracts

such as those depicted in novels by Howells, Twain, and others often failed, Taylor shows that some of the social and written contracts acted upon by her characters actually succeeded. A close reading of the contractual climate in the late stage books reveals that Taylor's main characters are empowered because they make contractual agreements, either tacitly as in *The Well* or formally as in *The Land*.

Contracts in *The Well*

Taylor incorporates social contracts in *The Well* to effectively demonstrate her main characters' agency and ability to achieve greater efficacy. By way of helping readers understand the oppressive nature of Jim Crow society as the backdrop, Taylor articulates the race situation in society as seen through the eyes of the narrator, ten-year-old David Logan. She depicts the status quo among the blacks and whites in *The Well*. David proclaims that a black person hitting a white person or a black person "mouthing off" to a white person "could get hung in a flick of a horse's tail" (*Well* 12, 31). David's explanation about the dominant culture's view of African Americans is evidence that the black codes had become Jim Crow Laws after the Reconstruction Era. Thus, Taylor's fiction validates history, and yet that is not all that the author implies. She shows black characters are resistant to oppression. This description of the times does not engender ideas of contractual associations between black and white persons because white Mississippians did not treat blacks as equals. Racist whites would not willingly admit that black persons had things for which they were willing to negotiate or that blacks were worth considering as partners in a legal transaction. White southerners promoted the rights of whites and disregarded the rights of African Americans., which relegated black

persons to second-class citizenship. Taylor explains that despite the perceived lack of agency of African Americans in Mississippi's past, her characters successfully navigate the precarious imbalance of power.

Taylor juxtaposes the *de facto* practice of subjugating blacks with an unusual display of equality in *The Well*. Two Logans—David's brother, Hammer, and their mother, Caroline Logan—are people who exhibit power beyond the pale of the status quo. In the Logans' sphere of influence in *The Well*, Taylor creates a microcosm in which people draw together to form alliances apart from the transcendent rules prescribed by the dominant culture, and thereby Taylor demonstrates greater agency and efficacy for black main characters. An extenuating circumstance in *The Well* reveals that Sheriff Peterson Rankins has to put aside white supremacy in order to enter into social contracts with the Logans. When confronting Caroline, David's mother, Rankins enters into a dialogue about the incident between Caroline's sons and Charlie in which he and Caroline each reveal their knowledge of the event. Rankins demonstrates that he views her as his equal on some level since he encourages her input even when she questions his need to believe her: "You gonna be taking my word over a white man's?" (*Well* 25). His investigation of the boys' alleged misdeeds bypasses the typical justice normally meted out when a black person assaults a white person. In spite of black people's lack of agency in Mississippi in 1910, Rankins listens to Caroline before deciding his course of action.

In *The Well*, Rankins functions in a conciliatory role, similar to that of contract negotiator, on behalf of a black family. Juxtaposed to the restrictions of the black person,

as outlined by David, the events that unfold in *The Well* are singular. The lawman serves as an advocate on behalf of the Logans. What is important is that the law *de facto* which allowed for a black to be hung for hitting a white person is not carried out due to the intervention of the sheriff.

Another incident in *The Well* shows that two other white men, George Melbourne and McCalister Simms, separately enter a social contract with the Logans. After drawing water from the Logans' well for months during the drought, Melbourne finally verbalizes his thanks for the water and brings the Logans a gift from his wife. His expression of gratitude connotes an acceptance of equality on some level and is akin to Huck's humbling himself to Jim. Earlier in the book, this white man does not say thank-you but merely nods, a gesture that narrator David construes as appreciation. On a different occasion, Melbourne serves as a mediator between the Logans and Simms. Simms threatens to cut out Caroline's heart out when she implicates his sons, Charlie and Ed-Rose, in the poisoning of the Logans' well water. Melbourne's voice of reason defuses Simms' hostility as he invites the old man to learn how the well has come to be contaminated.

In a surprising turn of events, Simms sets aside his hostility against the Logans to uncover the truth. Finally convinced that his sons are culpable for throwing animal carcasses down the Logans' well, he humbles himself in front of black folks by calling his sons liars and thereby agreeing that Caroline is telling the truth. Simms recognizes that the black family has something that he and the surrounding witnesses value: fresh water. What follows in the story indicates that Simms may value the Logans as well.

Simms chooses not to whip his sons in front of black people, but he disciplines them in a less conventional way. He makes Charlie and Ed-Rose repeatedly drop into the well to dredge up the animal parts (*Well* 90-91). Simms does not leave the animal parts for the Logans to burn or bury. He has his sons pile the rank carcasses on the back of his horse-drawn cart. He drives through the disgusted crowd, carrying not only his malodorous sons but also evidence of their maliciousness. Simms's actions are uncharacteristic since his sons vandalized the property of those he considers mere "nigger[s]" (*Well* 90).

One might argue that Simms' actions demonstrate only that he is embarrassed because the community knows that his sons fouled their community's primary sweet water supply during the drought. However, David reports that Simms does not cavalierly dismiss his sons' culpability and resume his superior attitude with the Logans; Simms makes certain that none of his family returns to the Logan property as long as he is alive, even during another drought when the Logans once again offer their well water to anyone. He does not again affect white privilege regarding the Logans' well water as he has at the beginning of the story.

Contracts in *The Land*

In *The Land*, Taylor shows protagonist Paul-Edward using verbal and written contract negotiations to forward his goals. He establishes a number of verbal and written contracts as he builds upon the lesson he learns from his father, Edward Logan. Paul-Edward is coerced into learning how to negotiate because his father instructs him to use his head not his fists if he wants an Mitchell, an older and bigger youth, to stop beating him. For example, Paul-Edward negotiates a verbal contract, an exchange of equal

services with Mitchell, another former slave. Mitchell promises not to beat him up and to teach him to fight, and Paul-Edward promises to teach Mitchell how to read, write, and do basic math. Taylor shows that the success of that verbal agreement sets Paul-Edward on a path of agency in which he forms contractual negotiations that help him achieve increased efficacy.

Paul-Edward sees the value of using his head to negotiate early in his life and practices it several times while he is still under his father's protection. After his introduction into the world of contract negotiating with Mitchell as a way to keep the black youth from beating him up, Paul-Edward negotiates contracts with several white persons, learning that although they may be willing to approach him because he has something they value, they do not view him as an equal; often the contracts fail. Taylor makes it clear what Paul-Edward brings to the arrangement with each of the parties: the Waverly brothers, Robert Logan's friends; Jesse Pinter, a master carpenter; and Sutcliff, a rancher looking for someone to race his horse. The Waverly brothers admit he is a good rider and value his silence, that he will not tell their father how they tricked Robert into riding a horse and his getting hurt, and they agree to give Robert and him an Appaloosa for his silence. Pinter values Paul-Edward as a worker and apprentice in his workshop and spends his time giving him a valuable education. Sutcliff values his skill as a rider, and agrees to give him four times the going rate if he wins the horse race. The terms for each of these agreements seem to be on an equal basis, but the white persons do not value him as an equal. The Waverlys do not respect him as a person or his right to claim joint ownership of the Appaloosa, which he legally shares with Robert. Pinter does not want

him to interact with his daughters since he is black and thus inferior. Sutcliff refuses to hand over the money after Paul-Edward wins the race. Instead he insists that as a “nigger” the youth should wait for the money (116).

Into his adulthood, Paul-Edward continues to negotiate contracts. One incident is a failed contract is a written document Paul-Edward signs with Fillmore Granger,⁴ a landowner. After Paul-Edward and Mitchell work two years clearing lumber from a forty-acre plot, Filmore accuses Paul-Edward of cutting lumber outside the property line and stealing it. He tears up their signed contract. He further shows his contempt for his contract with Paul-Edward by stating, “You think I care about a paper signed with a nigger?” (*Land* 343). Paul-Edward has no legal recourse, for the law would take the word of a white man over a black man.

Paul-Edward successfully negotiates contracts with two white Mississippians, demonstrating his advances in his agency and his efficacy. The first Mississippian with whom he successfully negotiates contracts is Luke Sawyer, who learns to value Paul-Edward’s ability to craft furniture and his skill in training and racing horses. The two men enter a number of contracts regarding both woodworking and horses, and each man successfully abides by his side of the contract. The first contract is arranged verbally and is sealed with a handshake. All others are verbal or written contracts based on the high opinion each man seems to have regarding the other’s ability to perform according to the agreement: Sawyer to be fair and a man of his word, and Paul-Edward to be a master craftsman and an excellent horseman. Unlike Sutcliff and Fillmore Granger, Sawyer does not withhold any part of his end of the bargain just because he is negotiating with a

⁴ Filmore Granger is the father of the Harlan Granger who appears in early and middle stage books.

man of color. Paul-Edward values his business relationship with Sawyer and informs Mitchell that the arrangements enable him to “still be [his] own boss” (*Land* 176).

When negotiating for the land he prizes with another white man, J. T. Hollenbeck, Paul-Edward demonstrates that he has learned from the bitter disappointment from the failed contract with Filmore. He uses his head and obtains legal advice before entering into a contract for the land he prizes, calling upon attorney Charles Jamison,⁵ who is also buying land from Hollenbeck, and asks him to draw up a legally binding contract. Charles Jamison shows Paul-Edward that the wording in the document is the same as in the contract he makes with Hollenbeck; only the amount of land and price of the land are different. It is an iron-clad agreement that neither Hollenbeck nor Paul-Edward can break without penalty. Paul-Edward drives away after signing the contract with a sense of satisfaction, certain that he will keep the land.

Taylor’s ideological shift of greater agency and efficacy for African Americans in the late stage novels is evident when juxtaposed with usually unsatisfactory negotiations in Taylor’s prior books. Successful contractual negotiations rarely happened in Taylor’s early and middle stage books, which take place from 1930 through 1950. They fail because society is entrenched in the mentality of institutionalized racism. When most negotiations were attempted, white Mississippians do not treat African Americans respectfully and fairly, and the contracts fails. One example is in *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* when the bank which holds the mortgage for the Logan land calls in the notice before the time specified on the contract. Caroline complains about the unfairness of it, and Mary and David Logan agree. However, Mary and David recognize that they have

⁵ Charles Jamison is the father of attorney the Wade Jamison who appears in early and middle stage books.

no impetus to stop the bank, implying that the white banker has the force of the law behind his unscrupulous action.

In earlier books, when white Mississippians go through the motions of negotiating contracts with African Americans, they do not value them as equals in the partnership. In prior books, whites rarely valued the Logans. In *Song of the Trees*, Andersen uses intimidation, not respect, to coerce Caroline to sign a contract allowing him to cut as many trees on the Logan land as he thinks is right for sixty-five dollars. In *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, registrar Sam Boudein ostensibly tests Lee Annie Lees for voter registration, but he denies her right to vote because he views her not as having value in herself but for merely being Harlan's "nigger" (357). Also in that novel, Harlan does not honor the agreement his sharecroppers negotiated with the government in the Crop Reduction Plan, but withholds the promised check, believing he has rights they do not have. In *The Friendship*, John Wallace refuses to honor a promise—a verbal contract—he made to Tom Bee years before and allow the elderly man to call him by his "Christian" name because, he tells him, it "ain't seemly, you a nigger and me a white man" (26). In *Mississippi Bridge*, the bus driver sells Josias Williams a seat on the bus that is to take him to Natchez Trace where a job awaits him. However, the bus driver reneges and cancels the transaction because he values the white person needing a seat on the bus more than he does the "nigger,"; he unceremoniously forces Josias out of his seat and off the bus (46-47). These failed contracts minimize black characters' agency and efficacy in the early and middle stages. The other failed contracts in the early and middle stages show how Taylor fulfills her intentions to show what prior generations endured at

the hands of white oppressors in the South before the Civil Rights Movement. In later books, Taylor emphasizes the presence of “equality” and respect.

Paul-Edward’s undisputed success of his contracts with Luke Sawyer and Hollenbeck is evidence that the African American protagonist has greater agency and efficacy than in earlier books. Paul-Edward grows from using his mental acuity in contract negotiations. Even when the contracts fail, they serve as schoolmaster to tutor him to make different choices for the next contract. The failed contracts also serve to strengthen his resolve and build his character. Paul-Edward believes in himself to fulfill his dream of owning land, and he applies himself by hard work and careful strategizing to gain the land he longs to have. Negotiating contracts allows Paul-Edward to be in control of his fate, to have agency, and to be efficacious. He owns land that no one can take away from him. His victory sets the family on a strong financial footing in his generation and in three generations that follow. His ability to negotiate contracts is a significant part of that his success.

Change in the Author’s Life

Taylor’s emphasis on empowering her main characters in her late stage books coincides with events in her life that Taylor and at least one critic credit with informing the literary development of her last book. Biographical information concerning Taylor’s life is available from several sources. She wrote autobiographical sketches in the 1970s and 1980s, and she granted occasional interviews throughout her writing career. She also starred in two documentaries in which she talks about key aspects of her life related to

her writing.⁶ Additionally, throughout her writing career, when accepting an honor or award or when speaking to promote a new book, she often reiterated previously disclosed facts about her life. However, in the author's note in *The Land*, Taylor reveals new information that suggests the motivation for changes in her late stage books.

This information involves the years she struggled to own a piece of property in the foothills of the Colorado Rocky Mountains. In *The Land*'s author's note, she states that God directed her to a flowering meadow in the Rockies. Captivated by the property, she states she was set on owning it. Although the property was for sale, she learned it was unobtainable to her because banks would not loan money on undeveloped land. The following year, she saw the land was still for sale but that the owner was willing to finance the loan for a short period. Taylor was able to negotiate a contract to buy part of the land, but not the meadow. Several years later, she was able to contract for the meadow and gave a down payment, knowing she would forfeit the land and the money if she missed a payment. She explains that throughout lean years, she had to do without in order to make the monthly payments. She sacrificed prized possessions, such as jewelry and the typewriter on which she had written *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Friends considered her foolish to hold fast to her dream for land, but her family supported her. Taylor states that she had an unshakeable faith that she was meant to have the land, so she persevered. When the balloon payment was due, she appealed to banks once more for the necessary funds but was again denied. She explains that right before the deadline,

⁶ Taylor explains aspects of her life and writing in several articles: one for *Something about the Author Autobiographical Series*, "Newbery Acceptance Speech," "My Life as a Writer," and "Growing up with Stories." She is featured in two documentaries, one from a series of black writers, *Women Writers*, and one about Newbery Medal winners, *Meet the Newbery Writer*. Interviews were conducted by Jennifer Brown, Chris Crowe, Johnson and Giorgis, Hazel Rochman, and Dial Books.

she visited what she called her praying rock and petitioned God to provide the money. Upon completing her prayer, she received a phone call and learned that the bank had reconsidered and agreed to a loan. She considers the bank's willingness to loan her money to be nothing short of miraculous (*Land* 373-75).

In the author's note, Taylor not only lets readers learn about her journey in fulfilling a dream, she makes it clear that she conflates facts from her experiences with fiction. She explains that she interweaves the pathos and events of her life with experiences passed along to her about her great-grandfather's life to create the fictional account of protagonist Paul-Edward Logan. Taylor implies that her struggles to obtain the Colorado property and the resultant triumphs that led to her becoming a landowner gave her a sense of empowerment and efficacy that this author believe is reflected in her late stage books: "My great grandparents have been an inspiration to me, not only in my writing, but also in my struggle to own land" (*Land* 373). In an interview with Jennifer Brown, Taylor is more specific as to the impact of her family's history on her latest book. For Taylor, *The Land* is "very personal on two levels" (Taylor qtd. in J. Brown 24). Brown further explains Taylor's comment: "The first [level] being the most apparent—her family ties to legacy of her great-grandfather—and the second being her own struggle to obtain land in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. Much of Taylor's long, patient process of contracting for the mountain property informs her writing here" (J. Brown 24).

The Land is the only book in which Taylor expresses a celebratory tone in the end. Taylor's assertion that two "miracles" occurred to bring about her success as the owner of her prized property, and her characters' jubilation at his success as a landowner

lead me to assume that it enabled her to write the story she had longed to write years before (*Land* 375). Motivation for sharing this aspect of her life became evident when she recounted the legacy passed along to her by her family. She writes that her family owns the land her great-grandfather bought in Mississippi and that her family owns the land in the Rocky Mountains that they helped her buy. For Taylor the joint ownership is as much relational as it is monetary since her gaining the land in the Rocky Mountains would not have been possible without her family's values and teachings passed along to her through the generations. She further emphasizes the conflation by explaining that she intends to pass along the legacy which had begun by her great-grandparents, which has made a great impression on her life. She considers herself "blessed" to be the one who passes along her family's legacy to readers. Furthermore, she perceives the responsibility of the legacy since her generation is extending the legacy to the next generation who are expected to transfer the legacy to those who follow (*Land* 375).

Choice in Narrator

This author would argue that Taylor's use of the two black males as the narrators in these last two books is a significant indicator of her shift in ideologies for several reasons. Instead of taking up the voice that was comfortable for her in her early books, Taylor chooses to break from her sphere of comfort and success and adopt new and different narrators through whom to tell her stories. For one reason, she allows the adult males to tell their stories without allowing the authorial mask to slip. The narrator's words and experiences are validated because they are his words. The story is not filtered through a third person, and thus they gain legitimacy.

Conclusion

Taylor's two-fold message that "we are free" and "use your head" is subtly substantiated by Edward when he deals with one of his employees, Willie Thomas, who is Mitchell's father. Edward contracts to pay Willie, his former slave, to take care of his livery. Edward is satisfied with his services, but he knows that Willie is physically abusive to his family. Paul-Edward learns about the abuse and asks Edward to make Willie stop the beatings. Edward claims that he does not approve of the abuse, but he refuses to intervene because his former slave is now free. Edward is Willie's employer, not his master, and he chooses to respect Willie's elevated place in society. Edward's decision not to stop the domestic abuse may seem heartless to twenty-first century readers since present day laws prohibit domestic abuse and government agencies protect the abused. By not acting on Mitchell's behalf, Edward gives Mitchell and his family what they need most from white people in the years after the Civil War: respect based on their freedom. He believes that his business association with Willie does not allow him to interfere with the man's treatment of his family, so Edward refuses to get involved. In so doing, Edward treats Willie as he himself wants to be treated: "He runs his family and I run mine" (*Land* 77).

By choosing not to interfere with the Thomases' domestic problems, Edward extends the message of empowerment to Mitchell, implying that Mitchell is liberated and can figure out a way to handle his problems. Edward intimates that Mitchell does not need a white man to interfere or to rescue. Thus empowered, when Mitchell is fifteen and as big as his father, he threatens to kill him if he will not stop the beatings. Mitchell

explains that the confrontation works. Willie does not lay his hand on anyone for as long as he is around. Thus, by guiding his son to use his head and by acknowledging that black people are free, Edward unwittingly empowers Mitchell to fulfill his goal.

The story of Mitchell's success in this matter is an example of what Taylor's late stage books do: they display the autonomy and efficacy of the main black characters who claim their right to freedom and use their heads to achieve their dreams. Even if individuals are working primarily for personal benefit, they can still model positive behavior for others (readers) who can likewise gain a sense of personal empowerment.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

Taylor introduces her initial and most often used narrator, Cassie Logan, to readers in *Song of the Trees*. In an early passage, eight-year-old Cassie describes a moment playing hide-and-seek with her brothers: “I glanced up into the boughs of my wintry-smelling hiding tree expecting a song of laughter. But the old pine only tapped me gently with one of its long, low branches” (8). The missing laughter from the old pine foreshadows sadness for the trees cut down by white men later in the book, an occurrence that represents the threat of Jim Crow society and points to one of Taylor’s most vivid themes and purposes for writing. But the passage also sets Cassie apart from other family members as the one “tapped” to tell the story about the loss of the Logans’ trees. Choosing Cassie as narrator was not a foregone conclusion for Taylor, as she wrote the story originally through a young boy’s point of view and then a grandmother’s, before settling on Cassie (Taylor, “Mildred” 283). This passage introduces one of Taylor’s purposes for Cassie as narrator, as though choosing her to be a mouth-king for the Logans. The author’s choice of the verb *tapped* rather than *brushed* or *tickled* or *scratched*, for instance, is intriguing because Taylor also uses this verb when writing of her own compulsion to record her family’s stories. She explains that of all her relatives who partook of the telling and hearing of the family’s oral storytelling tradition, she was the one who felt “tapped by God” to speak her family’s stories onto the printed page (Taylor and Rochman).

As expressed in her *Something about the Author's Autobiographical Series* (SAAS) article, Taylor writes that through her storytelling she wants to convey her father's legacy, but that she also hopes to leave a legacy of her own ("Mildred" 286). It is Taylor's achievement of a separate legacy supported by an ideological framework different from the experiences and ideas that influenced her father's thinking that I argue in this dissertation. The changes in her characters' goals and their empowerment that emerge by her late stage books demonstrate an enhanced vision for her African American characters. That she has broken with her father's familial vision and she endorses other models of family also demonstrate a separation from her father's legacy. It may be that the sentiments encompassed in the two phrases "we are free" and "use your head" will be incorporated in her legacy, but only time will substantiate the supposition.

The significance of Taylor's ideological shifts is that they demonstrate a changed trajectory for reaching her goal of painting what she considers to be a truer picture of the black experience. After helping to fulfill her father's legacy by sharing his stories and becoming a change agent, Taylor moves past having African Americans steel themselves against the oppression of a dominant culture. She directs African American characters to stake a claim, to take advantage of the "equality of opportunity," as phrased by Brook Thomas to explain Americans' freedom to make contracts (5), which is allotted to them by the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. Nowhere does Taylor's broader vision for African American characters appear more prominently than in the conclusion to *The Land*: Paul-Edward fulfills his dream in a fairy tale-like ending. Taylor writes in her SAAS article that as a result of *Life*

magazine's refusal to accept her article once she had allowed others in the Black Student Association to review and revise her ideas, she began to question whether an individual's goals had to be suppressed in order for the community to achieve its dreams ("Mildred" 282). She demonstrates an answer to her query in *The Land* because the protagonist's sole goal is to fulfill his personal dream for self betterment. Taylor seems to be answering that the individual's dream is more important than the community's goals.

Though it could be argued that Paul-Edward's success is historically based, and to a certain degree it is, another indicator that Taylor's view of the African American situation in America has changed by the time she completes *The Land* is Taylor's seeming inability to return to a more oppressed narrator's voice after finishing this book. The book with a working title of "Logan" that Taylor states she planned to complete after publishing *The Land* remains unpublished more than a decade later. In "Logan," Taylor states she intends to take Cassie and her brothers from where Taylor leaves them in *The Road to Memphis* in 1940, through World War II, and up to the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement—a time of continuing discrimination against blacks that would include aspects of Taylor's personal life written about "for the first time" (J. Brown 24). This scenario seems to be a natural continuation of Cassie's life and a suitable way to end the Logan chronicles. But Taylor has yet to complete the Logan saga even though she admits to having an additional impetus beyond her editors and readers awaiting the completion of "Logan." Taylor writes in personal correspondence that before his death in 2009, she made a promise to her beloved uncle, James Edward Taylor, who is the prototype of Little Man and was actually called by that nickname as a child, to tell his story (Taylor,

Letter to the author). But the printing press has yet to produce the pages of the long-awaited book.

Taylor has been working on “Logan” for more than a dozen years—a long time for an accomplished writer such as Taylor to struggle to attain the voice of a character. In 2001, in Jennifer Brown’s review of *The Land*, Taylor admits that it has been difficult to return to Cassie Logan’s voice after *The Land* because she enjoyed entering Paul-Edward’s persona and using his voice. More recently, she comments:

[I]t has been more than twenty years since I have written using the voice of Cassie Logan. Although Cassie is a part of me and I can reflect her feelings, so much in the world and my life personally has changed that the writing has become much more difficult. (Letter to author)

Though it would be hard to categorize the changes in Taylor’s life and her world, I hypothesize that she is having trouble writing “Logan” because of her shift in ideologies. Taylor stresses, “My writing has to be based on something that’s real” (“A Conversation”). Internationally successful, Taylor ideologically no longer sees her African American characters as constrained by lesser agency. The message of greater empowerment embodied in Paul-Edward’s story will not easily let her return to a place of less empowerment to finish the saga.

The importance of Taylor’s hesitation in returning to Cassie’s voice is that Taylor believes African Americans have made progress (Taylor and Rochman). Taylor realized her dream of buying land she prized in Colorado, another story that she says she would like to write (“A Conversation”). Likewise, although there is no reason to doubt that her

endorsement of the patriarchal family model is genuine in her early stage books, by her late stage books, she no longer demands the presence of a powerful father for the well-being of a child. Similarly, she allows a protagonist success without requiring him to better the African American community as a whole.

In perhaps one of the biggest departures from her earlier books, by the end of her completed late stage novels, she is no longer compelled to set straight uninformed white readers about the black experience. But since her protagonist is of mixed ethnicity in *The Land*, she is writing about the black experience and the white experience. She avers that if her readers do not understand her books, they will never get her message. When a librarian or teacher asks her to write a letter to explain the importance of her books when some factions want them banned because they contain offensive language and racism, she refuses to comply: “The books are there; they are the answer” (“My Life” 8). Both her willingness to leave more for the reader to interpret by slipping the authorial mask less and her personal response of silence to the challenges of her texts show that she is willing to let the readers make their own decisions about the true black experience.

Taylor’s success, great by any standard for a children’s author in a field still predominately white, blinds scholars to the shifts identified in this dissertation. Amid choruses of praise, critics fail to closely investigate the meaning of Taylor’s insertion of less supervised children (in middle and late stage books) and a happy ending (in *The Land*). Circumstances that might be of small consequence for another writer, these changes point to a new trajectory in Taylor’s writing and life. Taylor’s ideologies have grown beyond her father’s life guides in ways that hinder her ability to re-enter the world

that was Cassie's, a world which expresses her prior ideologies. She implies as much in 2001 when she tells Hazel Rochman:

Yes, we have equal rights, or so-called equal rights today. We have so many more opportunities. Children of all races and cultures and background have the opportunity to advance in this country now. It's amazing how much has changed. But I think each of us needs to know where America was in the past, where we came from—not just African Americans, but Hispanics and Asians and Native Americans. It's about all of us. (Taylor and Rochman)

Taylor's words show that she is moving from the realm of African American literary concerns to encompass multiculturalism. She views herself and America as multicultural and wants to direct readers to embrace that viewpoint as well. Taylor states that she had wanted to tell the story of her multicultural great-grandfather who achieved his dreams of land ownership even before she wrote *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.¹ However, she was restrained from accomplishing her goal for decades (J. Brown 24). It can be surmised that she could not tell the story because she had not yet been empowered by her success as a writer and by her personal victory at obtaining her prized land. Once she gained

¹ In "Political Correctness, Cultural Politics, and Writing for Young People," Joel Taxel discusses the dilemma of political correctness in conjunction with promoting multiculturalism (93), which he considers "debates about social responsibility" (104). He quotes *Time* magazine's explanation, that political correctness works "to suppress thought or statements deemed offensive to women, blacks or other groups" (Allis et al. qtd. in Taxel, "Political" 94). Like Hazel Rochman in *Against Borders: Promoting Books for a Multicultural World*, Taxel recognizes that political correctness restricts multiculturalism. He calls for artistic and literary works, like Taylor's books, in the classroom paired with teachers who help students engage with reading, writing, and talking about them. Mildred Taylor argues that although her books are not politically correct, they are important. She admits that her books are about racism and are offensive because "racism is offensive," but they are a part of our heritage that young people need to know ("My Life" 8).

success, she could enter her great-grandfather's mindset and tell his story. Taylor experientially gained an appreciation for what he achieved by owning land ("A Conversation" n. pag.).

She gained an appreciation for his rich family heritage that originated from three continents, Africa, Europe, and America. With publication of *The Land*, Taylor has grown from an African American writer to a multicultural writer. Time will tell what the essence and lasting effect of her legacy will be. In my estimation, her legacy will translate to this generation and future readers as a combination of independence and family love, of self-respect and integrity, of faith and hope, and a fierce determination to strategize to lay claim to one's humanity in the midst of an unfair world. It is significant that Taylor titles the epilogue in *The Land* "Legacy." The experience of land ownership she shares with her great-grandfather, as depicted in the novel, also represents the making of her own legacy.

This dissertation began by imploring readers to see that Taylor did indeed reflect many purposes that were important to Du Bois in his writing for children and that she repeated his call. What Du Bois imagines for the achievement of generations that followed, Taylor produced for children on paper. Taylor's message of empowerment is important for readers today. The future is not certain, and freedoms enjoyed today are not guaranteed for tomorrow. If children are fortified psychologically by books like *The Land* and can see that dreams are attainable with good decision-making and hard work, they are better off. Future generations of young people do not have to live in mere possibility of success but in the plausibility of triumph. Instead of narrowing her focus to

the needs of African Americans, Taylor is bypassing the boundary of African American children's literature and building a case for American literature in which people who use their heads and accept their right to dream should be able to reach goals and fulfill their potential.

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