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*This thesis examines the signification of the mammy stereotype in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The performances of Martin Lawrence, Tyler Perry and Eddie Murphy's as mammies in drag are the selected texts for the project. By presenting the many mammy representations over the past 150 years, I outline the ways in which the mammy stereotype dehumanizes black women and hinders the Pan African agenda. Through the commodification of the mammy stereotype it has been de-historicized and thus separated from its beginnings as a part of the white supremacist imagination. Discourse analysis is used to analyze its meaning and signification while black feminist theory and Pan Africanism are used as lenses to identify the systemic oppressions at work within the stereotype that help to demean and the modify the behavior of black women.*

Keywords: representation, stereotype, mammy, performance, slavery, film, Madea, Rasputia, Big Momma, Tyler Perry, Eddie Murphy, Martin Lawrence, black feminist theory, discourse analysis, Pan Africanism

# Mammy Representations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

By

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B.A., Columbia College Chicago, 2012

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in *Pan African Studies*.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Hattie McDaniel was the first African American to win an Academy Award and it was for her performance as a mammy in *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Set on a plantation in the American South, *Gone with the Wind* was the story of Scarlet O'Hara (the daughter of a slave owner) and how she persevered during the tumultuous time of the Civil War. The mammy character was to be played against Scarlet O'Hara specifically (performed by actress Vivien Leigh). While McDaniel did win the Oscar for the performance many black audiences scoffed at its representation and protested the release of the film.

When Hattie McDaniel was asked about her feelings of portraying demeaning characterizations of black women for larger audiences, McDaniel is known for responding with, "I'd rather play a maid than be one". That one retort highlights the thin line between representation and real life. However, performing as a maid on the big screen proved to have very different consequences for McDaniel than performing as a maid under any professional capacity.

McDaniel's statement shows her understanding of the privileged position of being an actress for a black woman over being a domestic worker which could have been a very real alternative for McDaniel. Although representing a maid would seem to be an ethical dilemma in fact McDaniel would seem to be conscious of much more. While McDaniel is widely known for making the aforementioned statement, she is actually quoted by a columnist as saying, "Why should I complain about making \$700 a week playing a maid, if I didn't I'd be making \$7 a week being one" (Salamon). The latter and more accurate quotation reveals not only the ethical dilemma of representation for the black community but the class struggle that lies in it as well.

Yes, the politics of representation hold within it questions regarding very real consequences for portraying dehumanizing stereotypes. Those consequences however fall on the public who have to consume these images rather than the performer who most is likely allowed to live a richer life through the earnings of such roles. But the question always looms over marginalized representations: How much damage to the black community can we blame on representation?

Even with the ethical dilemma of representing mammy on the big screen, mammy has maintained a presence in film for over a century. In the 21st century, mammy is in drag. Black comedians Martin Lawrence, Tyler Perry and Eddie Murphy have taken to donning wigs and fat suits in order to portray mammies in the new millennium.

One of the first “mammy in drag” films to make its debut was Martin Lawrence’s *Big Momma’s House*. It cost \$30 million (USD) to make with an opening weekend of \$25 million (USD) across 2802 theaters ultimately grossing \$117 million (USD). Similarly the remaining installments of the Big Momma series (*Big Momma’s House 2* and *Like Father Like Son*) had almost identical box office numbers (International Movie Database).

Even though the Tyler Perry’s movie series featuring Madea generally opened to about a thousand less theaters than Lawrence’s films, they still managed to generate box office numbers comparable to the Big Momma series while only debuting in heavily populated black areas. Also debuting in 2006 *Madea’s Family Reunion* had a budget of \$6 million (USD) to produce and grossed \$63 million (USD) the same year (International Movie Database).

What follows from these “box office hits” is the first decade of the new millennium littered with movies featuring mammy in drag. *Madea Goes To Jail*, *Madea’s Big Happy Family*, *Madea’s Witness Protection* and Eddie Murphy’s *Norbit* can be added to this list. In total

mammy movies starring and Martin Lawrence, Tyler Perry and Eddie Murphy have grossed almost a half a billion dollars in the 21<sup>st</sup> century thus far.

While the NAACP protested the release of *Gone with the Wind* because of its pejorative representation of black people “mammy in drag” movies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have been met with popularity and have been widely revered by black audiences. This project asserts that these “mammy in drag” films further demean and dehumanize black women just as its earlier representations. This project seeks to answer the following questions on mammy in drag films: Are black women dehumanized in these films? Why are these films widely revered by black audiences? 150 years after slavery, why are slavery stereotypes still found in contemporary and modern films? Is there a different meaning to these mammy images now than before? What messages does the representation deliver in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that is different from or counter to the traditional meanings of the original mammy? What are the implications of consuming these so-called modern stereotypes? Has the purpose of mammy evolved to fulfill new needs within the 21<sup>st</sup> century on behalf of audiences? Are there long lasting repercussions to the presence of such a character in the Pan African world? Is the representation of mammy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century helping the Pan African agenda or hurting it?

For all intents and purposes mammy is defined in this project by the character portrayal of a black matriarch that is overweight, has an asexual nature and maintains an ambiguous caregiver role to children. Honoring this criterion of mammy her appearance, behavior and her narrative become the full focal point in analyzing the representation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The argument to be proven is that the mammy image was birthed from the political white supremacist imagination in order to manipulate and oppress the black community. With such a stereotype to be claimed as authentic or naturalized is to ignore the social and political structures



that have manipulated this stereotype to be regenerated not only in film but in real life. This project is an exercise in archival film research to which discourse analysis coupled with black feminist theory and the Pan African philosophy will act as a sift for the layered meanings of representation.

“Mammy in drag” films are analyzed through a lens of layered meanings. Those meanings are symptomatic of different discourses. Discourse analysis, “...has its starting point in the poststructuralist idea that discourse constructs the social world in meaning, and that, owing to the fundamental instability of language, meaning can never be permanently fixed” (Phillips and Jorgensen 6). It is the discourse from which these mammy performances develop that is the subject of analysis rather than laying all mammy representations side by side to arrive at a qualitative study. Discourse analysis is focused on uncovering a pattern and its subsequent effects.

In focusing on particular patterns it is anticipated to reveal some relations of power that subjugates people. So often power is thought to be something that is acted upon a person but power is also a machine that influences how things are created, interpreted and internalized. As such power is just not a word that is doing it is also a system that is creating.

In common with discourse, power does not belong to particular agents such as individuals or the state or groups with particular interests; rather, power is spread across different social practices. Power should not to be understood as exclusively oppressive but as *productive*; power constitutes discourse, knowledge, bodies and subjectivities (Phillips and Jorgensen 13).

This project is preoccupied with the notion of meaning in all its facets as it relates to mammy representations. This is not just an introspective look at motion pictures in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but rather an analysis of signs placed on to black bodies. As such it is best to understand

signs and their significations within a particular discourse in order to arrive at not just some type of meaning but a challenge to the constructed meaning already put in place and to do so in a public and deliberate manner. This project's aim is to analyze and challenge power relations in society that allow stereotypes such as mammy to modify behavior, control perceptions and further deem black women as inferior. As will be presented in later chapters, the mammy representation has been used historically to maintain social order and camouflage oppressive systems. This project seeks to start a discussion on how to disrupt that same social order.

First mammy was adored by pro-slavery audiences and was often given narratives that involved protecting white families but over time mammy eventually represented all that is wrong with black households- that being black matriarchs. Mammies in appearance, behavior and narrative appear to be inherently natural while the variations in performances can be attributed to social constructs, political discourse and economic events.

The aim of discourse analysis is to map out the processes in which we struggle about the way in which the meaning of signs is to be fixed, and the processes by which some fixations of meaning become so conventionalized that we think of them as natural (Phillips and Jorgensen 26).

Addressing mammy as a controlling image filled with meaning driven by political discourse in order to further deem black women calls for discourse analysis as the filter for the theoretical framework because 1) Discourse analysis allows for the validation of the many meanings (signs) assigned to mammy 2) Discourse analysis accepts the premise that patterns can reveal relations of power 3) Discourse analysis believes that signs can be made to appear natural when it is through relations of power that they are constructed. While discourse analysis is used as the methodology to reveal patterns black feminist theory is used in this project to understand

those relations of power. That is to say relations of power that impede upon the Pan African philosophy.

Black feminist theory is invoked to better understand the binary oppositions at work in mammy performances. In thinking about power, Patricia Hill Collins knows precisely the impact of particular images and is accurate in referring to them as controlling images. Specifically speaking black stereotypes are controlling images in that they are constructed in order to make classism, sexism and racism (all systemic social disorders) seem biological and toward that end inevitable (i.e. inescapable). Thus, this ‘Other’ness serves as a justification for the aforementioned systemic disruptions. Collins explains that to deem black women as the Other is, “the point from which other groups define their normality” (77). Controlling images are used to maintain a social order- an order that deems black women inferior to all other subgroups. Originally the construction of mammy was juxtaposed to a Victorian era model of gentle white motherhood and white femininity. However over time the representations of mammy have been used to further define and set apart the identities of other subgroups such as white men, black men and white women.

It is crucial to understand that the following binaries: black woman/black man, black woman/white woman, black woman/white man are not created solely to deem black women inferior but rather to distinctly define the identities of the oppressor. As such black women supplanted into the stereotype of mammy are pitted inferior to the aforementioned binaries.

...because oppositional binaries rarely represent different but equal relationship, they are inherently unstable. Tension may be temporarily relieved by subordinating one half of the binary to the other....Juxtaposed against images of White women, the mammy images as the Other symbolizes the oppositional difference mind/body/and culture/nature thoughts to distinguishes black women from everyone else (Collins 81).

The first controlling image was that of mammy. Mammy is not only used to evaluate but also manipulate and govern black women's maternal behavior. Mammy is a controlling image to which analysis on the intersections of sexism, racism and classism deserves examination. . "Created to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and sustained to explain black women's long standing restriction to domestic service, the mammy image represents the normative yardstick used to evaluate all black women's behavior" (Collins 80). Collins surmises that images such as mammy are ever changing and new meaning constantly created and as such new forms of control emerge. "The mammy image buttresses the ideology of the cult of true womanhood, one in which sexuality and fertility are severed" (Collins 81). Similar to how mammy was seen a perfect slave and perfect mother to white children, black matriarchs are considered failed mothers in black households and yet perfectly competent and suitable (welcomed even) in white ones.

Mammy as a controlling image sets forth to manipulate the attitudes towards black familial structures and black matriarchs. Following the release of the Daniel Moynihan Report an image of an asexual, aggressive, unfeminine mammy works to undercut black women's assertiveness and agency within the home and in public. "Many U.S. Black women who find themselves maintaining families by themselves often feel that they have done something wrong. If only they were not so strong, some reason they might have found a male partner, or their sons would not have had so much trouble with the law" (Collins 84). In this way, the mammy stereotype further divides black men and black women with the latter being used as the scapegoat for pathologies that plague the black community. While problems in the black community such as criminal activity, drug use, poverty and unemployment are blamed on the

failure of the black matriarch generally speaking these pathologies are indicative of systemic oppressions such as racism, classism and sexism.

Dedicating itself to the black liberation struggle as Pan Africanism asserts it needs to thoroughly examine texts which distract and misdirect from systemic class struggles. The mammy stereotype further subjugates black women and places them in an inferior position to all other binary groups (i.e. Black men, white women and white men). While mammy originally came out of a white supremacy imagination and is used to mask socioeconomic inequalities over time black men have embraced the mammy stereotype for a new purpose.

Bell hooks is exemplary in dissecting the many implications of black men joining in to subjugate black women to an inferior position. Similar to Patricia Hill Collins' who laments black women being "mules of the world", bell hooks explains further how black women are deemed inadequate, insufficient and subsequently subordinate to all remaining binary groups (i.e. Black men, white men and white women). In *Ain't I A Woman* hooks writes, "Since the black woman has been stereotyped by both white and black as the 'bad' woman, she has not been able to ally herself with men from either group to get protection from the other" (108). It is hooks that offers that the ways in which black women are exploited and sexualized by white women is thoroughly duplicated in the objectification of black women by black men. This acknowledgement is crucial to the research because it determines the seed of sexist expectations within the black community to be that of white supremacist patriarchy ideals.

Men are encouraged to phobically focus on women as their ENEMY so that they will blindly allow other forces- truly powerful de-humanizing elements in American life- to strip them daily of their humanity. The select group of patriarchal women (who support and uphold patriarchal ideology) and patriarchal men who shape American capitalism have in fact made sexism into a commodity that they can sell while at the same time brainwashing men to feel that personal identity, worth and value, can be obtained through

the oppression of women, and that is the ultimate weapon by which patriarchs keep men in states of submission (hooks 115).

Hooks' insertion of American capitalism as a catalyst for black women being "mules of the world" describes precisely what this project seeks to explain: mammy in drag is the result of sexism as a commodity. The commodification of sexism particularly in the black community occurs for many reasons part of which is the over emphasis of destroying racist oppressions. But as hooks asserts, by ignoring other oppressions (such as classism, sexism and heteronormativity) the black community is just that further away from human liberation. These isms originate out of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy and to only address racist oppression while keeping other oppressive systems intact is to void the so-called acts of resistance.

Black women are the most devalued female groups in American society, and thus they have been recipients of a male abuse and cruelty that has known no bounds or limits. Since the black woman has been stereotyped by both white and black as the 'bad' woman, she has not been able to ally herself with men from either group to get protection from the other. Neither group feels that she deserves protection. A sociological study of low income black male-female relationship showed that most young black men see their female companions solely as objects to be exploited (hooks 108).

The black liberation struggle is severely hindered when black mothers (i.e. women) are manipulated into stereotypes whose purposes are to distract from the economic inequalities afflicting the black community. To further my understanding of the capitalist implications that belie this sexism, Audre Lorde sets the standard. In *Sister Outsider*, Lorde explains how sexism must be considered central to the black liberation struggle rather than tangential. What she refers to as the "capitalist dragon" or the "many-headed monster" devalues black women in society as a

whole. And it is under this systemic societal devaluing that makes black women acceptable targets for black men's rage.

Lorde offers that we have all been conditioned to deal with difference one of three ways: to ignore it, copy it, or destroy it. This method reveals an approach to difference rather as a deviance than a difference between equals. This is a fundamental problem as Lorde sees it, "Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people" (Lorde 115). These differences have always been negotiated even at the risk of being duplicated and reinforced. We can see these duplications in instances of sexism, classism and heteronormativity. The oppressed has no choice but to recognize the oppressor's difference as a means of survival and in many instances attempt to duplicate it.

One of the problems that capitalism poses culturally is that it inspires an obsession with individual class ascension rather than a collective (or community based) economic sustainability. Economic inequality and its affects (e.g. poverty, crime, and health problems) is a problem for the Pan African world. The Pan African philosophy aims to not only restore the dignity and humanity to African peoples but also restore unity between African men and women. Pan Africanism sets out to combat the humiliation and exploitation of those in the Pan African world while erecting modes of resistance against systemic racism, classism and sexism- systems which give rise to the oppression of African peoples. Under this philosophy this project asserts that the mammy presence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century demonstrates dissention between black men and women through its mocking nature and oppressive discourse. But what if mammy representations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are a reclamation of injurious images of the past? Or at best what if laying the black gaze upon these images suddenly deems them satirical? Has redemption been achieved or does the mocking remain?

If Pan Africanism is “an exercise in self-definition” (Campbell 213), then the idea of black motherhood cannot emerge by slavery discourse. To do so would be to set black mothers in an inferior position at the start. And so it is the women of the Pan African world that are challenging gender roles and demanding a new social order. “The reconstruction of gender relations is tied to the search for spiritual renewal, in the transformation of cultural values. The emancipation of the continent and of all peoples requires the fundamental restructuring of gender relations in the society” (Campbell 221). This project aligns itself with the understanding that African women are the most oppressed group in the Pan African world. Black women’s inferiority to all other subgroups is a part of the social order and the disruption of that social order must be part of the Pan African objective. Mammy in drag films are texts of propaganda used to undercut black women’s agency within their communities.

All over the Pan African world, many of these oppressions in relation to sexuality, conception of motherhood, nurturing, sexual oppression and harassment, genital mutilation, incest, rape and child abuse take place in the spheres outside of the public sphere and are not open to political discussion (Campbell 220).

This project aligns itself with Kimberly Wallace’s declaration that, “...mammy’s body is the site of where fiction, history, autobiography, memoir and popular culture meet in battle over the dominant representation of African American womanhood, and African American motherhood more specifically” (Wallace 3). My study is adding to the conversation on the mammy stereotype and articulating mammy’s existence in society as having more to do with the white supremacist imagination rather than any sort of inherently black (or natural) characteristics in doing so this study assists in the black liberation struggle through interrogating black womanhood as it relates to white supremacy. This analysis sets out to start the conversation



regarding the importance of representation on behalf of the black community and bring it to the fore. By examining the appearance, behavior and narrative of the mammy characters in the text the project will outline how these serve as problems for the black community through their demeaning and mocking nature.

This work will try to start a dialogue about black familial structures and the position representation plays to influence those structures. It will also highlight the ways in which black women are asked to perform as mammies in their daily lives and while mammy's representation seems to imply that black women are the foundation to any well-functioning family it also neatly makes black women the scapegoat for failed dysfunctional black families. In the following chapters a comprehensive history on the representation of mammy is presented to not only give context but to also catalog the evolution of the narrative and appearance of the stereotype. Chapter 2 outlines how the Victorian Era plays a big role in the narrative of the tender white mother versus the brutal black mother- an identity that is carried with the mammy stereotype into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Also it will be explained how the mammy stereotype is pictured as a great mother to white children and yet ineffective toward black children. This is through the discourse of slavery since the act of giving birth for enslaved black women was divorced from the idea and practice of motherhood. Chapter 2 is also where we understand the high significance of the construction of the stereotype. Mammy is known to be overweight (i.e. fat, soft and nurturing) while normally dark skinned with a wide grin and handkerchief about the head. While mammy's overweight body signified warmth and motherly, her hair covered and dark skin signifies servitude rather than mother. This is important to isolate because it is particularly where the discourse of black motherhood falls apart. There is no real identity of black motherhood without the construction of mammy taking part and we must not forget mammy was first a slave.

Furthermore mammy is known for signifying grandmotherly or elderly at best but, actual “mammies” who nursed white children were often teenagers or young girls charged with sleeping in the master’s house. Mammy historically was not old at all and while nursing white children these black women had to feed their own enslaved children sugar water or leave them in slave quarters while caring for the master’s children. It is the discourse of slavery that deems black women poor mothers.

Mammy was first birthed on the plantation. If that is true, mammy went through a second birth following slavery’s end. Chapter 2 lays heavily on the performance of Nancy Green as Aunt Jemima at the World’s Fair in 1893. It’s important because it is the moment a representation can be commodified and consumed by audiences. Also chapter 2 is where it is acknowledged that mammy performed in drag is not new to the representation as original minstrel shows were often performed in drag by black and white male artists.

The fruit of this study is the selected texts: the performances by Martin Lawrence, Tyler Perry and Eddie Murphy and how the mammy stereotype is situated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Chapter 3 is an examination of the narratives of each film centered on a variation of the mammy stereotype. Not only is the mammy character the focus of this chapter but the secondary characters, the mammy “costume” and subsequent implications are also the focus. These male performers signify very different mammies of different eras. Martin Lawrence’s *Big Momma* is more of the traditional or classic representation that signifies that grandmotherly type equipped with all kinds of know how. While Tyler Perry’s *Madea* is known for being not your typical grandmother type she is also known for giving off a familiarity in her sassy approach. Eddie Murphy’s *Rasputia* however is not motherly or full of wisdom if anything she is brazen, insolent and repulsive at best. These very different performances while still signifying mammy represents

the culmination of ways that the stereotype has been manipulated over one hundred years. But what purpose do they serve? And is the purpose injurious to the black community?

The mammy stereotype has been researched and written about heavily. In that sense the mammy stereotype has been approached as a relic. The mammy image is very removed from images we consume today and is analyzed with an extended analysis arm. While Martin Lawrence, Tyler Perry and Eddie Murphy have fallen under scrutiny for depicting black women in an injurious and negative light this project wants to relate the depictions directly to the mammy stereotype and the mammy stereotype only. This work is bringing the analysis of the mammy stereotype into the 21<sup>st</sup> century rather than referring to it in the past tense.

Furthermore work has been done not only on the consumption of images and bad representation but also on what happens to identity when consuming injurious images. This project is not an extension of that analysis. This project is not looking back at mammy and charting her historical projectory as a historian would demand and it is not looking forward at the audience to analyze consumption affects as a social scientist would dictate. This project is sitting in the present as a humanities document setting out to declare what the characters (in drag) are doing today. They are performing mammy. And this project sets out to expose the patterns of mammy representation and point at a direction or two as to where else this representation can be found. In this case the reader can hope to be invited to think about the other places where mammy can appear and indulge in asking questions as to the driving motivation of its existence, performance and its re-appearance at certain stages in history.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this section mammy's historical presence is to be understood and outlined from the master's house to the big screen. The mammy stereotype begins in slavery discourse and for enslavement purposes. From mammy's body to her dressings and stories, mammy is used to remove black women from their own families and communities and turn them into one dimensional servants for whites. The earliest use of the word mammy in reference to enslaved women caring for white children occurs in 1810 in a travel narrative about the American South. It is the hybrid of the words ma'am and mamma. Mammy was a docile, loving and nurturing figure toward the white children she raised and toward the master and mistress, but did not reflect any of these maternal qualities toward her own children because she was not allowed any responsibility for, loyalty to, or ownership over them. The mammy was denied outward expression regarding care, concern or even affection over her own children (Roberts 4).

The appearance and behavior of mammy are significant in her functionality because she had to be non-threatening to her mistress as to not entice the master, have no sexual relationships of her own that might compromise her devotion to the master's household and, most importantly, she needed to be one-dimensional and eager to please. Overweight, docile and asexual, the mammy maintains the role and archetype of good mother to white children as well as the perfect slave.

### Mammy in Slavery

Dorothy Roberts outlines the role of mammy during slavery within white (slave master) households versus the role understood within black (slave) households. Slavery created a peculiar space for mammies in that the role maintained no real autonomy or agency. Roberts explains that mammies were often under constant supervision by their white mistresses and had little to no authority over the enslaved children they bore. Intense supervision was a consistent

complaint among enslaved women that were assigned work in the master's house while debilitating back breaking work and horrible working conditions was often a complaint of enslaved women who were required to work in fields.

Often close relationships formed between mammies and the white children as well as with their white mistresses. However, it should be emphasized that the closeness mentioned is not to be confused for intimacy and/or respect but rather a comfortable nature on the part of the white mistress and a familiarity on behalf of the mammies. At any rate Roberts claims whites adored their mammies while accusing these same enslaved women of irresponsible mothering of their own slave children. The high infant mortality rate as a result of being in bondage was blamed on the slave mother's lack of instinctual ability to care for her young.

Whites believed that black mothers need the moral guidance that slavery once afforded. Eleanor Tayleur, for example, argued that deprived of the intimate contact with their morally superior white mistresses, freed black women displayed uncontrolled passion and ignorance (Roberts 14).

This opposition of black motherhood versus white motherhood is one of the first comparisons that is evident of the burgeoning mammy narrative. The doting white mother riddled with anxiety is that indicative of the Victorian era which was working on a shift of re-defining not only white motherhood but also white womanhood. It is important to understand the necessity of having a brutal black mother narrative pitted against selfless white motherhood in order to play up and distinguish the everlasting tender love of white mothers during this Victorian era.

The conception of motherhood confined at the home and opposed to wage labor never applied to black women. While Victorian roles required white women to be nurturing mothers, dutiful housekeepers, and gentle companions to their

husbands, slave women's role required backbreaking work in the fields (Roberts 15).

Also in the Victorian Era we start to see discourse of the virtuous woman emerge. The ideal woman of virtue was the white mistress while black female slaves were not considered to be women at all. Instead under slavery, black women were deemed machines (or yet animals) and were expected to generate capital for their slave masters through giving birth. "American culture reveres no black Madonna. It upholds no popular image of a black mother tenderly nurturing her child." (Roberts 15). The manipulation of family structures by slavery discourse is not enigmatic to say the least. But to understand how black motherhood was co-opted into a means of generating wealth is highly important. Black motherhood as a discourse is not manipulated out of coincidence or as a byproduct of black women being deemed as property under slavery discourse. Black motherhood is devoid of the nurturing, caring, tender relationship between mother and child that remains part of the white motherhood narrative at the time. As such black motherhood during slavery as an idea, narrative or discourse failed to materialize.

Lisa M. Anderson in *Mammies No More* ascribes slavery discourse with divorcing 'mothering' from the "biological process of giving birth" due to enslaved women's child labor as a means of producing capital- not children. "Her position is devoid of power that would be hers if she were the biological mother of the children for whom she cares" (Anderson 11). She dotes heavily on the representation of mammy and the understanding of mammy as a commodity. But Anderson also offers, "The mammy is also comic. She rarely appears serious, but frequently provides comic relief in the serious situation of whites. She is rarely taken seriously by white characters" (39). The writer refers to mammy as an icon built to convey the message that ideal

black women are reduced to the position of supporter/protector and back bone for white women and children.

*Sister Citizen* draws an essential line between mammies and enslaved black women that this project upholds as a part of its theoretical framework. The mammy narrative created out of the white American imagination is starkly different and deliberately counter to the real life experiences of enslaved black women firstly and ultimately black American women in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Enslaved women working as domestic servants in Southern plantations were taken from their families and forced to nurse white babies while their own infants subsisted on sugar water. They were not voluntary members of the enslaver's family; they were women laboring under coercion and the constant threat of physical and sexual violence. They had no enforceable authority over their white charges and could not even resist the sale and exploitation of their own children. Domestic servants often were not grandmotherly types but teenagers or very young women. It was white supremacist imaginations that remembered these powerless, coerced slave girls as soothing, comfortable consenting women (Harris-Perry 73).

Mammy's characteristics played into her functionality and each served a purpose. Harris-Perry explains how mammy's need to be asexual and/or absent of sexual desire was required in order for white mistresses to not feel threatened by mammy's presence in the home. Mammy's soft, fatness deemed motherly while her dark skin and wide grin decried contented servitude.

Additionally, enslaved black women were victim to numerous incidents of sexual exploits and sexual abuse to which is absent from the mammy narrative. Melissa Harris-Perry is also one of the writers that acknowledges mammy as created to maintain social order and to drive North-South reconciliation immediately following the abolishment of slavery. It can be argued that the narrative of mammy emerged out of the white supremacist imagination during slavery as nothing more than folklore but at the arrival of the Emancipation Proclamation the mammy narrative is

then transcribed to maintain social order as a necessity- social order that is to be thought of as the order of the state.

By misogynist white supremacist definitions. Mammy is to be hailed as a patriot. By enjoying her servitude, she acts as a healing salve for a nation ruptured by the sins of racism. Seeing the former slave woman visually transformed into a contented servant absolved every one of past transgressions and future responsibility toward the freed people (Harris-Perry 76).

Melissa Harris-Perry also is one of the few writers to note that mammy didn't just adore her white family but she protected them to the detriment of her own black family. Mammy's loyalty extended to the "fierce protection" of her white charges. The purpose and function of mammy then begins to transform. But it is Kimberly Wallace that separates the elements of mammy into two categories: appearance and behavior. In addition to appearance and behavior this project will be addressing the ever changing narrative that mammy is charged with over time. While it can be argued that mammy's representation can be located on the plantations of the South and within the master's home its influence would take off exponentially once it was commodified following the Civil War.

While enslaved black women were expected to perform mammy "duties" as it were (i.e. nursing white children) it is not until the creation of Aunt Jemima that mammy is solidified as a commodity. Performances of black people was commonly shaped through minstrel shows during and immediately after slavery. Black people and whites both performed mammy characters in minstrel shows. Michael D. Harris in *Colored Pictures* explains how Negro blackface minstrel artist Billy Kersands performed a song called, "Old Aunt Jemima" was pretending to be a black cook while donning an apron and bandanna about the head. For all intents and purposes Bill Kersands' mammy is one of the earliest performances of the stereotype without any utility or



functionality ascribed to the identity. The minstrel show mammy is created purely for entertainment with an audience in mind although that is not to say the performance was not created to deliver a message, assign meaning and aim for an affect.

Black audiences were known to enjoy Negro minstrel shows in particular for the encoded messages of discontent with the social order or criticism of treatment of black people by whites. However, once mammy was performed by white minstrel performers that meaning of displeasure with racism was no longer there. White audiences enjoyed white and black minstrel shows absent of critique and already the meaning behind the representation of the mammy stereotype begins to change shape before the twentieth century even began.

#### Aunt Jemima

R. T. Davis can be credited with finding Nancy Green and creating the Aunt Jemima character. Harris deems Nancy Green as “a human trademark”. In Davis’ search he wanted to find, ‘a Negro woman who might exemplify southern hospitality’ (88). Nancy Green traveled across the US performing as Aunt Jemima complete with a plantation narrative collaboratively written by Green and Davis. “As Aunt Jemima [Green] masqueraded as a former slave with a love for the Old South and devotion to the white she served” (Harris 88). Even though Aunt Jemima was first performed by a Negro minstrel artist in drag, by the time Nancy Green’s Aunt Jemima makes it to the World’s Fair in Chicago the performance had taken on new meaning.

By 1893 at the World’s Fair, Nancy Green’s Aunt Jemima served to soothe, recover and reconcile North-South relations following the Civil War. A pro-capitalist mammy full of industry and trade secrets from the Old South sought to revive the pulse of the now weakened heart of white families which is now missing the devoted black servants that slavery provided. Some of the details of Aunt Jemima’s narrative was that she had a secret pancake recipe that she used to

save her Colonel's life against Union soldiers and rather than keep the recipe to herself she passed it along to her white mistress who were welcomed to sell it for profit to restore the plantation with Aunt Jemima wanting no profits for herself. Already, Green's Aunt Jemima served as a signifier of not just the Old South but the wealth and class status that belied the South during slavery.

Harris suggests that the link between black servants and class status started in Britain, "...the portrayal of black servants in American art was built on British traditions of representing slaves as docile attendants, figures who functioned primarily to elevate the importance of white subjects" (Harris 91). This oppositional yet dependent relationship between mammy and whites is crucial to understand not only because it explains the creation/construction of mammy but also the societal need and dependence on mammy as well. Idealized womanhood was of a male fantasy, Harris explains and mammy (along with black women) was the binary opposition to that fantasy. In addition to the bandanna and apron to signify servitude or domestic work, the scarf also negated any possibility of beauty that is more commonly associated with the long, flowing hair that women can provide. "A person's character could be discerned from how her or his head represented visually" (Harris 96). Next to the hair as a symbol of femininity, the scarf is symbolized as an inferior social and racial status.

David Lubin, in his interesting book *Picturing a Nation*, argues that in nineteenth-century America a system of values was in place in which 'a female's worth (typified synechochically by her breasts) is calibrated by her proximity to or distance from an ideal age, which is to say the age of being marriageable (Harris 90).

The mammy stereotype sits between a series of oppositional relationships. Mammy's handkerchief and apron not only denounced her beauty set against the virtuosity of white

womanhood, they also signified her as a domestic worker (see fig. 1). It was known for even mulatto women to wrap their hair to set themselves beneath white women. Harris even suggests that a female's worth "is calibrated by her proximity to or distance from an ideal age" with that age being marriageable thus contributed to the aging of the mammy stereotype. Mammy is exclusively portrayed (and performed) as grandmotherly when we know enslaved black women who served as wet nurses to white children were often young mothers or teenagers.

Nancy Green herself was born into slavery- in Kentucky (1834) and was working as a domestic servant for a Chicago judge when discovered by R.T. Davis. In no one person does Green better exemplify the ever solidifying space between the fictional and imaginative characterization of mammy and the harsh realities and juxtaposition of black women of the time. While Nancy Green gave a performance of Old South nostalgia (that was a full fabrication) to full and eager crowds, African Americans were vehemently denied attendance to the World's Fair with few exceptions. Two black women's organizations (The Woman's Colombian Association and the Women's Columbian Auxillary Association) demanded the exclusion of black attendees to be addressed. Here it is evident how the dialectical relationship between representation and reality can collide in a single space. Green's Aunt Jemima was more than welcome (in a capitalist capacity) to attract crowds with the representation of mammy. However Nancy Green, a real domestic worker who is a closer embodiment of the Old South, would have been denied admittance. This is where representation presupposes reality.

Nancy Green's presence and lasting impression at the World's Fair was significant for several reasons. First, her Aunt Jemima performance turned mammy into a commodity to be sold and consumed. In this instance notions of slavery were also sold with every box of pancake mix and every family could 'own' a piece of the 'good old days'. This particular form of

consumption was used to soothe the growing pains of the evaporating slavery days. Second, by commodifying the mammy image further helped to divorce the representation of its historical beginnings. It is the performance of mammy (not just the image) that allows for the imagined persona to be recycled over and over without requiring any slave narrative to be present. If only Nancy Green's face was present on the pancake box without any sort of monologue performed her face might have been synonymous with just pancake mix. But to date we see the commodified mammy signifying slavery again and again in advertising with minimal variations applied. For example the mammy stereotype can be found today to sell *Popeye's Chicken* (see fig. 2) and *Pine Sol* (see fig. 3). In all of these advertisements black women perform mammy through revealing their "trade secrets" to the public with a know-it-all persona that has all the answers (limited to house work and kitchen duties of course). These 'human trademarks' are usually performed against a clueless white woman who just doesn't know what to do in her own household. Performing mammy in this way and selling household products allows for slavery signifiers to be commodities without ever having to mention any details of slavery at all.

Within the consumption of mammy there is a preferred reading that contributes to the popularity of the stereotype and then of course the possibility of an oppositional reading quickly follows suit. It is Nancy Green's Aunt Jemima *performance* where we first see evidence of black activism against the stereotype. It should not be overlooked that Nancy Green's performance of Aunt Jemima is the commodified performance of Bill Kersands which is the politically critiqued drag performance of the white minstrel show performers who are identifying an enslaved black mammy that never existed.

### Mammy in Film

Aunt Jemima was first trademarked at the World's Fair in 1893. "An African American woman, pretending to be a slave, was pivotal to the trademark's commercial achievement in 1894." (Wallace 61). Wallace notes that most African Americans were excluded from the World's Fair while the Aunt Jemima exhibit was a main attraction and a draw for audiences. "Their presence provides a profound contrast to idealized 'Old South' accompanying the Aunt Jemima phenomenon" (Wallace 60). It is apparent early on that there is a distinct line between mammy and real black women.

The Aunt Jemima trademark was constructed as part of the budding concept of an American Dream of the American Family. One year after the Fair, the Pearl Milling Company introduced the Aunt Jemima paper doll family: five dolls that could be cut out from the pancake box the Cream of Wheat chef was introduced in the early 1900s (Wallace 62).

Through appearance, behavior and narrative at the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can analyze the meaning of mammy's presence on the big screen. Historically speaking the social context surrounding films with mammy characters in them is just as important that the performances demanded by film producers. By the time the mammy persona is commodified to sell pancake mix (equipped with a narrative, aesthetic and personification) it becomes a seamless leap to film performances still selling the idea of a loyalty to whites. The first mammy in film was performed in blackface for *The Birth of a Nation*, she is representative of the mammy narrative that dictates, "...she is content in her life as a slave, she feels that she owes her allegiance to the people who owned her" (Wallace 11). The mammy in *Birth* then goes on to rescue the colonel from a black mob. This mammy personifies the idea of a 'neutered mammy' that lives not only to serve her white master's family but protect them.

Similarly Hattie McDaniel's mammy also exemplifies the 'neutered mammy' archetype. Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* is also asked to push aside a group of free black men on behalf of Scarlett while visiting in Atlanta so that the white mistress does not have to walk around them. McDaniel's mammy protects the family name (no doubt family names and reputations are strong signifiers of Southern aristocracy) and white womanhood with the preoccupation that Scarlett "act like a lady at all times" (Anderson 17). The earlier mammy performances were ever preoccupied with mammy being a fiercely loyal patriot to the unraveling structures of slavery following the Emancipation Proclamation.

In *Framing Blackness*, Ed Guerrero outlines mammy representations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century following Nancy Green's performance. The commodification of mammy helps to create and solidify a direct and distinct audience. Coming from *The Birth of a Nation*, Guerrero attributes two major events to greatly changing the plantation genre of film: the Great Depression and the commercial development of film sound. "Movie culture in the 1930s became a dominant culture for many Americans, providing new values and social ideals to replace shattered old traditions" (Guerrero 18). It is in his book that we see the word escapism being used to describe a reason to consume the mammy image. Before the advent of film, the myth and narrative of mammy served to uphold and support the binary opposition of white womanhood against black womanhood. And because of slavery discourse black women had little choice in being subjected to this narrative and had little agency outside of the stereotype. However, after mammy appears in film, the myth acted as an agent to soothe the American public, establish social order and anesthetize moviegoers into "national amnesia". "The grandiose settings...reassured the spectator that hard times were only a passing moment between more stable periods of economic growth and prosperity" (Guerrero 19). And this idea has been proven to be accurate.

With a gradual reduction in lynchings (relative to the peak years of the early 1920s) and the economic expansion of the studio system, the film industry began to conceptualize and produce the 'Old South' as an escapist vehicle, a panacea for depression-era anxieties. (Guerrero 20).

Guerrero ascertains that during the peak of Hollywood's 'classic period' (1930-1945) average weekly theater attendance was at 90 million bringing approximately \$1.7 billion for 1945. But by 1980 movie attendance has slipped to just 19 million people. This can also be attributed to the number of television sets that were in each home. That number drastically increased from 1945 to 1980. It is no surprise then that by 1980 we see mammy make a return in media through the television show *Gimme A Break!* But there are many more representations of mammy between *The Birth of a Nation* and *Gimme A Break!*. Donald Bogle outlines quite a bit of those performances in *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies*.

Bogle hearkens back to the way mammy is made out to be protector of the white family to which is she assigned. For example in *Imitation of Life*, Bogle highlights how Aunt Delilah panics when her white mistress (Miss Bea) suggests that she share some of the profits earned from Aunt Delilah's pancake recipe. Miss Bea declares, 'You'll have your own car. Your own house.' To which Aunt Delilah replies, 'My own house? You gonna send me away, Miss Bea? I can't live with you? Oh, honey chile, please don't send me away....How I gonna take care of you and Miss Jessie if I ain't here.' (Bogle 57). In addition to the writer of *Imitation of Life* taking directly from the page of the Pearl Mills Company narrative created for Aunt Jemima some 60 years before, it is also a direct acknowledgement of the enslaved mammy who was required to care for her white slave masters at the detriment of her own family. Here we see how the role of loyal and fearless protector is an essential element to the mammy stereotype.

Over time this, of course, led the way to blaming black mothers for the dysfunctional black family and the failure of black people as a whole. Social implications of slavery on black families starts to dissipate and in its place an inaccurate narrative of essentialism starts to take root. By the 1960s single parent families were deemed primarily a pathology prevalent in the black community. However, “the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure... Today, there are more white babies born to single mothers. Still, single motherhood is viewed as a black cultural trait that is creeping into white homes” (Roberts 17). Roberts makes the connection of vilifying black women in the 1960s and 1970s under the guise of the “Welfare Queen” in which black mothers on welfare were devious manipulators who did not want to work and had children incessantly so that they didn’t have to. She writes, “Poor black mothers do not simply procreate irresponsibly; they purposely have more and more children to manipulate taxpayers into giving them more money. A 1990 study found that 78 percent of white Americans thought that blacks preferred to live on welfare” (Roberts 17). The pre-emancipation mammy was highly coveted for her ability to give birth while the post-emancipation mammy was charged with holding taxpayers hostages with her reckless breeding. This shift or evolution of the mammy narrative is important to understand because it not only highlights and keeps the purpose that mammy serves in a specific scope it also shows the important role and influence that slavery discourse had over black identity. It is the discourse of slavery that translates the utility of mammy into a commodity. It is what undercuts the notion of family and motherhood for the black community.

The Daniel Moynihan report is brought up in *Mammies No More* as a way to explain how mammy can serve as a threat to the social order and “a threat to male power.” Anderson explains how mammy in a nuclear family has a castrating presence. Mammy is portrayed after the 1960s



as having control over black men. In the books it is one of the first references to mammy as a myth and that myth is charged with maintaining “systemic antiblack racism.” To think of mammy as a myth as Anderson maintains is to then first think about the representation of mammy then the message that is delivered with that representation. As such Kimberly Wallace writes in *mammy* as a way to acknowledge the earlier representations of mammy that can be attributed to how the narrative of mammy and mammy herself was turned into a commodity.

Just as with Aunt Jemima, the mammies in film were used to soothe audiences in times of strife and maintain a social order. As such mammies presence in film also helps to sustain mammy’s presence in society. In *Forgeries of Memory & Meaning*, Cedric J. Robinson makes the argument that, “It is no exaggeration to suggest that from the 1890s to World War I the country had no national political consensus, no hegemonic cultural core, no dominant historical identity, no definitive social solidarity” (181). This is exciting to consider because then mammy can be attributed with not just stabilizing social order but is a key part of founding the American identity to begin with. In following the end of slavery and approaching the Jim Crow Era, Robinson goes on to say that, “Maintaining political order among this mix of an impoverished majority had become a principal function of white racism” (182). This is essential because then the white supremacist films with mammy leading up to WWII and beginning with *The Birth of a Nation* fulfilled a need to maintain the social order driven by the state and disrupt the unification of the proletariat (including lumpenproletariat) class created in the South by the ending of slavery. Much like Jim Crow laws, the mammy myth’s purpose was twofold.

Employers, already made uneasy by the formation of national labor unions like the American Federation of Labor (AFL), were further distressed by the antiracist strategy of the Knights of Labor and the United Mine Works.” And in the New South, those whom John Cell characterizes as black and white peasants (but usually referred to as farmers in the parlance of other American historians) were edging towards class solidarity in the Farmers’ Alliances movement and some sectors of Populism. All these processes were

taking place during the fits and starts of the depressions (1873-1895) which beset capitalist world economy (Robinson 183).

So what would the purpose of a slavery stereotype be today seemingly so removed from slavery discourse? One would consider mammy to be a relic in a globalization era however many of mammy's signifiers harken back to a time when Africans were considered property. The appearance, behavior and narrative come to make up a performance with many signifiers. Chapter three examines the performances selected for this study.

### **Chapter 3: Texts**

What has been outlined so far is how mammy traveled from master's kitchen to the big screen. However what is to be examined in chapter 3 is the mammy representation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While mammy's body, narrative and purpose is quite distinct and recognizable it has yet to be evidenced if the popular films are indeed effectively purporting the mammy stereotype as outlined. The factors used to outline the stereotype in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are the appearance, behavior and narrative. The following are several characteristics attributed to the mammy stereotype that will be analyzed as to how it culminates today. Below is a short list of the discourse that will be the focus within the context of seven mammy in drag films.

<b>Appearance</b>	<b>Behavior</b>	<b>Narrative</b>
Wig	Cooking	Sexuality
Fat Suit	Cleaning	Marital Status
Clothing	Feeding Others	Ambiguous or Dismissive Relationship to Children
	Nurturing	
	Caring	
	Giving Advice	
	Discipline	
	Manners	

	Masculine	
	Authoritative	
	Threatening	
	Domineering	
	Protective	
	Violent	

Any one signifier listed above would not actively participate in the signification of the mammy stereotype as is but, these signifiers working together in context translate into the mammy stereotype. The analysis of these films will take into account the intersections of these signifiers, the narrative and historical discourse in order to reveal the extension of the mammy pattern today.

#### “Big Momma”

Martin Lawrence’s “Big Momma” appears in a three part series under the film titles *Big Momma’s House*, *Big Momma’s House 2* and *Big Momma’s Like Father Like Son*. The first installment of the series debuted in 2000 overall grossing \$117 million (USD) costing just \$30 million (USD) to produce. Lawrence holds one role in the film as “Malcolm Turner” who then dresses in drag to pretend to be “Big Momma”.

The narrative centers on Malcolm Turner, a Los Angeles detective, who is desperate to catch a runaway criminal known as “Sherry”. To do so, Turner must assume the identity of Sherry’s closest relative known as “Big Momma” with whom Sherry has gone to live. The detective must dress as Big Momma- an elderly woman who has taken leave of her home temporarily for a family emergency. Turner hopes that dressed as “Big Momma” he can capture the runaway criminal “Sherry” as he follows her to Cartersville, GA- “The only place that felt like home” (*Big Momma’s House*).

Lawrence's "Big Momma" wears a blonde wig, fat suit and flower print dress throughout the whole movie minus one scene where "Big Momma" is in a bathrobe (see fig. 4). It is not overtly clear the relationship between the original Big Momma and Sherry. However it is assumed that Big Momma is Nia Long's grandmother with an absentee mother that goes unexplained.

While trying to maintain his cover Turner is put into difficult albeit comedic situations such as having to perform midwife duties when a neighbor goes into labor. Even though Turner as the detective has no idea how to deliver a baby, unbeknownst to the women onlookers they have no problem deferring to the Big Momma they know can do the job. Malcolm Turner willingly dressing in disguise allows him to use double agency throughout the movie.

At times Turner is his natural self- performing as a straight male to use his academy training or to show Sherry's fatherless son how to fish and then as Big Momma gaining the trust of the women folk (especially Sherry) who admire Big Momma's home spun wisdom.

The movie ends with Nia Long's ex-boyfriend descending on the Southern home to which Martin Lawrence dressed as Big Momma defends Nia Long, protects her son and apprehends a criminal. Martin Lawrence as Big Momma saves the day all the way around.

In the second installment of the series (Big Momma's House 2) detective Malcolm Turner finds himself back in the fat suit to solve yet another case. This time it is to get to the bottom of a white families mob connections and illegal dealings. However, since Turner has now gotten the girl- he leaves an eight months pregnant Sherry at home to infiltrate the middle class white family as an experienced nanny. But throughout the whole movie Sherry has no idea where her new husband has gone off to and is slow to understand that the detective is back in the fat

suit. In addition to the fat suit, wig and print dress “Big Momma” dons a bikini in one scene equipped with a wig made of cornrows reminiscent of Bo Derek’s performance in *Fantasies*.

The legacy of slavery is ever so apparent when Haddie Mae interviews for a nanny position with three white women. Haddie Mae points out the ways in which she is not a threat to the employer’s marriage and is the right choice to care for the children because of her non-threatening, asexual, reliable and worldly nature that couldn’t be found in white women (including the employer). These are the traditional functions and characteristics of the mammy as a slave.

A noticeable scene in the second movie is when Big Momma is interviewing for the nanny position but is questioned alongside three other white women (including a fellow undercover female cop). Detective Turner proceeds to expose each nanny for being either too sexy, a drug addict or an out and out fraud in order to show how Big Momma herself is perfect to care for the white children in the family.

Other antics in the movie include Big Momma teaching one of the children to dance, disciplining an unruly teen and protecting the children. However the most significant part to the movie is the ending.

While undercover, the detective gets a lead in the case and has followed the patriarch of the family to an empty warehouse. But when he gets a call from the teen daughter of the family, the detective drops everything at the protest of the fellow detectives saying, “I promised that child that I would be there for her”.

Detective Turner drops his professional duties in order to fulfill Big Momma’s professional obligations while fully abandoning his family and young child for several weeks. As

a black man, Turner has abandoned his family. As a detective, he has abandoned his civil duties, but as a mammy, Turner is able to care for the white family adequately and devotedly. This is a resurrection of the romanticized mammy of slavery whose own children were secondary to the care of her white children.

The final scene of *Big Momma's House 2*, the camera freeze frames on Martin Lawrence's face (as the male detective) just as Big Momma's voice reassures, "You never know when Big Momma might be back." This last scene in the movie can correlate to the sadness and resentment whites felt at the end of slavery and the seeming abandonment by mammy.

Another scene worth noting is when the oldest child finds Turner's gun and dressed as Big Momma he says, "I need it to protect my virtue" and the teen retorts, "Does it really need that much protecting?" This is a nod toward the myth of the virtuous white woman and implies that black women have no virtue at all.

By the third installment of the Big Momma series Big Momma is given a niece who is just his stepson from the previous movies in drag. Again Big Momma is used to have an ambiguous child to mother relationship with an absentee mother betwixt the two. And again detective Turner has a crime to solve.

Turner's stepson Trent has witnessed a murder and to protect both of their lives (and solve the case) Detective Turner and son must live in drag until the bad guys are put away. What is interesting in this installment is that Trent can't be a mammy and is not included in the mammy drag model I provide but instead performs more a Sapphire or Jezebel stereotype when quoted as saying he has, "Beyoncé thighs and Rihanna eyes." Similarly to the other two movies

the men find themselves exploiting the agency available when performing an elderly black woman.

What is particularly unique about Martin Lawrence's Big Momma over my other texts is that Big Momma is situated in the narrative as a performance straight away. The audience is in on the joke that there's a desperate man underneath the mammy garb and that makes for the out of the loop secondary players in the movie that much more foolish. A man dressed as mammy to fulfill professional pursuits does not occur in the other movies selected for analysis.

"Madea"

Tyler Perry's Madea is a different mammy than that of Martin Lawrence's Big Momma. Madea is a gun toting, frying pan wielding, no-nonsense 'thug' and/or 'hoe' from Atlanta. Tyler Perry has embodied Madea for more than fourteen movies in the first fifteen years of the new millennium with Madea's debut and popularity stemming from his original stage plays.

Madea is the character performed by Tyler Perry but the character's formal name is Mable Simmons. All of the characters in the series all refer to Mable as Madea- an extension of the term "Madear", shorthand for in the south for mother dear. Just like mammy is a culmination of ma'am and mommy to signify tender respect decades later Madea is no different. Typically it is to signify a respectful relation where there otherwise would be none thus carrying on the mammy tradition under a different name.

All fourteen movies have a similar structure: a dysfunctional and disconnected family is in need of some guidance and tough love to which Madea either is consulted outright or she thrusts upon them her worldly wisdom or vice versa the family is thrust upon her. The Madea texts analyzed for this project are: *Madea's Family Reunion*, *Madea Goes To Jail* and *Madea's Big Happy Family*.

The first installment of the film series debuted in 2006 overall grossing \$62 million (USD) and costing just \$6 million (USD) to produce. Perry holds three roles in the movie listed as Madea, Brian (Madea's nephew) and Joe (Madea's live-in brother).

In the midst of planning a family reunion and a wedding the Simmons family is plagued with domestic abuse, taking in foster children and trying to find room for love. Madea, one of the elders in the family, doles out her street wise sensibilities to whomever in need.

Madea is a grandmotherly type in appearance with a seedy past. While at home Madea solely wears a flower print house coat and slippers but when headed to the store or to court Madea can be seen wearing either a flower print dress (in purple) or flower print blouse and pants (see fig. 5). The Madea character is identified by a gray wig, square shaped glasses and minimal makeup (other than that used to disguise Tyler Perry- the male actor). Perry's fat suit is not written into the narrative of the script but adds to the large size of Madea that is used to intimidate men, children and women. In addition to the fat suit pair of low hanging breasts protrude through all of Madea's clothing.

Most of Madea's comedic effect has to do with her large size and her violent behavior while other characters mock Madea for her lack of sexuality. However it is worth noting that Tyler Perry himself is over 6ft tall and as such Madea stands to be a very tall woman. Perry similar to Lawrence and Murphy gives Madea a high voice with a Southern accent. At times Madea mispronounces common words in order to appear proper; such words as "hellur" for hello" and "good mornting" for "good morning".

In *Madea's Family Reunion*, Perry's character Brian appears less than five seconds after Madea is seen in the movie for the first time. Brian is Madea's nephew and lawyer and is shown



throughout the movie as logical, low-tempered and much more reasonable than the hot-headed Madea. This straight man/comedian combo is repeated throughout the Madea series.

Rasputia has Norbit and Big Momma has Malcolm as the more comedic straight male juxtaposition to the mammy drag character.

These male characters hold redeeming qualities for the comedians' sexuality and it is this clear cut male role that gives these men permission to be in drag. Next to these men, the mummies' personas appear to be even more grandiose while helping to further fictionalize the character and heighten the comedic potential. This distance between the black man and the caricatured mammy not only mimics the oppositional relationship created between black men and women by slavery discourse it also pardons the comedian for dressing in drag.

The role of the domestic is a foundational part of the mammy stereotype and domesticity is a crucial part of mammy drag. Madea is consistently verbally and physically abusive to everyone and promotes abuse as the solution to all problems. Tyler Perry's Madea is the darker side to the pre-emancipation mammy.

When Madea is hauled into court for violating terms of her probation (for an earlier violent offense) she feigns a motherly nature with tender sensibilities in order to get a lighter sentence. However this plan backfires because Madea is decried foster mother for an unruly teen by the judge to which Madea does not want to be bothered.

Judge Mablean: (In disbelief) What are you up to now?

Bailiff: She took off her house arrest bracelet.

Judge Mablean: You better have good reason for taking it off. Cause I have a good mind

to send you to jail. Right now.

Brian: (Struggles to sound sincere) Actually she does. She takes care of my elderly father. And uh, he was sick and she needed to-

Judge Mablean: (Interrupting) Oh I don't believe that crap.

Madea: (To Brian) I told you, you don't know how to lie. What kind of lawyer don't know how to lie. Lie and Lawyer go together. Lie-awyer. Lie-awyer. That's all it is.

Mablean: (Sincerely) Well do you take care of his father?

Madea: Oh yes, I have to. I have to. Cause nobody else is going to take care of him. That's my only brother, you know. I take care of his kids when he in court (nodding to Brian). I take care of my great niece and her chil'ren- they at my house too cause I open my house up to anybody in need. Anybody in need they can come to my house, get a good meal and everything. That's why I can't be tied down. I have to be going to the store and stuff for people. I feed the homeless and help the hungry. I'm going out on the highways and bi-ways. And doing what the Lord told me to do. Praise him. Thank you Jesus.

Mablean: Brian does she watch your kids?

Brian: Oh yes. She's a major disciplinarian. But they have a lot of respect for her.

Judge Mablean: (Very interested) Really? (turns to female child) Stand up Nikki. (turns to Madea) Since you can't act like you have any sense except when you are caring for somebody, meet Nikki Grady. You're her new foster mother.

Madea: (In disbelief) The hell I am. Aw hell now. There is a reason why God put a woman through menopause. I am past 60 honey. You know what that mean? After that time, you are not supposed to be bothered with no bad kids. I'm sorry I will kill that little girl. I don't know her.

Nikki: So! You ugly anyway old lady.

Madea: See, she trying to give me the electric chair already.

Judge Mablean: Either you're her foster mother or you're a prison mother.

Madea: I'll take prison for 200, Alex. I'd rather be with Martha Stewart fighting for my virginity than to be dealing with this.

Brian: She'll make a great foster mother, judge.

Madea, who already in court because of violent behavior and was reduced to house arrest as punishment for her violence is now deemed fit to mentor a young girl who also in court for unruly behavior. However it is because Madea is a supposed "good disciplinarian" that makes her a "great foster other" for teen (Nikki) who comes from a broken home (with an absent father and mother in jail). In this short scene Madea has shown an affinity for lying, violence and threatening to kill a child and yet all involved seem to think Madea would be a great mother type for a wayward child and a suitable disciplinarian who has her own violent crimes to atone for.

There is no greater participating element to the mammy stereotype in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than that of “effective surrogate mother yet ineffective actual mother”. And as promised Madea proves to have a short fuse when it comes to dealing with children.

As soon as Madea and Brian head home in a car with Nikki violence ensues. Quite immediately Madea has no tolerance for Nikki’s manner of dealing with adults.

Madea: Little girl, that’s no way to talk to a grown person and stop popping that gum.

Nikki: You don’t tell me what do.

Madea: Brian you better get her. She don’t know who the hell she talking to.  
(Addressing Nikki) You better ask somebody hunni. (Nikki keeps popping gum incessantly.)

Madea: Little girl, I’mma tell you one more time to stop popping that gum.

Nikki: Whatever

Madea: Little girl if you don’t popping that gum!

Nikki: Look if you touch me, I’m gonna call 9-1-1!

Madea: My daughter tried that and I hit her so hard she dialed 9-19!

Nikki: (Taking her earrings off) You don’t know me, I’ll whip an old woman.

Madea: What who the hell you talking to?

Nikki: I’m talking to you!

Madea: (Unbuckles seatbelt turns around and hits Nikki in the backseat). Shut up!  
Shut up! Put that seatbelt on right now! (Nikki struggles with the seatbelt)  
I don't know what wrong with these children today. But oh, I'll set them  
straight! If you don't know how to get in line, I'll get you in line.

Brian: Remind me to never leave my kids with you again.

As throughout the movie, Madea's large size and willingness to get aggressive proves intimidating for children, men and women. But Madea is not just punching and hitting people at will for reasons unbeknownst to the audience. In every case Madea appears intimidating to people who seemingly "need to get in line" and to whom manners need to be instilled. As such to be on the receiving end of Madea's threats, punches and intimidation is to have earned such abuse through acting unruly, rude, selfish and intolerable. However following Madea's abuses typically follows a more mild delivery of sage advice or general rules to follow when in a difficult situation. As the following scene shows Nikki comes down to breakfast the first day of living in the Simmons household:

Madea: That baby speaking to you. Say good morning.

Nikki: And?

Madea: (Holds back from hitting Nicki). I'm sorry- natural reaction. I was getting to jump over this table on you. (Nikki starts to eat breakfast). Don't even fiddle with it, you don't have time to eat it. That bus is going to be here any minute for you. You should've been down here earlier to eat. You're going to have to take it to school with you.

Nikki: I don't want to go to school.

Madea: You don't have no choice. And why don't you want to go?

Nikki: I don't want to ride the bus.

Madea: Why? (Nikki doesn't answer) Little girl you better answer me.

Nikki: The kids be mean to me. They say all kinds of stuff about me.

Madea: (Concerned) And what you say back to them?

Nikki: (Solemn) Nothing

Madea: (Sincerely) Honey, folks are going to talk about you until the day you die and ain't nothing you can do. Let folks talk. People talk about me.

Joe: (From the chair in the living room) Yeah, cause you know they used to call her wide load. Beep, beep, beep.

Madea: (To Nikki). Honey, listen to me. It ain't what people call you, it's what you answer to. You remember that. (bus arrives). Come on.

Nikki: Where are you going?

Madea: The only way to deal with a bully is to confront them face to face.

Madea: (Heads out of the house and onto the waiting bus with Nikki in tow) Listen up. This here is a friend of mine. And she been telling me that a few of yall been

saying some stuff about her. I'mma tell you right now if I catch nan one of yall saying something its going to be me and you. You here me?

Child on the bus: Shut up old lady!

Madea: [grabs student by the neck and slaps him several times while other students laugh.] All my life I had to fight. I's love Harpo but I'd kill 'em dead before I let him beat me.

Another student on the bus: Who's Harpo?

Initially Madea had to supposedly hold herself back from attacking Nikki for her rude retort but in the end was giving Nikki advice as how to carry on in life with bullies. Toward that end, Madea ends up sticking up for Nikki on the bus and actually attacking another child for talking back. While Madea was going to attack Nikki or being rude by the end of the scene she ends up being Nikki's most fierce protector even though the lesson to be learned was originally "It's not what they call you, it's what you answer to". Madea uses violence and intimidation to solve all of her problems and yet gives advice that echoes "turn the other cheek" and stresses the importance of having high self-esteem. However Nikki doesn't entirely escape receiving a whipping from Madea in the film after it is revealed that Nikki in fact skipped school but yet again Madea's violent behavior was followed with a nurturing kindness.

Madea: How was school?

Nikki: I did it already

Madea: Got any homework? [Grabs a paper bag filled with several belts].

Nikki: (Anxiously) I did it already.

Madea: In what?

Nikki: Algebra.

Madea: [Goes over to television and turns it off] Algebra huh?

Joe: Don't do it. Don't whip the girl. Don't do it Mable. [Madea reaches for Nikki and whips her behind with a belt]

Joe: Mable you are jiggling like jello.

Madea: Why were not at school today? You were supposed to be at the school house!

Nikki: (Through tears) I'm not smart like the other kids. I can't do that stuff.

Madea: Who told you that?

Nikki: My last foster mother. She said the only thing I'mma be smart enough to do is lay on my back.

Madea: The best revenge you can have to somebody who told you something like that is to prove them wrong.



Joe: (Scoffs) The best revenge to kick they butts. That's the best revenge.

Madea: Now I went to that school and got your homework.

Nikki's beating with a belt is yet again validated because of her truancy- one of the reasons she's in Madea's care. But after the beating it comes out that Nikki is insecure about her performance in school due a former foster mother's verbal abuse and sexualization of the teen. These details warrant a more tender nature from Madea who delivers it immediately. The abuses the teen suffers by Madea's hand are never retracted or apologized for while other abuses at the hands of another foster mother are deemed deplorable.

Madea's home spun wisdom is not just limited to children either. She gives out relationship advice to family members as well even though it is ever apparent that Madea is single and has never been married. She often made the butt of jokes as to how unattractive or large she is by her brother Joe (also played by Perry). In the case of one of Madea's nieces whose is struggling to stay in a highly abusive relationship, Madea's home spun wisdom centers on dousing the fiancé with a hot pot of grits and hitting him the face with a cast iron skillet.

Madea: What's going on?

Vanessa: (Holding eye contact with Lisa) We have a friend and her husband is beating her and we would just like to know what we should do?

Madea: (In disbelief) Before or after his funeral?? (Staring at Lisa) Does she want to get out?

Vanessa: (Staring at Lisa) Does she Lisa?

Lisa: (Reluctantly) Yes. But he won't let her.

Madea: Sit down, let me tell you a story. [Lisa and Vanessa sit down at the kitchen table]  
Sit down. I'mma tell you this. Can't nobody help your friend until she want to get help. You can want all your life to help somebody but if they don't want to get help- it ain't gon happen. You listen to me, when you get tired of a man hitting on you, ain't nothing you can do but cook breakfast for him. Cook breakfast. Bring him into the kitchen and fix him a pot of hot grits. And when it done start to boil like lava after he done got good and comfortable. Say, good mornting. Throw it right on 'em. [Madea pantomimes throwing a pot of grits and then hitting with a cast iron skillet in the other hand] Throw it and swat. Throw it and saw. Venus and Serena. Grit ball.

This time not only does Madea condone violence she instructs how to get revenge on an already abusive fiancé to her nieces. In this instance Madea's violent nature is encouraged because it is validated by the abusive nature of Lisa's fiancé. In Madea's authoritative yet motherly persona lies a contradictory attitude toward violence. It is perfectly acceptable for Madea to use violence as a means to solve problems such as unruly teens or abusive men but when advising on the trials of life Madea appears to be gentle, nurturing and patient. As with the following scene when Madea is explaining just how she was able to make an impact on Nikki's

behavior she doesn't hesitate how she used violence to "fix" her but in the same instance Madea gives speech on how children just need care, concern and a tender hand.

Madea: I'm thirsty. Baby, get us some lemonade from out the house, please.

Nikki: Yes ma'am. [goes in the house']

Woman: They told me she was a hand full. How you get her to be so polite?

Madea: I been tearing that ass up. I been looking at all these foster parent taking these kids in and getting the money. But you know what I found out? Ain't nothing wrong with these children. They just needed some love and support and somebody to be a little patient with them and they'll be alright. [another little girl walks by on the phone] You know that's what I found out about these kids.

[Grabs by the arm and screams in her face]

Little girl didn't I tell you about being on the phone?! What is your problem?! I don't told you to hang up Aunt Ruby phone! I'm going to take that phone and shove it so far down your throat that all you gon be able to do is dial 9-1-1 with your navel. Do you hear me? Get the hell in the house and hang up the phone! Put it on the hook! [Let's the girl go who runs into the house immediately. Madea turns towards the ladies on the porch] You gotta be patient with these babies, you know?

The irony of Madea's violence through her large size and how quickly she can get aggressive plays into the comedic value of Madea's presence throughout the film as with this scene. Madea never pays the price for her brazen violence even when the film opened to Madea's court case. It appears as though Madea is correct in her violence responses because ultimately she's teaching a lesson. The lessons that Madea perceives to teach are not just manners but also the cues of particular norms. Madea is put in charge of maintaining a social order. She has the remedy for abusive men, unruly children and low self-esteem. It is not until the second installment of the Madea series that she seemingly pays a price for her insolent violence.

It must be noted that all the people that Madea seems to help are not in fact her children while it is common knowledge that Cora (a grown woman and often present) is Madea's only child. There is little evidence to support how great or how poor Madea's child rearing skills actually are. Instead her child rearing abilities are supported by her willingness to get violent with anyone at any time and it is accepted by audiences that, that is what is the remedy for all children.

### *Madea Goes to Jail*

Released in 2009 with an opening weekend of \$41 million (USD) and only opened to 169 theaters. The movie *Madea Goes To Jail* grossed \$90 million (USD) and cost \$41 million (USD) to produce. Tyler Perry reprised his roles as Madea, Joe and Brian for the film. With Madea's films opening up to a lower number of theaters than what is typical yet yielding such high box office success highlights the strong following Perry's has from the stage plays of the same names. Also, Perry's success highlights the homogeneity of his audience. His following is largely comprised of the black community particularly at first with the plays and then the films.

*Madea Goes To Jail* is more a story about a woman “Candace” who is jailed for prostitution and drug abuse. It comes out that Candace was in fact raped in college and a fellow classmate- now lawyer is wracked with guilt for not helping Candace through that difficult time. Madea finds herself in jail after committing one too many violent acts. Through a series of unlikely events Candace and Madea were found to have been charged unlawfully and immediately released having only served part of their sentence and their charges were reversed.

Madea’s appearance varied a little more than that in *Madea’s Family Reunion*. While she was seen wearing the usually flower print house coat and slippers, flower print blouses and pants outside of the home, after being in jail a while, Madea’s gray haired wig was exchanged for gray cornrows. Also, while the other female inmates wore navy blue jumpsuits, Madea donned a navy blue housedress over a gray shirt signifying a maternal or grandmotherly standing set apart from the inmates. Other than this variation, Madea’s clothing stayed identical to its performance of the past.

Madea’s behavior by the second installment of the series stayed true the Madea persona thus far. Madea’s brazenly violent behavior takes center stage. Madea not only threatens those whom she is in contact with but physically attacks them over and over. However true to the Madea formula tough love in the form of underhanded advice was ever present in the second movie.

Just as with *Madea’s Family Reunion*, Madea is continually mocked for her large size and lack of sexual attractiveness. In most cases all of the mocking towards Madea’s size and sexuality is doled out by the male characters in the movie.

Brown:            Now Mable when we get old we gotta keep ourselves checked. Now you know they checked my prostate? Mable you need to get your prostate checked too.

Cora: Women don't have a prostate Mr. Brown.

Brown: (Whispering) Cora, I'm telling you Madea got a prostate.

The character "Brown" in the movie is speculated to have a child (Cora) with Madea whom Madea can't stand. And while Brown and Madea exchange insults incessantly, it is contradictory for Brown to mock Madea for her sexuality when he has had sex with her in the past. Also for the Brown character to make suggestions that Madea is a man is also nod to the audience who knows that Madea is Perry dressed in drag.

As no surprise Madea has anger issues and the movies begins with Madea required to go to anger management as a condition of her probation for yet another incident (unspecified in the movie). Enter here a scene where Madea visits Dr. Phil to resolve her anger issues.

Madea: I told them that I didn't need to come here and see you okay?

Dr. Phil: (Amazed) Well I don't usually see people individually but when I saw this tape of you getting arrested I thought I have got to talk to this woman. What is wrong with you? Why are you so angry?

Madea: First of all, ain't nothing wrong with me and secondly I'm not angry. Okay? I'm not angry.

Dr. Phil: You seem angry right now.

Madea: I'm not angry. This is how I am. I don't have no hostility. At all.

Dr. Phil: Do you have to be in control all the time? Of everything?

Madea: I don't have to be in control all the time. I have no problem with that.

Dr. Phil: Well then why do you get so angry?

Madea: I don't get angry. I keep trying to tell you and that judge that I do not get angry. Somebody do something to me, I do something to them. That's just common sense.

Dr. Phil: So you believe in getting even?

Madea: (Definitively) Hell to the yeah.

Dr. Phil: Why do you feel the need to get somebody all the time? Like get 'em, get 'em, get 'em. You don't think that's angry?

Madea: If they got me, got me, got me. I gotta get them, get them, get them. Yeah, that's what it is.

Dr. Phil: Well what you call getting got is a whole lot different than what other people call getting got. It doesn't take much to get you does it?

Madea: Well if you're getting got and somebody done got you, you get them then everybody is gon' get got.

Dr. Phil: Yeah but when if you're getting somebody that you say got you when they didn't get you to begin with then you're getting the gotters when they didn't do anything to you to get em.

Madea: Yeah but when the gotters get me I'm going to get my glock.

Dr. Phil: Yeah well you don't get the glock when you haven't been got.

Madea: So what I'm trying to explain to you is, I don't care who done got me, I'mma get them first. You get me, I'mma get you.

Dr. Phil: What is it so important?



Madea: Okay. I'm tired of you asking me all these questions 'cause I didn't sign up for this. This the judge that told me to come up here. Okay? Everybody wants to get even. Everybody want to get even.

Dr. Phil: Alright, alright. Let's just talk about your childhood. Okay?

Madea: Let's just talk about childhood!

Dr. Phil: Let's talk about *your* childhood.

Madea: Let's talk about *your* childhood.

Dr. Phil: Talking about my childhood isn't going to help us. What was your childhood like?

Madea: What was yours like?

Dr. Phil: Let's talk about your anger. That's why you're here right?

Madea: I'm not angry. I don't know why I'm here.

Dr. Phil: Let's just try another approach. Do you sleep well at night?

Madea: Do you sleep well at night?

Dr. Phil: Let's stop answering a question with a question

Madea: Stop asking me all these questions and I won't have to answer a questions with a question, will I?

Dr. Phil: Stop! Can you just stop?!?!

Madea: Can you just stop? Can you just stop?

Dr. Phil: (A big exhale) Okay.

Madea: Are you getting angry doctor?

Dr. Phil: This isn't getting anywhere. I think am going to talk to the judge but I don't think this is getting anywhere. (Madea exits the office and Cora enters)

Cora: (To Dr. Phil) Well Doctor?

Dr. Phil: (Frustrated) This lady is out of control. I can't help her.

Cora: Wait a minute, you're the best.

Dr. Phil: Go see somebody else, I'm done! (Cora leaves in tears and in despair)

The scene in Dr. Phil's office is supposed to exemplify Madea's argumentative and exasperating nature. Dr. Phil is considered to be a more than accomplished and popular psychotherapist to which if he can't "fix" the difficult Madea, then who can? Instead Dr. Phil is worn down and frustrated having encountered Madea. This scene has two messages for the audience: 1) Madea always knows best and will never be outsmarted; 2) Therapy is fleeting and ineffective for dominant types like Madea.

In addition to being difficult and uncooperative, it is understood that Madea was also a stripper in her former years to take care of her only child, Cora. Typically a stripper narrative would play more into the Jezebel stereotype where unwed motherhood is a strong signifier.

However as a part of Madea's narrative, she stripped in order to provide for her daughter. As such it is to be read that Madea was in fact a good mother because she didn't whatever it took to provide. Additionally Madea as a stripper is supposed to be comedic because of the asexual mocking that take place toward Madea's body and lack of attractiveness. Jokes that insinuate Madea is a man or animal makes the thought of Madea stripping naked for money all the more funny.

Cora: (Pleading on the phone) Can I have some "me" time?

Madea: (Angry) Some what?

Cora: "Me" time. Some time for me?

Madea: Did I ask you for some "me" time when I had to get up every four hours and cook for you up until the time you were 17 years old?!

Cora: No ma'am but-

Madea: Did I ask you for some "me" time when I had to hit that stripper pole every night trying to bring some money into this house?? Did I ask you for some "me" time then?

Cora: No ma'am, no.

Madea: All them old men up in there trying to make it drizzle cause they shol' couldn't make it rain. What the hell is "me time"?!

Again this is another instance of Madea being demanding and unsympathetic to personal wellness. This scene is another example of how Madea can intrude unapologetically on others.

What winds up putting Madea in jail though, is a scene where she confronts a woman in a parking lot. What ensues is Madea acting in aggression and dropping a car on its side in a spectacled fashion in response to a woman seemingly taking Madea's parking spot.

Madea: I know damn well. Excuse me, excuse me. I know damn well you saw me getting ready to take this spot.

Lady: (Indignant) I saw you. I took it.

Madea: Why don't you move your little red car before I move it for you.

Lady: Hump! (walks into Kmart)

Madea: Okay g'on in the store. Just walk off. Okay, you bad, you bad. (follows Lady while still in her car) Excuse me

Lady: Well its my spot now grandma. (Madea uses a nearby tractor to life the Lady's car off the ground)

Madea: That's was *my* parking spot and you gon jump in front of me!

Lady: (In full anger) Old woman! Put my car down now!

Madea: (Mischievously smiles). Ok (drops car to the ground)

Lady: My husband is a police officer and he is on his way right now.

Madea: I'm not scared of the Po-Po! (Madea barrel rolls over the hood of her car and jumps in the driver seat quickly.)

Lady: (On the phone with her husband) Honey, this woman- this Jemima the Hut. She ruined my car!

Madea: I'm getting ready to get the hell out of here. If he want me, he better come to my house to get me!

Lady: He will!

This incident specifically is what lands Madea in jail- it is the last straw of violent acts on the public. And while usually it is the men who take shots at Madea, this white woman is able to call Madea, "Jemima the Hun" in anger. Jemima is in reference to her grandmotherly appearance while her tall body and brazen behavior is in reference to Atilla the Hunn. Even this insult combines the black, homely nature of Jemima and the male domineering figure of Attila the Hun. As a result, Madea is sentenced to eight to ten years in jail

While in jail Madea still hands out her brand of home spun wisdom to anyone who will have a listen. While in counseling with the other inmates, a character expresses frustration with reconciling her father's abuse in the past to which Madea shows quite an irritation.

Ellen: (To inmate #1) Forgiveness is not for them, its for you.

Madea: (To herself) Lord, do you have to listen to all this melodrama?

Ellen: Is there something wrong Ms. Simmons?

Madea: (Surprised) Huh?

Ellen: Is there something wrong?

Madea: I'm sorry Reverend, Doctor, Bishop, Preacher Lady, whatever your name is. I just don't agree with all of this stuff. I hear what you're saying about forgiveness. Yes. You're supposed to forgive people. This child over here talking about what her daddy did. Honey, your daddy is somewhere living his life and you on

lockdown. Honey you in jail cause of what you did. Learn how to take some responsibility for yourself. For your own stuff. I can't stand folks who always want to be the victim. This person did this, that's why I'm this way. Everybody in this place, got a story. Your mama and your daddy gave you life. That's all they were supposed to do. No matter how good or how bad the life was. It's up to you to make something out of it. Shut the hell up!

Inmate 1: But you don't know what he did!

Inmate 2: Let her talk!

As a convicted criminal in jail for abuse it is ironic that once in jail Madea is doling out advice on how to let things go but that is surely what she did. Ellen, a licensed counselor, defers to Madea who seemingly has more helpful advice on how to move on regardless to the fact that she, herself, do not overlook conflict in her own life nor has any helpful way of resolving it. When an fellow inmate stands up for Madea and demands she be heard it gives the understanding to the audience that the inmates would rather hear what Madea has to say and find her advice far more effective than the programs they are required to take in jail.

Yet again the contradictory elements of mammy reappear in Madea. The Madea narrative shows how far more capable she is as a healer, counselor and guide for others such as, fellow inmates and strangers yet she always fails to facilitate this advice in her personal life. In fact, Madea's personal life fails to have harmony unless the courts step in. This reminiscent of how mummies were shown to be great mothers for white children and exemplified failed black matriarchs in their own home due to having to work or being enslaved. Delilah Johnson in *Imitation of Life* and mammy in *Gone With The Wind* were such examples. The fact that Madea

worked as a stripper while raising her daughter Cora hardly comes under investigation when Madea is handing out tough love to strangers. It is assumed Madea can be trusted and even revered for her worldly knowledge and understanding.

In any case Madea and others are released out of jail on a technicality and the movie ends with Madea being set free. By this second installment, Madea still has not learned her lesson in threatening, intimidating and abusing the public. In fact, the lesson about moving on is undercut by the early release of the women because we never arrive at the full reflection of the ladies' crimes. Instead all ladies are exonerated for the crimes they committed.

In *Madea's Big Happy Family*, Madea's niece Shirley is stricken with cancer with only a few weeks to live. Shirley's disconnected and quarreling family holds a lot of secrets. Shirley commissions Madea to get all her children together in order to hear the grave news which proves to be difficult. It is worth noting that when Madea's daughter Cora tries to find out who her father is in *Madea's Big Happy Family*, Madea can offer no information due to her seedy past as a stripper nor tries to offer comfort to her own child at a difficult time. Instead Madea saves the day over and over and over again for strangers who have been in her life only for a short time.

Tyler Perry does not use Madea's size for comedic effect. Instead it is how comfortable and experienced she is at getting physical while overweight that allows audiences to laugh. Madea's comedic prowess comes from her physical aggressiveness with both men and women alike and is also a comment on the lack of sexuality and viability as a woman. Tyler Perry's Madea embodies two types of mammies. One the pre-emancipation mammy who is here to serve children not her own with her full of home spun wisdom and the other is the post-emancipation mammy better known as the sassy Welfare Queen.



In one particular scene, Madea tries to order breakfast in the drive-thru of a restaurant. What follows is a violent encounter between Madea and the order taker because breakfast was no longer served and the employee was perceivably rude. Madea responds with driving her car through the window of the restaurant while yelling and demanding food. While attempting to get away Madea yells out, "If you're looking for me, my name is Cora Simmons"- which is her daughter's name. A blatant disregard for other people's safety is evident in this scene as well bringing the subsequent consequences of said actions to her daughter's doorstep.

Because most of the movie is centered on Madea wrangling ungrateful children, much of the movie is about family values (or lack thereof). Madea has a lot to say about the state of children to day and what is to be done about them. In one scene she visits Shirley's daughter Tammy and husband at their place of business and doles out her usual brand of discipline.

Madea: Hey Tammy, how you doing? I don't how you married that bastard. (looking past Tammy at two children) Oh, I ain't see your children since they were five years old. What you been feeding that big pumpkin over there? Look like he been eating hay.

Son #1: You look like you been eating at the zoo.

Madea: Oh its like that? Oh. (laughing sinisterly) I would've beat his ass.

Tammy: What brings you by Madea? Is your car acting up?

Madea: My car is fine. Your mom wants me to be really nice to y'all and invite you all to dinner tonight at her house at 6 o'clock.

Tammy: What's this about? Does she need money again because we don't have any money. We are really tight right now.

Madea: No she doesn't want any money. You just need to be at her house at 6 o'clock.

Son #1: Well I ain't going.

Tammy: (To son #1) Yes you are.

Son #1: I said I ain't going.

Madea: (To Tammy) You gon let him talk to you like that, Tammy?

Tammy: (nervously laughing) Don't worry Madea he's just a kid.

Madea: Kids end up being just adults who just in damn jail. Don't let no child talk to you like that Tammy.

Tammy: (Bell rings) Yeah, okay. I have a customer. (leaves the office) Don't go anywhere okay? I'll be right back.

Madea: (To Tammy) Go deal with that then. I'mma talk to the boys.

Son # 1: What you looking at old lady?

Madea: [Madea slaps son # 1 seven times back and forth] (menacingly) I don't want to have this conversation with you again. Do you understand me son? I see you learn fast. Now look here, you young folks are so damn disrespectful. You not finna disrespect me. I come from the school where you said yes ma'am, no ma'am, yes sir, no sir. You showed some respect or you got your teeth knocked out of your mouth. Do you understand me? I can't stand you young folk sitting around at the

bus stop, got old people sitting there and they cussing, pants hanging off. You gon show me some respect! Yes I have silver hair but I also got silver bullets. Do you want one of them? Now when the lady walk in you say hellur.

Son #1: (Struggling to pronounce) Hel-l-ur??

Madea: Hellur. You be disrespectful again I will beat your ass. I will beat your ass until you have nothing but legs running up your back. (to son # 2) Do you hear me? Nothing but legs and no ass. Cause I will beat it. Do you hear me boy?

During her frustration with the two children directly in front of her, Madea goes on a rant about the state of children today in talking about the goings on at the “the bus stop. Madea’s preoccupation with manhood takes center stage in this film more than the others. As Madea speaks to Byron (another one of Shirley’s children) she beseeches him to become a leader.

Madea: (Pulling up in a car to Byron) Hey, boy.

Byron: Hey, Madea.

Madea: Lord, I didn't know where the hell you work. I done came way over here. How you doing?

Byron : I had a long night, okay? Look, I just got fired. I just wanna go home.

Madea: Yeah, well, we all had a rough night here. Your mama's having a rough night. She want all of y'all at her house at 6:00. She having a dinner over there.

Byron: Mama don't wanna see me.

Madea: Yeah, she do. Now, be there. I'm telling you, we're gonna have a nice dinner and I wanna talk to all y'all, she's gonna talk to you. So be there at 6:00. And if you ain't there, let me tell you something. You're gonna wish that the sperm did a backstroke when it saw the egg that created you. Do you understand? And pull your pants up. Why the hell you got your pants on the ground? I don't know what the hell is wrong with y'all young boys with these damn pants hanging down to your knees. That don't look good. You look like a fool. That's probably why you got arrested. You can't run from the police like that. I want to meet the jackass that started pulling his pants down and then everybody started following him. Why can't you lead and let everybody follow you? Pull your damn pants up. Look like somebody.

Byron: It's called swag. Just...

Madea: I got your swag. Somebody looking at your ass when you walk down the street. That ain't no damn swag. Get the hell on out of here. You better be there at 6:00. And pull your pants up.

It is worth noting that the children in this film are not children in foster care or within the penal system. Instead they are actual relatives of Madea and but are still perceived as unruly and ungrateful. Besides Tammy's two sons and Byron, Madea takes it upon herself to teach manhood to Harold, Tammy's husband. While having dinner at Shirley's house, Tammy crosses the line

and disrespects Harold in front of her children and this is when Madea's version of tough love kicks it.

Harold: That wasn't the way to do that.

Tammy: Shut up, Harold.

Madea: Stop talking to this man like that. You're gonna stop talking to this man like that. That's why these children don't have no respect for the either one of y'all. Y'all sit there talking to each other like y'all ain't got no sense. (to son 1 and 2) Get up and go upstairs. Let me talk to your mommy and daddy. Go on.

Harold: Tammy.

Madea: (Toward son #1) Son.

Son # 1: Yes, ma'am.

Madea: (Whispering to Son #1) Very good. (to Tammy and Harold ) Now what was I saying? Harold, the only reason this woman is talking to you like that is 'cause you let her. Don't no woman want no weak, whiny, wimp running behind her like a wet dog. Put your foot down. Stand up and be a man in your house. That's why your damn children run around here act like they ain't go no sense, talking back, 'cause you won't put your foot down. The children are watching the two of y'all disrespect each other, so they're disrespecting you, too. Set an

example. You used to love this man. You used to love him to death. Look at me when I'm talking to you. He ain't playing football. Y'all were gonna be together forever. Remember that? Running up in here talking about you getting married and how much you love him. Now you done hit that patch in life you don't know what to do. Honey, everybody go through that patch. It's rough. I call it the traffic jam of life. It happens between the age of 40 and 50. That is a rough decade for anybody. Do you hear me? Now, I'll tell you why. 'Cause during that 10 years a few things happen. One, you go through menopause. Secondly, your husband having a midlife crisis. If you got children, they start acting like they ain't got no sense at all. At the same time your parents are getting sick and dying, his parents are sick and dying. You try to take care of them, take care of your household, that's enough to stress any marriage apart, honey. That's enough to stress it out and make y'all break up. That's why you're so angry, honey. You've got to take some time and deal...

Tammy: But he just makes me so mad, Madea.

Madea: Get on up. Go in the kitchen and have a conversation. That wasn't the way to tell that boy that that's his mama. That wasn't the way to tell him that at all. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

Harold: Tammy.

Madea: (Mouthing to Harold from across the room) Be a man. Be a man.

Madea: I'm glad I'm here. I got all this straight.

Aunt Bam: Madea, I'm so glad you're here. You got all this straight. Yes, indeed.

Madea: This is wonderful.

Madea managed to do what a dying Shirley could not do which is gather all of her children together for her grave news. Even though once they arrived havoc ensued with deep family secrets being revealed Madea still took control of the situation and put upset women in their place and encouraged timid men to mature. Madea's look on the stages of life helped to show empathy and concern for the state of the family and it showed Madea in a discernible light. However, this is light that is rarely shown between Madea and her own child Cora.

Madea: What y'all doing sitting here...What's the matter? Y'all look mad. What the doctor say? Some bad news, Brown?

Cora: He's fine.

Brown: Ask her, Cora.

Cora: You ask.

Brown: (Anxiously) Ask her.

Cora: (Concerned) Madea, who's my daddy?

Joe: I knew that was coming. I knew that was coming.

Madea: (anxiously) What are you talking about?

Brown: All of the money I gave you for child support on this child and you don't even know who her daddy is?

Madea: Oh, bastard. You gave me \$18 in 18 years. Shut the hell up. There wasn't no montey. What y'all talking about?What you talking about?

Cora: Madea, we had blood work done at the hospital today, and Dr. Evans said there's no way possible Mr. Brown could be my daddy. So I ask you, who is her daddy?



Joe: Ya'll need to go on Maury, too. Call Maury.

Madea: The doctor say that?

Cora/Brown: Yes!

Cora: Who's my daddy, Madea?

Madea: Child, if Charlie Brown ain't your dad, then I don't know who it is.

Cora: Madea, how could you not know who my daddy is?

Madea: I hate to tell you this, honey, but your mama was a ho. I was a ho. I put the "H" and the "O" in ho.

Cora: Who's my daddy, Madea?

Joe: Okay, all right. I'm gonna tell you.

Madea: Joe, shut up. Don't you say nothing.

Cora: Who is it? He can tell me. Who is it, Uncle Joe?

Joe: Now this was before Hilary and after Monica.

Cora/Brown: What?

Cora: Bill Clinton is my daddy?

Joe: Bill Clinton was not your daddy.

Joe: Okay. No, no. It was before he started that show with Sybil and J. Anthony on the radio. I believe that might have been him.

Brown: Tom Joyner is your daddy. Cora, I knew it. I knew it.

Joe: Oh, oh, oh. Ho! Ho! Ho!

Cora: Uncle Joe.

Madea : Tom Joyner ain't you dad, hon. Look, y'all stop asking me all these questions, honey. That's your daddy right there. I'm telling you. They made a mistake at the

hospillar. That is your daddy.

Cora: I'm gonna find out.

Madea: Dana'll tell you anything you wanna know. Call Dana.

Cora: Dana? Who is Dana?

Joe: They both dumb as hell. You don't know what Dana is? They've been using Dana to find people out for years who the daddy or who the mama, Dana. And when you kill somebody, the crime, they use Dana to get all the evidence on you. Dumbass. You need to watch some television sometime. Learn something. Jackass don't know what Dana is. Hell. D-N-A. D-N-A. That's Dana. Lord, you're so dumb.

Cora/Brown: Nobody called no Dana.

Madea: You know what here? That's your daddy. I don't even want to be bothered with this no more. I done told you the truth. You don't like what the hell I got to say, that's the truth. I'm sorry. I know you don't want him to be your daddy, I didn't want him to be your daddy either.

That was the worst 36 seconds of my life. Right there sitting next to you. I'm out of here. (Walks off in a huff)

At dinner over to Shirley's house it was revealed that Byron is not Shirley's child but rather she's Kimberly's child and it was kept secret all these years. During that scene Madea took control of the dilemma at hand and counseled the family. However when her own daughter begs to know who her father is Madea has nothing but jokes and retorts for the anguished Cora. Additionally Madea confesses that she was a "ho" meaning promiscuous in her days of being a stripper and while this does not infer Madea's asexual nature it indeed is a comment on Madea's lack of virtuosity and desirability.

The final two scenes in the movie exemplify the contradictory nature of the Madea narrative at its heart. Madea is more than capable to advise, nurture and support all of the secondary characters around here as written but continually fails her own child and herself time and time again. The second to last scene at Shirley's funeral is where both types of personas come to a head in a dramatic fashion:

Madea: (toward the entire family sitting in one room ) Come in here and sit. Shut up! Sit down, you black leprechaun, looking like you out of a box of Chocolate Lucky Charms. Whole family. I'm sick of this. Now look here. Your mama was a peaceful woman. She did not want all this foolishness. She did the best she could with y'all, but all of y'all act like y'all ain't got no sense. You, little leprechaun. Let me tell you something... Stop using that baby to make this man's life miserable. That's right. I didn't ask for no amen from you. I will punch... I will punch the hell out of you. Say something else. The man don't want you. He done moved the hell on. You can't get to what's in front of you, 'cause you're too busy looking to see

what the hell he doing with this girl. Move on. Stop or that child will grow up resenting you for that. Do you hear me? That is a human being. That is not some pawn that you can use to make this man's life miserable. Stop doing it. 'Cause if I catch you doing it, I'm gonna beat the hell out of you. Do you understand? You don't know me. You don't want none of this. This is old "whoop your ass." And old "whoop your ass" is much worse than new "whoop your ass." New "whoop your ass" get up off you, old "whoop your ass" have you in the grave. Do you want some old "whoop your ass"? Do you want some old "whoop your ass"? And you, out there selling dope. Yeah, she's a snitch. She told me you out there selling dope, giving this girl all the money. Can't give her \$20 for some Pampers? What the hell wrong with you? A man take care of his baby without anybody telling him he need to take care of his baby. Get a job. Go to work. Do you understand what I am telling you? Y'all them young folk, born around the '80s, something happened to 'em. Y'all feel like y'all don't have to work for nothing, somebody's supposed to hand something to you, forgetting that old folks marched for your dumb ass, to get you where you can be and to be free. That dope either gonna lead you to one of two places: to the grave or to prison. Now you've already been to prison. You ready to go back to jail? You ready to go to the grave? Which one you want? 'Cause as soon as you go down, this one right here is going to be sold to the highest bidder. All she looking for is some money. Say something. I dare you. I double-D dare you to say something. I'm gonna tell you right now, I will be checking in with this side of the family from time to time. And y'all better have it together. You two. You better be F. Lee Bailey, you better be Johnnie Cochran. I

want to see a settlement. I want to know who's going to have the baby, who going to pick him up, who gonna have Pampers, when you gonna come and give the child support, when is the money gonna be there. You better write it all down. Do you hear what I'm tellin' you, son? Your mama did not want ya'll to know this.

Aunt Bam:     Madea.

Madea:         (To Aunt Bam) Shut up. (To the family) She wanted to keep this hidden from y'all, but I'm gonna tell y'all. You arguing and fussing with this girl, she fussing. She mad at the world. Honey, you know why you be so mad? This child was raped by your uncle at 12 years old. Anything that's covered up don't get healed. That's what's wrong with people. Keep trying to cover things up, and covered up. That don't help nobody. I can't stand nobody sitting around saying, "What goes on in this house stays in this house." Let me explain something to you. Whatever went on in that house, if you're getting hurt by it and it's tearing you up in your adult life, you need to go get some help. This man is trying to love you and you acting like a fool. Always grouchy and mean. And the reason you so nasty, honey, you ain't forgave the man that raped you. You got to forgive those people, honey. Not for them, but for you. If you don't, they take power over you. Do you hear me? Forgive him for your own sake. This man is trying to love you. Go talk to him, act like you got some sense. Go on upstairs and talk to the man. Go on, talk to him.

Cora: It's nice what you did for this family, Madea.

Madea: Yes, it is. Praise the Lord. It is.

Cora: But you can't even do it for your own daughter.

Madea: Did she just go off on me?

Aunt Bam: Sound like she did.

Madea: What you talking about, Cora?

Cora: My daddy, Madea. You don't even know who...

Madea: That is your daddy, that silverback standing over there.

Cora: Madea... Well, prove it, then. Prove it.

Cora finally says what some of the audience might have been thinking for some time. How is it Madea has all of the answers for everyone else except her own child? In true dramatic fashion, the final scene is Madea, Brown and Cora going on The Maury Povich Show to find out if Brown is Cora's father. This scene is mocking the many young women who have come on that

show to have a DNA test to declare who the father of their child is on national television. As with many of the outcomes performed on the show, it is declared that Brown is not the father of Cora.

Maury:        So, Cora, when you were growing up,  
                      who did you think your father was?

Cora:            I didn't know, Maury. I didn't know. bBut Mr. Brown always acted like my father,  
                      so it came easy once Madea told me.

Maury:        When did Madea tell you?

Cora:            I was, like, 40-something.

Maury:        Forty-something?

Cora:            (Through tears) Yes.

Madea:        Okay, you all have talked a lot about this. But we haven't heard from Madea. And  
                      this is what Madea had to say to my producers.

Madea:        Brown is a lowdown dirty...He is a liar, he is a cheater.He ain't never did  
                      like he was supposed to do for Cora. He gonna act like he...He wanted to act like



he done went to the doctor and found out he ain't the baby daddy. He is the baby daddy. And I'm gonna tell you right now, Maury, I'm gonna tell you right now. I know that's the baby daddy. 'Cause that is the only baby daddy that I had a baby daddy with. He is the baby daddy. If he ain't the baby daddy...I know he's the baby daddy 'cause I know...I know that was the worst 15 seconds of my life. So I know that's the baby daddy. You ain't even got to worry about, 'cause I know that was the baby daddy. Cora ain't got to figure it out. But when I go up there, I'm gonna show... I'm gonna say it all. 'Cause he's so damn stupid, he don't even want nobody to tell nobody what the hell he's supposed to do. But I know that's the baby daddy. Y'all ain't gotta tell me, 'cause I know that's the baby daddy.

Maury : Madea, nice to see you.

Madea: How you doing, Maury? I've been trying to tell you, you are the daddy. You the daddy, you the daddy. That's your baby. This is your baby.

Maury: Why you wait until Cora was in her 40s to tell her who her father was?

Madea: Now, I didn't tell her, I didn't tell her 'cause it wasn't important. I took care of her. I gave her everything she needed. She didn't need to know. She did not even need to know who her daddy was.

Maury: I'm more interested now in Cora, and having both of her parents in her life.

Maury: I don't know why. Hell, she ain't five years old. I don't even know why, Cora, you all got me on this... television. Acting like you ain't got no... And I... You said... Right, this the father. He is the father. You are the father.

Maury: There's only one way to settle this. We're gonna have the answer right here.

Madea: Bring it on. He the daddy. You the daddy. You the daddy. You the daddy. You the daddy. Tell him, tell him, Maury. Tell him. You are the father. Tell him, Maury. Tell him.

Maury: In the case of 58-year-old Cora Jean Simmons, Brown, you are not the father.

Madea: I thought he was the daddy, Maury! I thought he was the daddy, Maury! I thought he was the daddy, Maury!

Maury: He's not the father.

Madea: I'm a hoe, Maury. I'm just a no-good hoe, Maury.

While it is not big part of the storyline it is known that Madea is on Welfare and in her 60s. However being on Welfare, not knowing who the father of her child is and delaring on national television that she is “a hoe” all play a part in signifying the Welfare Queen Stereotype. Those signifiers coupled with Madea in a flower print dress and gray wig brings two different stereotypes of the black matriarch into one performance. The grandmotherly mammy from the early days of film from *Birth of Nation* to *Gone With The Wind* to *Imitation of Life* were full of loyalty to whites, old world wisdom and a sense of sacrifice for the greater good beyond that of their own children. While black Matriarchs following the Civil Rights Movement and the publication of the Daniel Moynihan report demonized black motherhood. Both stereotypes of black motherhood ring loudly within Madea and rightfully appear to be contradictory. Just how Aunt Jemima embodied the nostalgia and romantic notion of the ‘Old South, Madea embodies a more militant and aggressive that proudly declares she’s on Welfare. Both performances of mammy carry different meaning and the discourse (or language of articulation) is just as complex.

Aunt Jemima arrives to the public at a time just where slavery ended just thirty years before and so Nancy Green’s performance was an immediate symbol to soothe and reassure white audiences that not only will mammy remain loyal to white families after slavery but also the American government got it all wrong to end slavery and that black [women] were perfectly happy enslaved. But Tyler Perry’s Madea on the other hand directly counters the “loyal to white families” mammy narrative and is indicative of not just black audience resisting such slavery propaganda. Instead, Perry’s Madea defiantly skirts the judicial system and her aggressive combative nature is hardly ever cured. This performance is indicative of a black audience tired of

the jolly, submissive and loyal narrative of mammy and Perry's performance directly resists this narrative.

“Rasputia”

A mild mannered orphan (Norbit) grows up to marry a domineering childhood friend (Rasputia) who eventually controls every aspect of his life. Over time Norbit grows miserable in his marriage and reconnects with a former friend from the orphanage (Kate) from which he grew up. Norbit's menacing wife proves to be problematic for the renewed friendship and ultimately havoc ensues in the town. Norbit (along with the town) stands up to his domineering wife in order to be with the friend from the past while Rasputia and her three brothers are banished from the town.

Rasputia has several different outfits throughout the movie that include jeans, blouses, jean jackets, housecoats, lingerie and a multitude of costumes. Along with a diverse set of clothing Rasputia wears many wigs dyed red, blonde or black while some are long, cropped short or curly. The makeup of Rasputia consists of heavy, shiny lip gloss and different eye shadows during specific scenes. Overall, Rasputia's aesthetic centers on the contemporary dress of particular modern woman of several different ages. At times, Rasputia is seen wearing a too small pink polyester jacket over a leopard print blouse that gives the appearance of a woman in her twenties. Also Rasputia wears long acrylic nails consistently in the film that also helps the modern aesthetic.

While at home in bed Rasputia has wrong a frumpy oversized print house coat with sagging breasts giving the appearance of a woman possibly over fifty years old. However, no matter what Rasputia is wearing it appears to be ill-fitted and unflattering unbeknownst to her who is confident and arrogant in all outfits (see fig. 6)

Amusement Park Attendant: Excuse me. Ma'am. Are you wearing bottoms??

Rasputia: [Puts her hands on her hips and bares her sagging belly] Of course I'm wearing bottoms! [Rasputia lifts her stomach to show pink bikini bottoms underneath her stomach]

Amusement Park Attendant: (Disgusted and surprised) Okay. Come on in.

Rasputia: How dare you? [Walks past attendant and struggles with turnstile to enter park]

Besides the print house coat almost none of Rasputia's garb is reminiscent of the traditional mammy aesthetic which which handkerchief about the head and white apron. These items were indicative of the servant (and former slave) mammy confined to the kitchen and loyal to the servitude of whites.

Rasputia is quite abusive and demanding to all those she comes into contact with. In the film she's tried to run over a dog, hit/punches Norbit on several occasions and it is insinuated that she's also abused the mailman who is terrified of her after he appears at their doorstep with neck brace and his arm in a sling. Murphy performs Rasputia's voice as high and raspy to which many of the neighbors in their town cringe at the sound. Rasputia throws her body around and often times at people who are left in pain and wincing. This is making the use of the fat suit. While fat suit adds quite a bit of girth to the Rasputia performance it also adds a wobbly nature that adds to the comedic value of the narrative.

Murphy's Rasputia is perceived as a more sinister mammy than that the traditional loyal servant that originated following the end of slavery. This particular mammy is taken from the days of post-slavery and is infused with the ideologies of the Welfare Queen. Rapsutia is lazy, angry, resentful, bossy, loud-mouthed and unattractive. At one point in the movie, Rasputia lies about being pregnant in order to prevent Norbit from divorcing her.

Norbit: [Grabbing clothes from the closet] Enough is enough!

Rasputia: (Arrogantly) Now where in the hell do you think you're going?

Norbit: Lloyd's in the hospital because of you!

Rasputia: Yeah, that's right I put his little dog ass in the hospital. And I would've put it in the morgue too if you didn't mess with my car seat. It throw off my driving skills.

Norbit: (Grabbing both suitcases) Rasputia you are a mean, selfish, cold heartless woman and I'm leaving you!

Rasputia: You're leaving me?!

Norbit: YES! (Heads toward the door)

Rasputia: Well where the hell do you think you're going?? You have no money and you ain't no family. Everything is in my name: the car, the house! You ain't nothing and will never be nothing without me Norbit! (Norbit continues out the front door) Norbit please! I'm with child!

Norbit: (He turns toward Rasputia surprised) With child?!

Rasputia: Oh yes, Norbit. Can't you tell? I'm getting a little belly. And my titties are achy and itchy like. (Rasputia scratches her chest) Oh Norbit we 'gon be a family.

Although Rasputia does not have any children she is reminiscent of the Welfare Queen because of her blatant manipulation of motherhood. Also Rasputia is degrading, mean and abusive to her husband (Norbit) and blatantly disregards his feelings and well-being. It is this portrayed aggressive nature that deems mammy unfit for companionship and confirms the assumption that mammy would be better off alone which is another key element to the mammy stereotype: she is always single (whether widowed, never married or ran out on) and the potential for long lasting love is never addressed nor recognized as a possibility.

In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan published a report, entitled “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” he argues that, “In essence the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure, which because it is so out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole”.

The matriarch represented a failed mammy, a negative stigma to be applied to black women who dared reject the image of the submissive, hardworking servant. We can see here how the negative perception of motherhood for a slave carries on after slavery.

The post-emancipation mammy looks more like the Welfare Queen stereotype that emerged out of the 60s and 70s. This mammy still remains selfish, ignorant and brutal to her children, but now she is lazy and carries no duty to American society or the well-being of white families. The Welfare Queen is defined by Dorothy Roberts as “...the lazy mother on public assistance that deliberately breeds children at the expense of taxpayers to fatten her monthly check”.

Mammy after slavery is not only a devious neglectful mother to her black children, but she is also manipulative: she gives birth as a means to victimize tax payers and take advantage of the American government. The post-emancipation mammy can also be younger in age and this would be more in line with stereotypes of the young, unwed Welfare Queen. However, the most important characteristic is her disregard toward children and loved ones and lack of work ethic.

The devotion to whites vanishes with the end of slavery and what remains is contempt by whites for the working black mother. Because an enslaved black woman's reproduction would be viewed as generating capital for slave masters rather than developing a black family, enslaved black women's motherhood was detached from the act of giving birth and transplanted onto white families. Murphy performs Rasputia as abusive, insolent, lazy and promiscuous.

Norbit: [Walks down the hall unsure of what he's hearing. Gym instructor "Buster" and Rasputia are in the bedroom- insinuating sexual activity]

Buster: You look just like a pig in a blanket. Go 'head squeal.

Rasputia: (Squeals like a pig loudly) [Norbit opens the bedroom door to find the gym instructor and Rasputia in bed together under the covers]

Norbit: You're Rasputia tap dance teacher.

Buster: Actually, I'm her power tap guru. I was just here giving her a tap lesson.

Norbit: But you're naked.

Buster: Oh. That's just so she can see the various muscle groups as I go through the various routines. (Proceeds to dance)



Norbit: But you have a uh- (looks down at Buster's genitals off camera). [Rasputia chokes on a joint she has in her hand while still in bed.]

Buster: I'm just real passionate about dance. If you just say the word dance, he'll just jump up. [Buster yells dance down at his groin area] See there.

Rasputia: Norbit, Buster is a guest in our home. How dare you insinuate something like that?!

Buster: (In an indignant tone). Yeah. "Orbit". How dare you insinuate something such like that?! I am actually offended by your accu-siz-ation. I'm going to do like Christ and turn the other cheek. (Buster pivots suddenly toward the door baring is naked behind.) Amen!

Norbit: (In disbelief) Rasputia you cheated on me!

Rasputia: Are you happy now? [Rasputia gets out of bed to the sound of the mattress squeaking and rustling] Look I said ain't nothing happen. And the next you say it again, I'mma knock the teeth out your mouth!

Norbit: Rasputia, we took vows! I'm your husband. [Rasputia walks past Norbit to the window to watch Buster leave in a car.] We took vows and you cheated on me!

Rasputia: [Turns towards Norbit and away from the wind] It never happened! [Walks past Norbit and back toward the bedroom]

Norbit: (Outraged) Yes it did! And that makes you the queen of whores!!

Rasputia: [Turns towards Norbit in the hallway in a rage. Norbit suddenly frightened turns and runs out of the front door]

When Norbit catches Rasputia cheating on him, he plans to leave but the manipulative Rasputia declares that she's "with child" and begs Norbit to stay. However when Norbit begs her to not drink alcohol because of her "condition"- she reveals it was all a lie and the only child she's having is gas and proceeds to fart. She farts twice and says, "There I just had twins."

Rasputia: Go 'head and get me another wine cooler. Its hot as hell out here. Don't see I'm sweltering?

Norbit: (Shocked) Rasputia you can't drink wine.

Rasputia: Why the hell not?!

Norbit: (shocked) You're with child!

Rasputia: (Forgetting) Child?! I ain't with no d- oh that. That was just gas. I still got it. [Rasputia farts.] There's your child. Now go get me something to drink. [Rasputia farts again] Twins!

Throughout the movie Rasputia hits Norbit on several occasions, threatens him and demands that he does more work while she lounges around the house and office eating incessantly and passing gas. Rasputia's violent, lazy and grotesque behaviors are supposed to guild the audience into not only rooting for the "good guy" persona Norbit but define and short up his good nature more specifically just as Scarlett O'Hara's femininity and virtuosity was played up against mammy in *Gone With The Wind*.

Rasputia: How many times do you have to tell you when you drive my car don't adjust my seat?

Norbit: I haven't touched your seat.

Rasputia: Then why is it up so damn far?

Norbit: (Earnestly) It look like it's as far as it goes Rasputia.

Rasputia: (Accusing Norbit) No you moved it cause I can tell. 'Cause when I move my titties make the horn honk. See look. (Rasputia then smashes her gigantic chest at the steering wheel and the car makes a long and loud horn sound). That ain't right. (Rasputia slams her chest against the steering wheel again). That scientifically proves you were adjusting my seat.

Norbit: (Dismissively) That's not science.

Rasputia: (definitively) It is.

Norbit: (Dismissively) No it's not.

Rasputia: [Punches Norbit in the face] It is!

It is ever apparent that Norbit is miserable being married to Rasputia and seeks to get away any chance he gets. In one scene Norbit is locked in the basement when a childhood friend and love interest approaches the basement window to which Norbit denounces his feelings for her thus breaking her heart in an attempt to save her from the marauding Rasputia. The movie concludes with the town banding together to defeat the terrorizing Rasputia on behalf of Norbit and banishing her and her equally bullish brothers to Mexico where she works as an ever desirable stripper and Norbit lives happily ever after with the much thinner and much lighter love interest performed by Thandie Newton.

These three mammy performances are very different and each harken back to a different focal point in the mammy representation's history. While Lawrence's Big Momma is noble and loving yet fully a disguise, Perry's Madea is more than stern and out to settle a score. Big Momma, Madea and Rasputia together embody precisely what society needs and the reason for the failure of black families. In none of these men's performances or films does an acknowledgement of the systemic disruptions that plague the black community come about. Even with a single mother on the run from a criminal boyfriend or a child left to foster care as a result of both parents in jail these events go unexplained and unexamined. But for these films to leave out the struggles of black life would deem these movies unauthentic by audiences. What happens then, is the problems of the black community (i.e. domestic abuse, unruly children, bullying, criminal activity etc.) are laid at the feet of the mammy in drag protagonist which is symbolic of these problems being laid at the feet of real black women in daily life left alone to fix.

#### **Chapter 4: Conclusions**

Thus far mammy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century doesn't look all that different from the day Nancy Green first entered the World's Fair as Aunt Jemima. Equipped with a title, an elaborate get up and an ulterior motive to serve the greater good, mammy has done little to evolve over the years and the message is clear: mammy is the perfect remedy for all that is wrong *with* society but when her own family fails she is all that is wrong *for* them. Kevin Johnson says of mammy in drag audiences, "I watch them as many times as I can...I just love them, especially the way [Madea] acts stupid, bouncing up and down. I thought it was a real woman. It's unreal for a man to be dressed like that. I just thought it was somebody like me" (1). The popularity of these

mammy films is undeniable. Black audiences are enjoying these movies under the pretext that they are largely watching themselves portrayed in film.

This project is not going to debate the “realness” that belies these mammy in drag performances- to do so would be to weigh a drag performance against real black women and that would be wrong. The argument this project is making is that the mammy image was birthed from the political white supremacist imagination in order to manipulate and oppress the black community. For a stereotype to seem authentic or natural is to ignore the social and political structures that have manipulated this stereotype to be regenerated not only in film but also in real life.

Black audiences are being sold blackness that comes from pro-slavery political motivations. Johnson actually asked audiences why they loved Tyler Perry and Madea and their responses generally revolved around having a connection to the movies that can't be found anywhere else and that connection is centered on blackness in response to marginalization. When asked the question why they enjoyed Perry's work they replied, “We need an outlet as Christians. We go to the movies, too” and another movie-goer remarked, “I don't get tired of watching his plays. They're fresh and relevant. And the dude is funny. So it's not only humorous, but it's also real” (1). It is important to point out that even though Johnson may disagree with the realism in Perry's work, it is the lack of valid criticism within the black community that allows for the popular public opinion to stand. It is the dehistoricization of the mammy stereotype that allows for these films to be read as “fresh” and it is the marginalization of the black community that allows for these films to be seen as relevant.

Black audiences will continue to turn out for mammy in drag. “As a filmmaker, I have found that black American audiences are... hungry to see their own image or the image of any

black person on the screen...” (Bobo 68). But mammy is not “their own image” it is an oppressive image created to dehumanize black women and reduce them to a figure of servitude. Jacqueline Bobo fully understands why the black audience is so important and why social change should start with recognizing the audience’s complicity within popular culture. “For we know well enough that in the last instance it is the audience, not the artist that makes the film; the artist can only supply a demand which is already there...” (Bobo 73). While black women feel they are watching a “real” portrayal of black matriarchs in mammy in drag movies they can admit to the discomfort of feeling manipulated into similar disparaging stereotypes in their professional/personal lives.

As previously mentioned there is already research examining how black women are victims of behavior modification and the detriment effects of consuming damning images on behalf of the public. Melissa Harris-Perry spoke with several black women in therapy discussion groups who shared instances of giving into stereotypes that were grossly different from whom they were outside of their professional environments. These women were relentlessly rewarded for their performance of mammy with appeasement and patronizing condescension on behalf of their white counterparts. This was the preferred result over blatant disregard and social alienation.

Alice senses that because she is an overweight black woman, her opinions are unimportant to her employer, but she also believes that she has a certain power to make herself heard in critical situations. This force of black womanhood exists because she can become angry, loud, presumably intimidating to the fifty-year-old white men with whom she works. In this sense, Alice’s anger is a weapon of the weak. Using force does not necessarily make her feel empowered; instead she laments that she “shouldn’t have to do that (Harris-Perry 91).

It is one thing to recognize character traits attributed to mammy as occurring naturally in black women, it is quite another thing when the internal dialogue for black women is counter to that of the mammy stereotype and society only recognizing or responding to the latter. In one exercise, these black women were asked to write down attributes which they would associate with themselves, and most of the women wrote characteristics such as kind, giving and tender. But when these women were asked to write down adjectives they felt their friends and family associated with them, words mirroring mouthy, sassy, aggressive and strong were commonly found. One woman in particular did not show a shift between inner and outer personas. She identified with the loud, pushy, controlling, stand-offish characteristics that were identical to the perceptions of her personal and professional network. But, Harris-Perry remains skeptical of the cohesive persona, “She played the independent, opinionated, domineering black woman perfectly, but the performance was too seamless to be convincing...I am convinced that her tilted posture was a distortion of her full self” (90). Behavior modification is about squeezing down into society’s model of the marginalized and this is always to fulfill the purpose of serving and pleasuring the oppressor.

Barbara Omolade describes this behavior modification as ‘mammification’ of black professional women (Collins 80). For so long the effective state of agency for black women has been to invoke this stereotype. Once the familiar role of angry and loud is put into play, a black woman is rewarded with the illusion of being heard and seriously considered. This is a molded process for hundreds of years and while there is no doubt that Madea, Rasputia and Big Momma may resemble black matriarchs today, these characters have been in the making for centuries.

With the advent of social media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century representation as a whole has taken on highly concentrated dimensions. Not only are stereotypes exploited in a new way through the use

of the internet, the veil between what is real and what is fake is halfway lifted with the incessant use of the cell phone. Consuming damning images on social media makes it harder for audiences to discern how much is real and how much is fake. No longer do audiences have to travel to a movie theater to consume mammy images nor do audiences have to turn on a television set in the primary room of the house and watch mammy stereotypes peppered with commercials. Both mediums of consumption (theater and television) have an element of production to them that signals to audiences that the images they are consuming are in some part constructed. With social media however, the game is to appear as authentic and impromptu as possible to fool audiences. In this sense the production of an event or skit is much harder to discern and yet the encouragement for such damning performances are all the more encouraged. Black women are rewarded in a sense for re-creating scenes similar to ones where Madea is violent and loud in public. Comments are abound to weigh in on black women's behavior and these videos can range from cursing and yelling in fast food restaurants or getting violent in shoe stores or just staring straight on into the camera delivering funny sound bites camouflaged as sage advice.

Make no mistake, what is being rewarded by audiences of social media is black women rising up to the mammy stereotype expectation which we've been taught is the authentic black woman because there is limited images of black women used other than mammy, jezebel and sapphire or slight variations of the three. This is how stereotypes come through as controlling images (as Patricia Hill Collins has explained) and this is the modification of behavior that Melissa Harris-Perry has outlined. But what about black women consuming these images?

In trying to understand this 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon of mammy drag specifically Chen et al performed a study on the audience of mammy drag comprised of 36 black women between the ages of 18 to 59. Terms such as "male mammies" and "super-mammy" were used in the



project to refer to mammy in drag. The project's aim was to uncover the meaning that black women audiences brought to "male mammy" performances and to examine the "male mammy's" affects on black women's self-image. Because self-image is the focus of analysis for that research there is a preoccupation with understanding the beauty standards of American society and how it relates black women audiences. As such, there is a large focus of body consciousness albeit fat or thin and how that relates to ideals of beauty rather than addressing mammy in drag films as a continuation of the mammy identity created through slavery propaganda. While the study acknowledges that the mammy stereotype was created during the slavery era, it primarily focuses on the weight aspect of "male mammy" performances exaggerated by the use of fat suits. This project concludes, "Male mummies are more derisive because they combine one caricature- of a fat, black woman- with another- of a man in a dress, wielding more damage than either caricature would separately, according to women in our sample" (Chen et al 127). However "male mummies" considered to be "more derisive" is arguable. Mammy Drag actually highlights the performative nature of mammy stereotypes and exposes its social constructed elements. The study as it promises shows the dehumanizing effects of mammy in drag however it also addresses the effeminization of the black male performers.

What about audiences in the Pan African World consuming these films? Since the mammy stereotype is de-historicized global audiences suffer from the same lack of historical context as audiences in America. The oppositional reading of the text is not readily available as a possibility. As expected audiences in the Pan African world arrive at the text with the preferred reading. This occurs for two reasons 1) representation overrides dehumanization. These texts partially encapsulate black life and the need for solidarity with a re-telling of black life can spur on accepting the dehumanization of black women. 2) The mammy has been removed from her

plantation beginnings and presupposed as a natural black woman allows audiences to come away with the preferred reading. While some will come to the text with a negotiated reading or oppositional reading- that is to say will directly oppose these movies as a whole or can see how some depictions in these films are injurious, the popularity of these films is evidence of its preferred reading by audiences.

What about mammy representations in the Pan African World? This project is based on the methodology of discourse analysis and as such the language, representation and articulation of mammy have been the focus. The title of mammy arrives out of the American South along with the nostalgic sentiments of American slavery with the advent of Aunt Jemima and onto mammy in *Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind*. Mammy is a cultural text situated in American history. That is not to say that black women have not cared for white children around the world and that is certainly not to say that black women have not been denied the right of motherhood to their black children within the Pan African world. But what that looks like in representation, as a stereotype and a mode of oppression is very different in separate discourses. Even within American discourse there is a separate distinction for mulatto mammies in which colorism plays a much more pivotal role in the signification of the stereotype. So what does mammy look like then situated in Brazil where there are over 82 different words for race or in England where the discourse of servitude is birthed out the feudal system rather than a notion of aristocracy that's chasing behind the mother country like in the US? In those instances mammy looks and feels very different and rightfully so. With that being said, the main point this project wants to make is that mammy embodies the fetish that the American society has with enslavement. Mammy does very little to represent the life of real women in the Pan African World. In fact, mammy fails black women time and time again.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century mammy has no doubt or fears. It lacks complexity and remains one dimensional. No emotions beyond righteous indignation and continues to never have a healthy and loving serious relationship on an intimate level. The 21<sup>st</sup> century mammy continues to have one purpose and one purpose only and that is serve others to full exclusion of herself. Whether it is to help a detective solve a crime, to bring families together or to justify a black man's need to be the 'good' guy and the victim. All of these are seemingly at the black woman's expense at the hands of a black man. What has yet to be addressed in this project is that these are black men performing mammy rather than black women and this has an important affect. More research is needed to understand the drag element in this 21<sup>st</sup> century representation and the significance (if any) of deconstructing gender.

What is obvious about mammy in the millennium is the use of a fat suit. Not only is mammy portrayed fat and loud, she is now awkward. The comedians heavily rely on the fat suit as the primary element to the comedic value of mammy drag. For Martin Lawrence, the fat suit is part of the storyline in the *Big Momma's House* series and so Lawrence has free rein to reference the awkwardness, exaggerate the learning curve and can play up the physicality of drag. Eddie Murphy uses the fat suit to create a grotesque element in *Rasputia* to which she is oblivious. While Lawrence uses the awkwardness of the fat suit as a conscious focus, Murphy builds off the invisibility of the fat suit. *Rasputia* and *Hattie Mae* have notable scenes in bikinis to which the movie reaches a comedic high. The lack of sexual attractiveness takes center stage and makes for big laughs.

In dealing with the 21<sup>st</sup> century mammy and the performativity of drag, Kathleen LeBesco offers decent insight as to the use of the fat suit. She asserts, "...a common method of defusing the fear of contamination is ridicule." She refers to fat suits used in performativity as "a

narrative prosthesis.” Similar to Judith Butler, LeBesco argues that drag does more to reinforce traditional gender norms and signifiers than it does to challenge or deconstruct them. What does mammy in drag do for gender norms?

Issues of drag are usually purported to be issues of homosexuality and the emasculation of men, and in this specific case, black men. A man in a dress is considered most often by the public to be a comment on a man’s masculinity rather than a challenge to a woman’s sexuality. The comedians in mammy drag circumvent the assumed emasculation most often with dual yet counter identities antithetical to their flagrant mammy personas (see fig. 7). Although Tyler Perry, Martin Lawrence and Eddie Murphy are dressing in drag for one character in their movie, these comedians always depict a secondary character who is a heterosexual black male (see fig. 8). While black women are sufficiently ridiculed by black men in drag the comedians are not completely emasculated because they have created a heterosexual persona that redeems their sexuality and authority over black women. The comedic value of these mammy drag personas is in fact intensified in juxtaposition to the black straight character who is supposed to be logical, level-headed and hard-working compared to the loud, insolent black woman. Even though there is substantial literature on mammy in slavery discourse, adding the stereotype to drag performances changes potentially subversive nature of drag. As such this project positions its analysis as mammy in drag not only to assert the performative elements of mammy but also mammy’s aesthetic and construction as a whole. Mammy in drag is a performance, a style of dress and a narrative, all of which are the discourses of traditional drag. However mammy in drag takes on new meaning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century from that of traditional drag and that of the traditional mammy stereotype.

As can be imagined, significations placed onto the body requires that the body is destroyed in the signification process. The body of mammy is destroyed as a black woman and transposed on top it is the creation of values of mammy. In this sense mammy's body construction can be considered a domain of values or a trapped house of signification. But it must not be forgotten that the black body was demarcated in several ways only to serve a political economy fixed on generating capital and/or in direct relation to wealth. All demarcations on the black body originate from this understanding and to be objectified in this way.

When dealing with identification practices Judith Butler says it goes beyond an enacted fantasy but a grapple at coherence is desired. She says of performative gendered acts, "...the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the 'integrity' of the subject" (Butler 173). Understanding clear as possible performative gendered acts helps to critically analyze the dragging, if you will, of mammy.

The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance (Butler 73).

With the imitation of gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself. Similarly in imitating mammy through drag it reveals the performative nature that the mammy stereotype demands. I believe that drag in this way reveals the performativity of mammy that goes largely unacknowledged when mammy is merely performed by black women. Somehow with black women's performances of mammy permeating the first representations of mammy it is easily overlooked that mammy is fictitious (aka a myth).

But the crux of the Butler reading that is important to this research is, “Gender can be neither true nor false but rendered radically incredible” (Butler 180). Toward that end, mammy drag can be considered to be ‘radically incredible’. When mammy in drag is used to portray a rather brazen, masculine, unattractive black woman it validates these attributes while also making black women the butt of the joke. By the time Aunt Jemima makes her debut at the World’s Fair in 1893 already the representation had great distance from the young enslaved black women who were charged as mammies during slavery days. Aunt Jemima was a mammy given the narrative of patriot, hero and expert cook through which she bestows her pancake recipes onto the public out of pure generosity. Mammy in *Birth of a Nation* is a fierce protector of her white master and loyal patriot to the Confederacy. Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* is almost 75 years after slavery’s end and McDaniel’s performance while still protecting the Tara plantation is feistier than the previous mammies but no less all for the O’Hara family’s greater good. By the time mammy is performed in drag, the meaning behind the performance has changed several times over getting further away from the slavery discourse from which it was birthed.

Going forward this project wants to lay the groundwork for considering mammy to be an idol. As outlined mammy is used to maintain a social order, impersonated and embodied by both gender groups and is seemingly supernatural (almost immortal). The case can be made that mammy is not only larger than life but wields power over the public. Beyond this research this project will set out to argue that mammy is beyond a stereotype and beyond a persona and the language we should bring to the stereotype should be “her” rather than “it” and with a capital “M” rather than lower case. This is all due to the specific manner in which is required to be a mammy or to control as mammy and the work going forward will be to make the case that

mammy is an idol in American history. This change in the approach to mammy will serve to better eliminate it from society if we truly understand what it is set forth to do which is control rather merely treat it like a stereotype to be disproven. Mammy is an idol that should to be eradicated from our consciousness.

Appendix



Figure 1. Actress Vivien Leigh and Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind*.





Figure 2. “Annie the Chicken Queen” played by actress Deidrie Henry.



Figure 3. Pine Sol lady played by Diane Amos.



Figure 4. “Brian” and Madea” played by Tyler Perry.



Figure 5. Norbit and Rasputia played by Eddie Murphy.



Figure 6. Martin Lawrence as “Big Momma”



Figure 7. Tyler Perry as “Madea”.



Figure 8. Eddie Murphy as “Rasputia”.

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# Ayondela McDole: Curriculum Vitae

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## EDUCATION

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**Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY □ 13210 □ □ 8/2017**

Master's Degree: Pan African Studies

Thesis: "Mammy Representations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"

Honors: cum Laude

**Columbia College Chicago, Chicago, IL □ 60602 □ □ 5/2012**

Bachelors of Arts

Major: Cultural Studies

Minor: Black World Studies

Thesis: "Fat, Black and Ugly: The Politics of Postmodern Blackness and the Millennium Mammy"

Honors: Magna cum Laude

**Hoffman Estates High School, Hoffman Estates, IL □ 60195 □ □ 6/2000**

Diploma

Major: English Literature

Minor: Psychology

Honors: "A" Honor Roll (cumulative GPA, 3.7)

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## AWARDS

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**African American Studies Fellowship Award:** 2014-2015 School year (1<sup>st</sup> year Masters), Syracuse University

**LAS Dean's Award for Outstanding Thesis:** Honorable Mention, Columbia College Chicago, 05/2012

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## **TEACHING (or Research) EXPERIENCE**

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**Host** of The New Politics of Race on Campus with panelist Dr. Stefan Bradley and Dr. Belisa Gonzales Syracuse University □□04/2016

Hosted race talk on Syracuse campus regarding activism inside and outside academic during a time of unrest and facilitated a panel discussion on the role of faculty of color in supporting and encouraging activism in students.

### **Teaching Assistant**

Course: "African American Literature up to 1900" □Syracuse University □9/15- 12/15

Course: "African American Literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21 Century" □Syracuse University □01/16- 05/16

Led two discussion sections for each course. Fully graded all assignments for all students and administered all quizzes and exams.

**Workshop Instructor** for "Writing Our Lives" Writing Workshop, Syracuse, NY□11/2015

Instructed writing workshop session on how to construct autobiographical narratives for middle school students.

**Instructor** for "How to Give an Effective Power Point at the Graduate Level" Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY □□08/2015

**Internship** – "Media Literacy Program" □Columbia College Chicago, Chicago, IL□9/11-12/11

Taught media literacy to teens in an after school program which included deconstructing film, leading discussions on critical analysis and practical applications of discussions to everyday life. Conducted workshop to help students' voice feelings of violence in their local communities and help students work out real solutions to violence and way to cope.

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## PUBLICATIONS AND PAPERS

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- “Fat, Black and Ugly: The Politics of Postmodern Blackness and the New Mammy” **Presented** at the “Tomorrow’s Ideas Now” International Undergraduate Conference, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada □ 08/2012
- “Fat, Black and Ugly: The Politics of Postmodern Blackness and the New Mammy” **Published:** Journal of Student Research, Houston, TX □ Publication date 10/2013
- **Keynote Speaker:** “Tomorrow’s Ideas Now” International Undergraduate Conference, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada □□08/2013
- “Living Curiosities: The Wonderful Albino Family” **Presented** at the Special Collections Research Methods Forum, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY □ 10/2014
- “Dragging Mammy: The Politics of the New Millennium Mammy” **Presented** at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History Conference, Atlanta, GA □□9/2015
- “Archival Analysis and Capturing Performativity” **Presented** at the Research Methods Form, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY □□11/2015
- “Mammy Drag and the Black Body” **Presented** at the “Doing the Body” Conference, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA □□3/2016  
**Presented** at the “Policing Crises, Now” Conference, Villanova University, Villanova, PA □ 6/2016
- **Black Women Representations Today Panelist** at the Association for Theatre in Higher Education Conference, Chicago, IL □□08/2016

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## BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH INTERESTS

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### Research Focus

- Black Feminism/ Womanism
- Black identity
- Gender
- Film
- Popular Culture
- Representation
- Literature

## Influences

- bell hooks
- Toni Morrison
- Patricia Hill Collins
- Stuart Hall
- Paul Gilroy
- Angela Davis