Images and lyrics: Representations of African American women in blues lyrics written by black women

Danette Marie Pugh-Patton

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IMAGES AND LYRICS: REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN BLUES LYRICS WRITTEN BY BLACK WOMEN

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Communication Studies

by
Danette Marie Pugh-Patton

December 2007
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1-29-07 Date
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine to what extent representations of double jeopardy and the stereotypical images of African American females: Mammy, Matriarch, Sapphire, and Strong Black Woman emerge in the blues lyrics of Alberta Hunter, Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Memphis Minnie, and Victoria Spivey, using the theoretical framework of Black feminist rhetorical critique.

The Sapphire stereotype is represented by acts of violence and/or the threat of violence, time in jail and/or the possibility of going to jail, drinking, gambling, and dirty dozens. The stereotype of Strong Black Woman is represented by a woman’s independence and desire to ramble. The Matriarch stereotype consists of women being the soul provider for a man. Each artist had several themes that were representative of these stereotypes. There were no representations of the Mammy stereotype.

Representations of racism, sexism, and classism also appear in the theme of relationships with various subthemes. Classism appeared with references to employment. Racism appears with references to the criminal justice system and employment, and sexism appeared either as prostitution and/or domestic violence. The findings indicate that African American women experienced multiple jeopardy during the 1920s and 1930s in various ways.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background Information

Racism, sexism, and classism are embedded at the core of American society. They inhibit the pursuit of happiness and stand in the way of pursuing the "American Dream." By promoting intolerance and hate, these isms infringe on both individual and group freedoms. Existing in a society where these elements of isms reign is a struggle for many individuals, particularly minorities. While most people face some degree of difficulty in their journey to self actualization, the road is often more difficult for those individuals and groups who have been marginalized in society. Social, political, and personal issues often hinder the process of finding and maintaining both an individual and group consciousness. This creates a long-time struggle for non-Whites who simply try to coexist in a society that wants compliance and conformity.

Double-consciousness is a phrase coined by African American author and educator W. E. B. DuBois. He indicates "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, measuring one's soul by the type of a
world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (1903/2003, p. 9). DuBois describes the dual state of reality for African Americans as a feeling of two-ness; two beliefs, two souls, and two endeavors (p. 9). This suggests that African Americans have difficulty reconciling their African identity with their American identity. Essed and Goldberg refer to “double consciousness” as “a complex and constant play between the exclusionary conditions of social structure marked by race and the psychological and cultural strategies employed by the racially excluded and marginalized to accommodate themselves to everyday indignities as well as to resist them” (2002, p. 5). Essed also indicates that DuBois was the first to look at race on a societal level and define how African Americans experience race on a daily basis through double consciousness. McPhail examines the rhetoric of race, by exploring how African Americans experience “double consciousness” based on the racist discourse of White Americans (2002).

Writing during the Jim Crow Era, which was 40 plus years after emancipation, DuBois also discusses how the freed Black man has not found freedom after emancipation. The Jim Crow era refers to the time between the end of the Reconstruction Period roughly until the end of the Civil
Rights Movement. Prior to the Jim Crow Era, Black codes existed in the South that essentially ignored the very existence of African Americans. After the Reconstruction, White Southerners had greater ability to enact local and state laws that basically reestablished them as masters and African Americans as slaves. "Rather than concentrating on Black exclusion, the initial wave of the Jim Crow measures that would eventually mother the South focused on the creation of separate facilities for them" (Packard, 2002, p. 63).

Different laws were passed in various Southern states that ushered in the Jim Crow concept of "separate but equal." African Americans could not legally eat in the same establishments as Whites; they could not drink from the same fountains and/or use the same restrooms. Some laws that were passed that disenfranchised African American citizens were The Separate Car Act, established in 1890 in Louisiana, which made it illegal for African Americans to ride in the same train car as Whites; miscegenation laws interracial marriages illegal; and although African Americans legally had the right to vote, the Eight-Box Ballot Act made it necessary for a voter to be able to read in order to cast a ballot, thus preventing many of the poor and uneducated Southern African Americans
to vote. Another example of injustices during the Jim Crow Era was legislators’ passing more harsh sentences on crimes they thought would more likely to be committed by African Americans, such as in Missouri where stealing poultry, what normally would be a misdemeanor, was considered a felony.

In the midst of the Jim Crow Era, DuBois explored the underlying frustrations of African Americans who are not able to obtain the expected social, financial, and political status of success in American society due to this feeling of two-ness. DuBois was writing from the perspective of an African American male in the late 1800s and early 1900s. His purpose was to inform society that although slavery was abolished in 1862, the system of racism had been rooted in the moral fiber of the United States. Blacks were marginalized and considered as the "other" by the White majority.

Slavery was an institutionalized form of oppression that dehumanized Blacks and set a standard of "othering" in the United States. Slavery initialized an attitude that caused White Americans to hate and fear those who did not look, speak, act, and/or maintain the same beliefs and values of the White majority; therefore, anyone who did not reflect these characteristics was considered
different, often less than equal. Being different, other than White, automatically forced minorities into the position of other in the United States. The concept of the other equates White with American. Anyone who was not White did not fit into accepted norms and was marginalized in society. Slavery harbored misconceptions of African Americans and embedded ideologies of hatred towards Blacks. A standard of hate was set into perpetual motion. Therefore, after African Americans gained their freedom, they felt a sense of a dual identity “double consciousness.”

DuBois also believed that African Americans had a desire to acculturate to White American norms. Yet regardless of how intelligent, well spoken, clean, or even well mannered a Black person was, he or she, as the marginalized other would not be able to completely assimilate into White America. DuBois documented the difficulty African Americans experienced trying to combine the White American lifestyle with their African roots. DuBois believed that African Americans were in a no-win situation. On one hand striving to develop and maintain a sense of White American values and standards, yet at the same time trying to maintain African American cultural beliefs, they were holding on to what may be left of their
African heritage (1903/2003). African Americans subconsciously knew that they would never truly be permitted to fully integrate into White America because racism was deeply rooted in the nation’s core.

African American women not only had difficulties that reflected race and class, but they experienced sexism. The added burden of sexism gives meaning to the phrase “double jeopardy.” The concept of double jeopardy is the fact that African American women are oppressed and exploited not only because of their race, but because of their gender as well. They must endure both racism and sexism. During reconstruction, many African Americans wanted to conform to the identity of White America. Black women also wanted to acculturate to White American standards of femininity. Sarah Breedlove, better known as Madam C. J. Walker, built an empire on the development of hair care products for African American women that helped to straighten their hair to resemble White women’s hair. Many African American women also did not want to work. They desired the luxury to stay at home with their children, and adapt the White American female role of femininity, yet they too were not allowed permitted to completely acculturate. hooks indicates that, “Trying to dispel the myth that all Black women were sexually loose, they emulated the conduct and
mannerisms of White women" (1981, p. 55). Their efforts were ignored and often publicly ridiculed by White men and women.

The system of racism and sexism made it difficult for Black families to maintain a sustainable lifestyle. White employers would not hire Black men making them feel less masculine; therefore, Black women had to work. The work they found was predominantly in the domestic field, which hardly paid enough for a family to get by. This created conflict in the home, continued to emasculate Black men, and continued the image of African American women as being less feminine than White women.

The efforts of many African Americans to acculturate was ignored by Whites, and racist and sexist stereotypes continued to permeate through society. This created a need for an outlet to deal with the oppression. DuBois (1903) indicates that there are three potential responses to oppression: "a feeling of revolt and revenge; an attempt to adjust all thought and action to the will of the greater group; or finally, a determined effort at self-realization and self development despite environing opinion" (p. 38). African Americans expressed revenge, adjustment, and self-development in different ways. Their
struggles to adjust were reflected in art, poetry, literature, activism, and music.

As noted, African Americans needed an outlet to cope with the hardships of being Black in America. Academia, literature, and/or music were used as forms of expression. Music was used as a way to escape a brutal reality, provide entertainment, and also as a communication tool. During slavery, African Americans sang spirituals that reflected a slave's everyday life of bondage; the lyrics were often centered on aspects such as work, family, and escaping. Often, spirituals were embedded with codes that informed other slaves of when the "Master" was coming or helped lead people to freedom. For example the song Steal Away, a Christian hymn that was sung by both slave owners and slaves, yet, "when slaves sang, Steal Away to Jesus, it was often a way to communicate plans for escape or rebellion" (Perry, 2001, p. 87). Slaves were planning to escape to the North via the Underground Railroad. This tradition transitioned into blues and other types of music. Instead of communicating an escape, the music communicated discussion of such topics as Jim Crow, oppression, and/or love. In Leadbelly's Jim Crow Blues it indicates that people should unite to fight against the oppression of Jim, as described in the following lyrics:
I’ve been travelin’, I’ve been travelin’ from toe to toe
Everywhere I have been, I find some ole Jim Crow
One thing people I want everybody to know
You gonna find some Jim Crow everyplace you go
Down in Louisiana, Tennessee, Georgia’s I mighty good place to go
And get together; break-up this ole Jim Crow
Break it up now
I told everybody over the radio
Make up your mind and get together
Break-up this ole Jim Crow
I want to tell you people something that you don’t know
It’s a lot of Jim Crow in a movin’ picture show
I’m goin’ to sang this verse, I ain’t gonna sang no mo’
Please get together, break up this ole Jim Crow
People used music and other forms of expression to deal with oppression. Many people turned to their spiritual beliefs. “Church was a haven from the constant surveillance of Whites, and it was in church that Blacks could vent their pent-up emotions and were indeed exhorted to do so by their ministers” (Jackson, 2005, p. 40). On the opposite side of religion was the African American club scene, the birthplace of the blues culture. “When economic and political liberation must have seemed more
unattainable than ever blues created a discourse that represented freedom in more immediate and accessible terms” (Davis, 1998, p. 7). Others may have tried to completely assimilate to White American culture, rejecting and denying any aspect of their African heritage. Some African Americans used both religion and blues as outlets for relief and expression.

While spirituals were sacred during slavery and reflected the feelings of the church, blues became one of the most popular types of secular music during that time. It echoed the pain, joy, and hopes of African American life. “As it came to displace sacred music in the everyday lives of Black people, it both reflected and helped to construct a new Black consciousness” (Davis, 1998, p. 6). Both men and women belted the blues. Women popularized the genre and were the first to record the blues. They helped to take blues from the jook joints and barrel houses into the streets and homes of mainstream society.

Statement of the Problem

In 1903 DuBois indicated, “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line, the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea”
Although slavery has been abolished for over 140 years, African Americans continue to experience double consciousness, struggling to reconcile two identities, African and American. "Discrimination, subordination, and control by race are still a vital part of American institutional life. What has changed are the ways in which historic subordination by race has been maintained" (Bowser as cited in McPhail, 2002, p. 3). African American women still deal with double jeopardy, constantly negotiating their identities and searching for a sense of self definition. They are continuously treated with disrespect and contempt, creating feelings of disappointment and frustration. Jones and Shooter-Gooder (2003) indicate that, "Black women in America have many reasons to feel this deep sense of dissatisfaction. As painful as it may be to acknowledge, their lives are still widely governed by a set of old oppressive myths circulating in the White-dominated world" (p. 2).

While African Americans in general deal with double consciousness, multiple jeopardy still remains a struggle for African American women. African American females have the added factor of reconciling their gender. Being Black and female is very different than being Black and male. "The outcome of being African American and a woman in a
social order rife with both racism and sexism is that Black women’s experiences of womanhood may overlap with those of both White women and other women of color but will also differ from them in important ways: their experiences of Blackness may overlap with those of African American men but will significantly differs as well” (Houston, 2000, ¶ 2).

The 2007 controversy over racist comments made during a Don Imus radio broadcast is an example of how bigotry and sexism are still prominent in American society. Imus became the central figure in a debate over free speech versus hate speech. The debate grew out of comments made by Imus and a producer of his “Imus in the Morning” radio show made on April 4, 2007. The two men were discussing the previous night’s NCAA Women’s Basketball Championship when Imus made reference to the Rutgers Women’s’ Basketball team, who are predominantly African American, as “nappy headed hos.” His producer went on to add that the game played out like a scenario from a Spike Lee film, “the Jigaboos versus the Wannabes.” Within days sponsors dropped the multi-million dollar revenue generating program and MSNBC, which had aired a televised simulcast of the program since 1996, announced it was ending its
relationship with Imus. Approximately a week following the incident, CBS permanently cancelled the program.

The comments made, followed by Imus' termination raised a number of important issues about race, gender, and class in today's society. It reiterated to America that, "not only is the society still permeated by racism and sexism and the stereotypes they spawn, but we have allowed a debased and profoundly immature culture to emerge in which the coarsest, most socially destructive images and language are an integral part of the everyday discourse" (Herbert as cited in NY Times, p. 19). In the wake of these events many people have blamed hip-hop for Imus' comments. The controversy has brought to light the continued debate for rap artists to stop using derogatory terms when referring to African American women. Yet, little attention is given to the radio and music producers who are predominantly White males and are earning millions of dollars promoting the images of Black male rap artists that the media is blaming for Imus' statements. In addition, there is little to no discussion about where such sexist and racist terms generated and how stereotypes were created and continue to be perpetuated.

Don Imus had a history of making insulting, demeaning comments directed at a variety of minorities, but they did
not lead to his termination. In 1993 Imus referred to Gwen Ifill, an African American New York Times' White House correspondent, with the following indignation "Isn't the Times wonderful? It lets the cleaning lady cover the White House." Despite the similarities of the remarks, there was no decision in 1993 to have Imus fired. With millions spent by radio advertisers at his New York City base of operations and more money generated for commercials promoting the MSNBC simulcast, Don Imus was considered a worthy investment by corporations. The incident is yet another reminder that capitalism, which helps to fuel racism, sexism, and classism is highly prevalent.

In 2003 Jones and Shorter-Gooden conducted an African American Women's Voices Project in which they surveyed 333 African American women and interviewed 71 women throughout the United States. They discovered "that racist and sexist attitudes and discriminatory behavior are still taking a significant toll on Black women" (p. 8). The project revealed the following about African American women’s experiences in today’s society (p. 9):

- A majority of African American women have experienced racial and sexual discrimination.
- Most Black women alter their behavior to accommodate others.
• Work is the most common place to experience discrimination.

• Black women often downplay their skills to support Black men.

• The myths that African American women are sexually promiscuous results in childhood sexual abuse and adult sexual harassment, assault, and/or rape.

• There is pressure for Black women to conform to White American standards of beauty.

• Black mothers must educate their children to deal with the certainty of race. Young Black girls must also be socialized to cope with the reality of sexism.

• Black women are at a high risk for depression.

• Black women feel discriminated against in their religious settings, which they may see as male dominated and centered on men.

African American women continue to experience these forms of discrimination and deal with issues of double jeopardy. This is why researchers must explore what it means to be an African American woman. With a better understanding of how African American women have dealt with racism, sexism,
and classism through music, it should be one step in allowing for ways to overcome these issues and hopefully eliminate oppression.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework I will be using is rhetorical criticism from a Black feminist perspective. Ideological culture-centered criticism is the method that I will be applying when interpreting the texts of African American blues artists. Brummett (2006) outlines various forms of rhetorical criticism, particularly for the examination of popular culture. Throughout his book culture is a critical theme, and he indicates “the importance of culture as a source of perspectives, thoughts, values, feelings, ideas, and ideologies” (p. 202). Conducting cultural criticism is an attempt at self-discovery for historically oppressed and exploited cultures. It is a way to give voice to the oppressed as well as a way to gain a better understanding of one’s own culture and hopefully expand the knowledge of other cultures.

The assumption of culture-centered critique is that cultural artifacts are better understood by representatives from that culture. “It argues that those
artifacts that are clearly part of the culture of African Americans, such as rap music, the Traditional Black Church, jazz, rhythm and blues, and so on, cannot be adequately understood if analyzed from a Europeans perspective" (Brummet, 2006, p. 204). Therefore this is my attempt to add to the discussion of the various ways Black women rediscover their voice and overcome exploitation and oppression.

In addition to an Afrocentric culture-centered perspective of rhetoric, there are also various feminist approach. The application of afrocentricity to research is a concept developed by Molefi Kete Asante. The concept suggests talking a point of view from that of an "African", a non White individual, and objectively looking at a subject with the thought and/or question of how it would appear without European influences. Afrocentricity explores artifacts and situations from the view of a Black or non-White individual and places them in the position of being the subject rather than the object. It is a paradigm that views information based on the placing Africans, a traditionally marginalized group at the center of their own lives and within historical contexts, thus consequently brings Africans from margin to center.
One goal of feminist critique is to empower women and raise consciousness of female-related struggles. Storey (1998) indicates "There are at least four different feminisms: radical, Marxist, liberal, and what Sylvia Walby calls dual systems theory" (p. 135). Radical feminism focuses on the domination men have over women as a result of being in a patriarchal society, and Marxist feminism focuses on capitalism as being the source of oppression and domination. Yet as Brummet indicates, "All feminist critical thinking begins from the assumption that there is gender inequality between men and women, particularly in today's industrialized economies" (2006, p. 171). Therefore, it is believed that artifacts will have representations or elements that are reflective of racial and sexual domination.

I approach this research with the hope of adding to the dialogue of what it means to be a Black woman in America. Examining the lyrics written by Black female blues artists will provide an insight to the lives of these women as well as provide a perspective of how African American women may have dealt with and continue to deal with double jeopardy in today's society.
Research Questions

This study seeks to examine whether issues such as racism, classism, and sexism emerge in the lyrics of African American women blues artists. In addition, it looks at whether or not stereotypical images of African American women emerge in the lyrics of female blues artists. "The dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of several interrelated, socially constructed, controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination" (Hill-Collins, 2000, p. 72).

Hence, the following research questions are presented:

RQ1: To what extent do representations of double jeopardy emerge in the lyrics of African American female blues singers?

RQ2: To what extent are the stereotypical African American female concepts of Mammy, Matriarch, Sapphire, and Strong Black Woman rhetorically represented in the blues lyrics of African American female blues artists?

Double jeopardy is a combination of issues that African American women contended with on a daily basis, and because these stereotypical images of African American women were ensconced in the minds of society, it is possible that blues artists subconsciously incorporated
these concepts; thus, representations of these stereotypes will appear in their blues lyrics.

Purpose and Significance of Research

There are several reasons to examine representations of double jeopardy and stereotypical images of African American women as symbolized in the lyrics of Black female blues artists. The first reason for studying the blues is that it is not only considered the root of Black music in America, it is also a core element in the development of American popular music such as Rock 'n Roll, Rhythm and Blues (R&B), and hip-hop.

The reason for specifically looking at female blues artists in this research project is that African American women had many obstacles to overcome to be recognized in the music industry. Black women have made many contributions in an industry primarily controlled by White male executives. Although several blues women became successful and recognized artists, most were cheated out of many profits and royalties to which they were entitled. Often, women of all ethnicities have been ignored in regard to their contributions to the music industry and have been overlooked by the men who write the history of the genre. "If you go to a standard rock history, you will
usually find that very few female performers are listed, giving the erroneous impression that women played an insubstantial role in the creation and development of rock and roll” (Gaar, 1992, p. xix). Although Gaar writes about rock and roll, she is also referring to the blues, indicating that blues is the root of rock and roll. As blues was developing into rhythm and blues, a larger audience that consisted of mostly White teenagers started to listen and play. Gaar refers to a quote from Ruth Brown, a 1950s rhythm and blues artist, which indicates, “At what point did rhythm and blues start becoming rock and roll? When the White kids started to dance to it” (Ruth Brown as cited in Gaar, 1990, p. 1).

Blues is considered to consist of both overt and subtle sexual innuendoes. This study of the lyrics of various female blues artists will not focus on the fact that many blues songs have a sexual content, thus highlighting something other than the politics of Black sexuality. It will examine to what extent aspects of racism, sexism, and classism appear in the lyric and to what extent stereotypical images of African American women that were developed out of racist and sexist ideologies appear in their lyrics. Providing an insight to these
women's lives will open possibilities for further research into African American women's experiences.

On a personal note, my interest in representations of controlled images and evidence of double jeopardy in the blues is because of my cultural upbringing. As an African American woman, I was raised in a household where, although I was taught to appreciate all types of music, there were some songs that were strictly forbidden. I was not permitted to listen to any blues besides B. B. King and Bobbie Blue Bland. There were not many women in the permitted repertoire. My grandmother, a devout Christian woman, viewed the blues as sinful music. She was raised in the early 1900s, amidst the controversy between the church and secular society. My mother and grandmother basically tried to shield me from any potential sexual lyrics. I was permitted to listen to crossover jazz artists such as Billie Holiday and Dinah Washington, but the blues was too sexually overt for my grandmother and mother.

As I matured and began to make my own choices concerning the type of music I listened to, I sought out the forbidden in both blues and other types of music, such as rap, which was also a genre I was not permitted to listen to because of the media's hype regarding its sexual lyrics and its effect on urban youth. I began to realize
that although there were some songs with explicit lyrics, there were plenty that actually had positive messages. I enjoyed listening to songs by artists such as KoKo Tayler, Big Momma Thorton, Dinah Washington, and Billie Holiday. Whether a song boasted about one's sexual freedom or spoke about the political hardships of the time, I was able to identify with the music and lyrics. Both the artists and their lyrics helped me to define and redefine how I perceived myself as a Black woman.

Scope of Study

The focus of this study will be to briefly explore the evolution of Black music and examine the role women have played in both the development and advancement of the blues genre. Additionally, the study will explore various concepts of cultural identity development in order to establish the process of how identity is constructed and negotiated in African Americans, specifically African American women. I will also examine various concepts of Black feminism. Exploring and understanding various facets of Black feminism is essential to the study because it lays the groundwork for understanding Black female consciousness. I will choose song writers/performers,
develop a list of their songs to choose from, and select five songs from each artist to analyze.

I will be looking for representations of the following images: Mammy, Matriarch, Sapphire, and Strong Black Woman (SBW). Mammy is a woman of domesticity; the image is one of a happy and content Black female servant. A Matriarch does not need a man and is control of everything. The third controlled image that I will focus on is the image of Sapphire that is one of a woman who is feisty and often out of control with her emotions. A SBW is the superwoman who can work as well as take care of her family. She does not have any weakness and carries the weight of the world on her shoulders, yet she does not show it. The image of the SBW can be seen as both positive and negative.

Stereotypical images of African Americans women are a direct result of racism, sexism, and classism. These prejudices corrupt the essence of American Society, yet they contribute to a group consciousness and a collective identity. By exploring the lyrics of African American blues women who performed during the time blues was in its early stages of evolution, it is my goal to gain a better understanding of these artists as well as discover how the
era may have influenced their lyrics, essentially gaining a deeper knowledge of African American women in general.

Overview of Next Chapters

In the following chapters I will provide an overview of Black feminism and discuss the connection between cultural identity construction Black feminist ideology. There will also be a brief examination of media influences on the construction of identity and how it contributes to stereotypes that reflect racist and sexist ideologies. In addition, I will explore the importance of self-valuation, self-esteem, and self-discovery as they arise as concepts of Black feminist thought. Following the discussion of Black feminism, I will examine various concepts of rhetorical criticism in which I will look at Afrocentric and feminist approaches to cultural criticism. Next I will explore the research that has been done regarding rhetorical analyses that use Afrocentric cultural criticism, feminist critic, and Black feminist approaches. The topics of examination will include hip-hop and rap, the concept of hip-hop feminism, rhetoric of blues, African American hair and beauty expectations, representations of African American women in media, Black
women in academia, and elements of African American literature.

The following chapter will outline the methods used to first choose the artists then will provide a brief biographical overview of the artists chosen. The next section will explore how the lyrics were chosen; following will be the section that explores how the texts themselves will be critiqued. The next chapter consists of the analyses of the lyrics, answering to what extent the representations of double jeopardy emerge in the lyrics how the stereotypical African American female concepts of Mammy, Matriarch, and Sapphire are rhetorically represented in the blues lyrics of African American female blues artists. The final chapter will offer future areas of study and a discussion of the limitations. Appendixes are attached with a complete copy of each artist's lyrics.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Information

Music connects a society with time periods. The United States saw significant change both in civil rights and women's rights. When one hears James Brown sing *Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud*, or Aretha Franklin demand *Respect*, most listeners know that those songs are products of the 1960s. Music reflects history, and history, in turn, reflects music. Analyzing lyrics helps one to understand the influences society has on developing the African American consciousness. After emancipation many African Americans migrated to the North in search of a better quality of life and better jobs. During WWI many more Blacks moved to the North looking for work to replace the White soldiers who were at war. The Blacks who stayed in the South faced Jim Crow, the laws that governed most Southern states. Most Blacks were destined to a life of sharecropping, manual labor, and/or domestic jobs in White Americans' homes. Servitude replaced slavery.

During this time educational opportunities for African Americans were few. Most educational prospects for African Americans were designed to keep Blacks at a low
socioeconomic level. According to the documentary "With All Deliberate Speed," a film that detailed incidents leading up to the Brown versus Board of Education Supreme Court trial, many school curriculums were set up so that Black men only studied subjects such as farming and agriculture, and Black women studied home economics. This practically sealed a desperate fate for most African Americans in the South. It also created a ready labor force for White America, a modern legalized version of slavery.

The overall political and social climate of the United States was littered with contradictions. Known as the "Roaring Twenties," this decade began with bang and ended with a crash. On one hand, the decade is characterized as a time of hope and prosperity for the majority of Americans. People earned $5 for work, the Model T was built, and strides were being made in American technology, such as the increase of commercial transatlantic flights.

On the other hand, people were filled with skepticism and intolerance. Primarily consisting of women, the Temperance Movement began to rely on the skepticisms and intolerances of White America. Using propaganda techniques, the people of the movement achieved much
success by playing to the fears of the White middle class, insisting that social degradation and moral decline in the United States was caused by new European immigrants and Blacks. There were also the tensions among working class Whites, fearing that Blacks would take their jobs for lower wages. This was an issue in both the North and the South.

The tension gave rise to the Ku Klux Klan, which fueled the fires of hate and intolerance, particularly throughout the South. Prohibition was another factor that sparked the political and social atmosphere in the United States. As an effort initiated by the Temperance Movement, January 16, 1920, marked the date the government outlawed the selling, manufacturing, and transporting of alcohol in all 48 states. Previously, the Temperance Movement had succeeded in outlawing alcohol in 26 of the 48 states by 1916. While this is true, it was not illegal to have procession of or drink alcohol.

At the beginning of the decade, women gained political strides, obtaining the right to vote in 1920. While this advancement was a political step forward for White women, their social expectations did not change. White women were still expected to stay at home and perform their wifely and motherly duties. They continued
to be thought of as delicate flowers to remain untouched and unharmed, thus reiterating the patriarchal values and traditions embedded in the United States culture. The White female response to this oppressive patriarchal culture created the "Flapper." Young women shortened the length of their skirts and cut their hair. Flappers and their male counterparts were frequent partiers and enjoyed the consumption of liquor. At the same time, the majority of Black women continued with their working class lives, not enjoying the same lifestyles as their White female Flapper counterparts.

The 1920s also saw the rise of the Jazz Age and the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance was a Black cultural movement that took place in New York's predominantly African American neighborhood, Harlem. African American literature, music, and art were being taken seriously by White publishers and producers and being marketed to mainstream America. While jazz was the musical genre of the North, particularly in New York, blues was still the music choice of the South.

Aspects of the Blues

Freedom of speech is a constitutional right, but for Southern Blacks speaking out against injustice invited
harassment, incarceration, or possibly lynching (Evans, 2001). Escaping harsh realities through song was a way to deal with an oppressive environment. Exploring the historical development of blues music establishes meaning and helps one to recognize the social and political impact music had on American society and how political and social movements in America influenced the music. Although there is no definitive date on which to say the blues began, there is a time frame when various themes, styles and techniques took hold and started to generate the classic blues sounds that we are familiar with today. Blues was “a kind of American folk music that developed from spirituals and work songs and became popular in the early 1900s” (Anner, 2004). The blues became both a form of entertainment and a way to escape the harsh realities of Black American life.

Blues music developed out of the experiences of African Americans that reflected the social and political climate of the South during the post Civil War Southern Reconstruction Period in America. Local and state laws were established in the South, and these decrees enforced the ideology of separate but equal from 1876 to 1965. “It was out of this oppressive social and economic environment that the blues arose. They were songs of general
dissatisfaction, fundamentally shifting and ambivalent in character, expressed in allusive and elusive language” (Evans, 2001, p. 38). The blues encompassed the essence of Black American life. The politics, education, and social experience in working class African American communities were translated through music.

By the 1920s, blues was a staple of Black American culture. It is speculated that blues-like songs date back to the late 1890s and that some of the blues styles reflect the African oral traditions of call and response. In addition, many scholars believe that “blues singing and songwriting often placed the artist in the role of storyteller and reporter of her experience—an existence in an oppressed community defined by the rules of the dominant culture” (Wright, 2001, ¶ 1). Although slaves were taken from their homeland, much of the spirit of African remained in their souls. Many musical traditions and techniques that date back to African rituals became a part of slavery (Finn, 1992). African slaves used familiar tones, rhythms, and the use of instruments, such as the drums, to communicate with one another during slavery. These traditions continued after slavery and emerged in both spirituals and blues. Evans (2001) indicates that blues musicians also drew from the “holler” technique
which was "a song sometimes mixed with moaning, humming, whistling, and falsetto whooping; sung during solitary work activities, such as plowing with a mule, herding cattle, driving a wagon, chopping cotton or walking to and from work" (p. 41).

The demand for entertainment by Black artists increased, and Black dance halls, theaters, and clubs began to emerge. Musicians often played in both the church and the clubs, using their talents for both God and the world. A common place where musicians played the blues was called a jook joint, which was a place where Blacks would socially congregate that had a bar or club-like atmosphere. People could either go to someone’s house or a run-down building where they would eat and drink and listen to music. Because of Jim Crow laws, Blacks were not permitted to go to White-owned bars and clubs, and many African Americans did not have the financial means to open major establishments; therefore, socializing took place in these jook joints.

As noted, many musicians would play for the church on Sundays and in the jook joints throughout the week. At this time, many African American church people believed that one should not be out late singing and/or playing the devil’s music on Saturday, then go to church and sing the
Lord's praises on Sunday, so they condemned the musicians for their blasphemous ways. As a result, many African American musicians stopped singing in the churches and only performed in the clubs and dance halls in order to earn a little money or sometimes food. Soon many performers were recruited to participate in vaudeville. Vaudeville shows were essentially mass-produced entertainment. Like traveling minstrel and/or medicine shows, various types of performers, singers, circus handlers, dancers, and musicians, would perform before a paid audience. While minstrel shows often masqueraded White performers in Black face singing 'Black' music, vaudeville shows signed Black performers who would sing of different ethnicities, but in separate venues, of course.

The type of blues that was first popular was known as Classic blues. Towards the end of the 1920s the Delta blues started to gain popularity. The Delta blues was primarily performed by Black men in the Mississippi Delta. As time evolved, African Americans continued to migrate to the North in search of new job opportunities and a better quality of life. Populating major cities, African Americans began to find a new identity, and the urban blues was an expression of that identity. Also known as Chicago blues, the new sound incorporated old cultural
traditions with new instruments creating a new blues culture. Many blues musicians moved North to Chicago, where they developed the urban blues style known as Chicago blues. The Chicago blues style generated such popular artists as Muddy Waters and B. B. King.

The urban blues soon developed more of a dance beat, and blues as America knew it began to lose its popularity. Rhythm and blues became the Black music of the time. Eventually “race” music, which was once exclusively associated with blues, was deemed as inappropriate, and the new name for Billboard records was now Rhythm and Blues, ushering in a new era in music. Individuals, such as Elvis Presley, also adapted many Black styles of singing and playing that popularized the blues as well as created a Rock ‘n Roll spinoff, which made Black music more acceptable to White audiences. For many years blues took a back seat in popular culture to R&B and Rock ‘n Roll. In the 1960s several White European artists, such as the Cream and the Rolling Stone,s used their male blues influences and began to adapt their own styles to the blues. “It was also a time that brought about a return (or turn) to blues by White pop artists” (Sonnier, Jr., 1994, p. 87).
Women in Blues

As previously mentioned, it was common for White artists to take blues songs and popularize them, making Black music acceptable in mainstream America. This practice was not new. "Sophie Tucker (1884-1966) appropriated Black culture in her act and made a point of crossing and re-crossing ethnic and gender-based lines of traditional American performance throughout her career" (Jackson, 2005, p. 24). Tucker made Black music available and acceptable to mainstream society. In many ways she opened the door for African American women to enter into and find popularity in the music business. Tucker was a comic actress who became the first woman to record a blues record in 1917. Vaudeville managers convinced her, a rather large woman, to dress as the happy, content, and pleasing Black female figure, Mammy, in her shows. They believed that a White woman singing Black songs would not sit well with White audiences; therefore, she was asked to perform as a 'Mammy' in minstrel tradition in order to be more accepted by White audiences. Painted in Black face, she would take on expressions and dialectical inflections of Blacks to perform on stage.

Although Sophie Tucker is one example of a White woman performing to Black music, the genre stayed true to
form when African Americans sang the songs. The blues was
a way for African Americans to cope with the hardships of
everyday life during Reconstruction. It was not just a
form of entertainment. “It was a way of solidifying
community and commentary on the social fabric of
working-class Black life in America” (Hill-Collins, 2000,
p. 105). Collins indicates that a woman singing the blues
is a way of defining one’s self and negotiating identity.
In addition, it was a way for Black women to challenge the
controlling images of African American women. It is said
that, “The female figures evoked in women’s blues are
independent women free of the domestic orthodoxy of the
prevailing representations of womanhood through which
female subjects of the era were constructed” (Davis, 1998,
p. 13).

In 1920 Mamie Smith made her second recording “Crazy
Blues,” on the Okeh record label. It sold 75,000 copies in
its first month of release. Smith’s recording launched the
era of “race records” which opened many doors for African
American women (Davis 1998; Gaar 1992; Jackson 2005;
Santelli 2001). White record producers eagerly sought
Black women to record classic blues songs. Not only did
many African Americans record their music, they toured in
vaudeville. Prior to this, “a woman on stage was
considered to be little more than a prostitute, so most aspiring singers and musicians performed in the privacy of their own parlours with a piano and sheet music, and those who played for pay had to take the consequences" (O’Brien, 2002, p. 10).

Women popularized the blues in the early 1920s. "Through them, their audience vicariously experienced many freedoms: freedom to express anger without fear of White retribution; freedom to travel, just as the blues women traveled from town to town; freedom to testify publicly to the Black experience of the world; freedom to love whomever they wanted and to reject those they didn’t" (Jackson, 2005, p. 16). Producers and talent scouts searched for entertainers to perform in traveling shows and to produce race records. Unfortunately the women’s spotlight in the blues was short-lived, and towards the end of the decade, the Delta blues, also known as the country blues became popular. During their heyday many Black women gained popularity in blues and were given elaborate and long-lasting titles. They were given these titles based on their overall contributions to the genre, their influences on other artists, their spouse’s names, and their physical appearances.
Born Gertrude Pridgett, she is better known as 'Ma' Rainey and still holds the title of "Mother of the Blues." Pridgett was nicknamed 'Ma' because of her marriage to fellow vaudeville performer, William 'Pa' Rainey, but she is known as mother because she influenced and mentored many female blues artists in her time. A title that many women have held is "Queen of the Blues." Bessie Smith, one of Ma Rainey's protégés, sometimes considered more popular than her mentor, held the title while she was alive. Since then several people have earned the title of "Queen of the Blues." Dinah Washington, an accomplished blues and jazz singer during the 1950's has held the title, and currently Koko Taylor is known as "Queen of the Blues." Willie Mae Thornton, a woman who had a robust stature, weighed over 300 pounds, and stood over six feet tall was known as "Big Mama." One of the most popular blues artists, who is also known for her contributions to jazz, is Billie Holiday, who was billed as "Lady Day."

In the mid to late 1920s a new type of blues began to take hold. The country blues began to take precedence over classic blues. Men coming out of the Mississippi Delta used guitars and harmonicas in their songs. They strummed their guitars and blew their harmonicas, giving way to a new type of blues. This wave pushed female blues musicians
to the sidelines. Davis (1998) indicates “Their growing popularity initiated a pattern that eventually marginalized women blues singers after the classic blues era began to decline with the stock market crash of 1929” (p. xiii). Women blues singers also began to lose their popularity because some of their songs contained sexual lyrics. Exhibiting sexual behavior was unbefitting of a woman in American society. In order for a woman to gain any popularity in the music business, after the Classic blues era, she had to brighten her lyrics, soften her voice, and mask her sexuality. Many female blues artists found some success crossing over into the new American popular music jazz and singing with big bands and orchestras.

Gaar (1992) selectively explores the careers of various popular artists, “examining the experiences these artists have faced as women and placing them in the larger context of how those experiences have had an effect on their work as rock performers” (p. xix). Although she uses the term ‘rock and roll’, Gaar looks at blues and the contributions of such artists as Big Momma Thornton, ‘Ma’ Rainey and Bessie Smith as setting the groundwork and laying a path for all women in the music industry. But she also notes the prejudice of American society as a factor
affecting the role of women in the genre of rock and roll. “The joint obstacles of sexism and racism combined to
downplay, overlook, or erase women’s contributions to the
development of rock and roll” (Gaar, 1992, p. 29).

A statement that has been made about the blues is
that the music consists of sexually explicit lyrics.
Although this is true, other themes, such as giving advice
and politics, appear in the lyrics. Davis speculates,
“Perhaps women’s blues history has been so readily
marginalized because the most frequently recurring themes
of women’s blues music revolve around male lovers and the
plethora of problems posed by heterosexual relationships
complicated by expressions of autonomous female sexuality”
(1998, p. 45). Because African American sexuality is often
dehumanized by White America, a genre of music that
focuses on aspects of a culture’s sexual politics, such as
blues, is often overlooked, thus not acknowledging that
blues women had a significant part in developing an
African American consciousness as well as a Black women’s
consciousness.

Various studies look at the autobiographies of blues
artists or ethnographic studies of Black women blues
artists. Researchers generally look at the lives of the
artist and only pull small samples of lyrics from the
music in their analyses. Many of the articles that mention the lyrics of Black women artists do not indicate whether or not they were written by the artists themselves, co-written, or written by another woman or man. Many Blues women often sang songs written by men. Therefore, some of the lyrics that people examine may represent the point of view of women as interpreted by a male. Thus, for the purposes of this research project, I specifically chose to look at women who wrote their own music.

Black Feminism

Black feminist thought is essential to examining the musical texts of African American female blues artists. Before examining various concepts of Black feminism, it is important to understand the need for Black feminist thought. Dealing with racism, sexism, and classism is a daily routine for African American women and has been throughout history. By dealing with these oppressions, a unique identity as well as a group consciousness has developed. These shared experiences give a voice and understanding to what it means to be an African American woman in the United States. Having a group consciousness that is centered on shared experiences of African American women has helped to create the concepts of Black feminism.
and cause a Black feminist thought to emerge. Tailored to address the needs and explore the lives of African American women, Black feminist thought includes the reality of shared experiences by African American women (Hill-Collins, 2000).

A collective consciousness is not only developed through the incidents that African American women are currently going through; it also encompasses the history of our ancestors who endured slavery, reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement. Although African American women living today did not live through the pain and injustice of slavery, the sting of racism and sexism are still manifested through political, social, and professional outlets. For example, my grandmother was born during the Jim Crow Era. She used to tell me stories of blatant forms of racism when she would have to use "colored" restrooms, water fountains, and entrances while living in North Carolina, and she had to use a back door or servant's entrance when living and working in Pennsylvania. Although she would have liked to spend more time with her family and wanted to do more with her life than be a domestic servant, she informed me that there were not many opportunities available for her because she was a Black woman. My mother, who lived through the Civil
Rights Movement, has told me stories of working and making less money than her White female coworkers who had the same education and less tenure on the job. In addition, she was passed over for promotions by Black men and White women, with her supervisors only telling her they did not believe she would be a good fit for the position.

Many years after my mother’s and grandmother’s experiences, while working for a school district as a manager, it was in my job responsibilities to attend a monthly administrators’ meeting. My supervisor informed me of my job duties prior to starting the position, but it was not until two months into my position that I was told to attend the meetings. During each meeting the members were asked to provide updates on our schools and programs. As one of perhaps five African Americans working in the district, and the only African American female administrator, I felt uncomfortable sharing because of a comment someone once said to me. I was told that I was a smart young lady. Although that was meant as a compliment, I felt that it was said as if being a smart and educated African American woman was a phenomenon. Outside the office many administrators socialized at lunch and at weekend parties. The men would also frequently play golf. I was never invited to lunch, only received an invitation
to the manager’s Christmas party, and was asked to assist during the golf fundraisers. Although these experiences were not as blatant as my mother’s or grandmother’s, they were still forms of racism and sexism, just manifested in a subtle way.

No two experiences for African American women are identical, but the institution of slavery established a system in which we have continued to be marginalized and oppressed based on race, sex, and class. Although overt racism still exists, it has now shifted from obvious forms of expression to subtle tones of oppression.

Being female did not excuse African American women from the brutalities of slavery. hooks (1981) indicates “the Black male slave was primarily exploited as a laborer in the fields; the Black female was exploited as laborer in the fields, a worker in the domestic household, a breeder, and as an object of White male sexual assault” (p. 22). Black women worked alongside Black men, endured the abuse, and also faced rape by their slave masters. They witnessed their children being sold into bondage and were often forced to mother White children while neglecting their own. African American women endured the same pain and the added burden of sexual abuse.
After Reconstruction and during Jim Crow, it was a difficult time for most African Americans to adjust into White American society. A history of racism and sexism had been constructed, and African Americans were constantly fighting the system that had institutionalized these isms. An issue that both African American men and women faced was confronting stereotypes. Black men were perceived as unintelligent, lustful savages. Black women had several images to contend with as well. They were perceived as Mammies, Jezebels, Matriarchs and Sapphires to name only a few. The Mammy image was "the icon of benign, uncomplaining maternal servitude" (Jackson, 2005, p. 44); the Jezebel was a promiscuous woman and considered overt with her sexual escapades. The Matriarch was the bossy woman who controlled everyone and everything, and the Sapphire image was an evil and bitter, the opposite of Mammy.

Black Women and Double Jeopardy

African American women are placed in a double bind. Added to the two-ness DuBois' spoke of defining double-consciousness, women had the added pressure of gender politics, the term double-consciousness was later reconstructed to describe isms experienced by African
American women. Frances Beale (1969) coined the term "double jeopardy" and used it to describe how African American women experienced racism and sexism in a capitalist society. "The system of capitalism (and its afterbirth...racism) under which we all live, has attempted by many devious ways and means to destroy the humanity of all people and particularly the humanity of Black people" (p. 1). She explores social and political concepts as they apply to the development of the identity of African American women in society. The term double jeopardy has since been redeveloped to multiple jeopardy, acknowledging that more than race and gender contribute to the construction of one’s identity and affect both their group and personal ideologies. The phrase double jeopardy eventually became the beacon concept for Black Feminism.

The Black women’s experiences yielded to the concepts of Black feminism. The African American feminists’ concepts multiple jeopardy and multiple consciousnesses indicated the similarities of African American women is life experiences (Houston, 2000). Created by and for African American women, Black feminism manifested itself in response to both the Civil Rights and Women’s Liberation Movements. At its simplest explanation, during the Civil Rights and Women’s Movements, African American
women had the choice of either siding with Black men and being supporters, or even helpmates, of the Civil Rights Movement, or choosing to be with other women or White women for gender liberation. Unfortunately, there did not seem to be an outlet for both racial and gender equality for African American women.

"The Black woman likewise was manipulated by the system, economically exploited, and physically assaulted" (Beale, 1969, p. 1). African American women faced the dilemma that the Civil Rights Movement primarily was focused and Gaared towards the rights of Black men, thus creating a sexist undertone within the movement. In the other corner of the Women's Liberation Movement, many of the White women who participated were considered racist. "Contemporary Black women felt they were asked to choose between a Black movement that primarily served the interests of Black male patriarchs and a women's movement that primarily served the interests of racist White women" (hooks, 1981, p. 9). Some of the White women in the movement had African American women working for them, and many of them viewed Black men as both physically and sexually aggressive. Essentially, White women could not identify with the needs and struggles of African American women. Black feminist thought was developed as a way to
focus on the desires, needs, and experiences of African American women not addressed by either the Civil Rights or Women’s Liberation Movements.

The different experiences as well as needs between Black women and White women essentially separates feminism from Black feminism. In Torrey’s (1979) article, she outlines the following issues that led to a definite conflict of interest between the African American women and White women during the women’s liberation movement:

- **Double oppression:** African American women are sexually, racially and economically oppressed.
- **Femininity and Sexual Abuse:** Rape and sexual abuse by Caucasian male slave owners victimized Black women.
- **Segregation:** Legalized segregation did not allow for African Americans and Caucasian women to associate.
- **Homemaker dependency:** White women sought an alternative to the traditional female homemaker role. Many African American women worked to contribute to the stability of the family.
- **Black versus White Movement:** White women viewed all men as defenders of sexism while African American women, who were being oppressed under the same system as African American men, viewed White men as the perpetrators. (p. 2)
As the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum, so did the Women's Liberation Movement. White women wanted to obtain equal rights with men, yet the goal was not clearly defined. They wanted to set aside the rights and privileges and concepts of femininity that defined White womanhood for equality because not all men were treated equal. This was not possible for Black women because of the situation that capitalism created. They were earning money and making a living in defined roles as domestic servants in many of the White women's homes. Some also worked in the fields, mills, and plants alongside men. This was a necessity in order to put food on their tables and clothes on their families' backs. During this time African American women made up the majority of working class Blacks. Essentially the luxuries of 'White' femininity were not afforded to Black women. Therefore, "the reality of the degrading and dehumanizing jobs that were relegated to us quickly dissipated this mirage of 'womanhood'" (Beale, 1969, p. 1).

Feminism and Black Feminism

There are three basic principles of feminism. The first is to take a cognizant position against the slander of women and misogyny. Second is to have a belief that the
sexes are both biologically as well as culturally equally constructed, and the third is to have a desire for a truly general conception of humanity. In addition, themes such as objectifying women, the views of a patriarchal society, and stereotyping are explored in feminism.

According to bell hooks, feminism is a commitment to end domination that permeates such ideologies of race, sex, and class. It is not just a movement to obtain equal rights for women or a struggle to end male chauvinism: but it is also a dedication to the belief that individuals in Western society can evolve pass financial growth and materialistic desires (2003). Feminism can be seen as a social theory as well as a political movement. Theoretically, feminism in the social realm focuses on understanding such concepts as inequality, sexuality, and power. The political aspect focuses on taking action, protesting, critiquing, or writing; the goal is to actively fight all forms of oppression.

There are many themes within Black feminism. One scholar believes that there are two core themes, controlling negative images and defining one’s self in spite of the multiple stings of oppression. In addition, promoting a healthy self-esteem amongst African American women is an important goal of Black feminism. It is
believed that a history of racist and sexist acts that have marginalized African American women has generated a negative self-image for Black women. hooks believes that “Unfortunately, the devaluation of Black womanhood has wreaked havoc on the Black female’s ability to cultivate a healthy self-esteem” (hooks, 2003). These concepts help to construct a group cultural identity for Black women.

Hill-Collins outlines five distinguishing features of Black feminist thought. The first feature Hill-Collins examines is the link between activism and Black women’s oppression. Black women participate in a dialectical between their oppression and the need to act. As long as Black women are marginalized and subordinated due to intersecting factors, such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, an activist response will be needed.

The second feature is that there is a tension between experience and ideas. Although Black women share common experiences, neither the types of experiences nor their degrees are identical. “Despite the common challenges confronting U.S. Black women as a group, diverse responses to these core themes characterize U.S. Black women’s knowledge and standpoints” (Hill-Collins, 2000, p. 25). One must take into consideration not only race and gender but other factors such as religion, ethnicity, sexual
orientation, marital status, education, and residential region. Therefore, suggesting that it is possible to reach a collective understanding of Black feminist ideologies, one must realize and accept that there is not just one Black female voice but many voices.

Making sure that the collective experiences of Black women create a group standpoint or collective knowledge and understanding is the third distinguishing factor of Black women’s thought. Hill-Collins (2000) indicates that there is a dialogical relationship between oppression and activist, which is in contrast to the dialectical relationship. “On both the individual and the group level, a dialogical relationship suggests that changes in thinking may be accompanied by changed actions and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a changed consciousness” (p. 30).

The fourth distinguishing feature of Black women’s thought is that Black women intellectuals are essential in the role of bringing about social change. Black feminist thought as a social theory and practice cannot be static is the fifth distinguishing feature of Black women’s thought. Knowledge must be put into practice, and as social conditions change, the concepts must evolve and the actions must change along with it.
Although Black feminism was developed as a result of racial and sexual oppression against African American women, and is solidified through shared experiences, not all Black women are Black Feminists. Black feminism can find allies in Black men, Whites and individuals from other ethnicities and cultures. In addition, one does not become a Black feminist solely based on gender and race identification. While Black women share the identification of both gender and race, not all experiences are the same. The thoughts, beliefs, and experiences of Black women develop multiple and broader understandings of Black feminist thought, therefore creating various standpoints.

Cultural Identity Construction

One cannot examine Black Feminist thought without exploring how both racial and/or ethnic identities are socially constructed and negotiated. The basic concept of cultural identity is how people identify with various aspects of their lives, based on values, beliefs, norms, and practices. These aspects influence a person’s collective and individual identities that are defined by such social groups as race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. Identifying with a group provides people with senses of belonging and
inclusiveness. The bonds of identity for some may be deeply or loosely rooted, depending on which aspect of one’s identity is being addressed. For minorities who have been marginalized, identifying with others who have shared their experiences usually provides a sense of common ground and an inherent connection in a culturally divided society.

The theory of cultural identity addresses various aspects of how culture is constructed in our society. It looks at how race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation contribute to a person’s identity. An approach that is used to examine cultural identity is the post-colonialist perspective. Coincided with post-modernism, a post-colonial perspective allows one to examine culture and identity in relation to power. Most minorities have in fact been colonized by an oppressive dominant culture and made the other. Hill-Collins (2000) indicates “domination encompasses structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power. These domains constitute specific sites where oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation mutually construct one another” (p. 203). Post-colonialism expresses the historical role that dominant groups and their assertion of power have played in the social
development of those who are marginalized in our society. This is an important concept because it allows room to suggest that history is deeply embedded in how our society has formed and perpetuated isms, such as racism and sexism, as well as phobias, such as homophobia.

Collier and Thomas’s (1988) Cultural Identity Theory also addresses the idea that White privilege is still prominent in the United States as a problem and affects minorities from a historical perspective. White privilege is the concept that benefits are automatically given to White people in our society, privileges that have neither been earned nor deserved and that are not given to the minority groups in our society. Collier and Thomas also offer an interpretation of African American identity construction. They indicate that aspects such as speech, codes, community, and core symbols help to construct African American identity. “According to the authors, African Americans identify with an ethnic culture, a social organization, with a common sense of ancestry, tradition, aesthetics, and values that coalesce around racial characteristics” (Jackson, 2005, p. 59).

The theory also suggests that while individual experiences contribute to one’s cultural identity, collective experiences and social structures contribute to
it as well. This theory allows for the idea that historical actions against various groups of people, whether racially, religiously, or otherwise driven, affect the culture of today. It not only contributes to the marginalization of non-dominant groups, but it perpetuates the authority and power a dominant group has in a society.

Both race and gender in their historical contexts have helped to develop a Black cultural identity that it explains how the social construction of many Black women contributes to the core sense of self and influences their individual identities. "Black women experience womanhood in the context of Blackness; they do not experience their gender and ethnic identities as separate ‘parts’ of who they are" (Houston, 2000, p. 11). Although most American cultural traditions look at identity as an either/or dichotomy, Black feminist thought seeks to view aspects such as race and gender as with/and/also they are connected. By doing so, this suggests that gender and race cannot be separated in one’s identity.

African American Cultural Identity

An important part of identity is one’s self-esteem and positive self-image. Factors such as racism and sexism contribute to a negative self-image of minorities. hooks
explores the deeper aspects of Black cultural identity by looking at, in general, the self esteem of African Americans. hooks examines the roots of racism and sexism, which helps to give historical context to the development of Black cultural identity, especially for African American women. She states, "Unfortunately the devaluation of Black womanhood has wreaked havoc on the Black female's ability to cultivate healthy self-esteem" (hooks, 2003, p. 129). Because African American females were sexually taken advantage of dating back to slavery, images were created of them being overly sexualized, thus sociologically demoralized. This is a negative and less valued image in comparison to the innocence of Euro-American women; thus it affects the psychology and self-esteem of African American women today.

"Black women's lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African-American women with our objectification as the Other" (Collins, 2000, p. 99). Stevens (1997) focuses on the development of the African American female identity. It argues that racism and oppression affect the cultural make-up of African American women. Stevens (1997) states, "The development of identity in African Americans encompasses
behavioral and psychological responses that mediate, 
negotiate, and repudiate oppressive conditions" (p. 2). 
Although the article primarily examines the lives of poor 
African American females, it does briefly conceptualize 
the definitions of gender identity as well as suggest that 
the cultural make-up of African American females is 
complex because they do not belong to the dominant White 
male culture.

Identity in general starts when one is a very young 
age. Of course, genetics play a role in developing one’s 
identity, but the events that occur in our lives 
contribute to that identity as well. Carter (1996) 
explores whether or not there is a relationship between 
racial and gender identity of African American and 
Euro-American women. He finds that there is a relationship 
between the gender and racial identity of African American 
women, but there appeared to be no relationship between 
racial and gender identity of White women. White women who 
cannot differentiate between their gender and racial 
identity are a product of White privilege. If one cannot 
see a difference and how each part affects their lives and 
contributes to societal norms, it is my belief that one 
identity must not face the same challenges and therefore 
does not surface equally.
There are many other aspects that influence cultural identity. Historical events even affect the development of cultural identity. Such events are the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement, which are only a few of the events that have contributed to collective cultural identity. Although some people may not have experienced these life-altering events first hand, the events still provide people with ways to identify with one another.

Media and Identity

The media is another aspect that plays an important part at defining what is accepted and not accepted in our society. "Radio, television, film, and other products of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our very identities, our sense of selfhood, our notion of what it means to be male or female, our sense of class, of ethnicity, of race, of nationality, of sexuality, of 'us' and 'them'" (Kellner, 1995, p. 5).

Chavez and Guido-Debrito (1999) provide an appealing explanation and models of both racial and ethnic identity development. Parham (1989) each generally, and ironically, examines the progression of African American, and how the perceptions of others affect the perception of self, while
Helms developed the first model for Euro-American Identity development. Parham indicates that racial identity development for African Americans is a continuous process and changes throughout life.

As previously mentioned, Helms offers a model for Euro-American Identity development. Her model, "Presupposes the existence of White superiority and individual, cultural, and institution racism" (Chavez & Guido-Debrito, 1999, p. 42). Helm’s model generally states that a Euro-American will move from a racist way of thinking to a point where he or she will find a non-racist identity. This is done through interracial interaction. Although the conclusions are primarily used to provide concepts for relationships between racial and ethnic minorities, the chapter discusses the complexities of both racial and ethnic identity development, particularly in the United States.

Chavez and Guido-Debrito (1999) provide models for ethnic identity development, as well as the aforementioned models of racial identity development. They state that according to Torres, "Ethnic Identity is developed from shared culture, religion, geography, and language of individuals who are often connected by strong loyalty and kinship as well as proximity" (Chavez & Guido-Debrito,
1999, p. 42). They give credit to Katz's model of ethnic identity that identifies various values and perspectives of Euro-Americans, some of which seem to stem from Hall's concepts of high-low context cultures and the concepts of monochronic time and polychronic time.

Torres, Howard-Hamilton, and Cooper (2002) provide a theoretical framework of oppression as well as discuss the impact socialization plays in identity development. They indicate that, "Oppressed people develop this through processes when their internalized ideas are not their own but rather are thoughts prescribed by others to subjugate them" (p. 9). It indicates that oppression consists of six important premises: (1) Pervasiveness, the insidious character of inequality entwined throughout all aspects of our society; (2) restricting, representing the barriers that influence an individual's "life chances, and sense of possibility" (p. 20), (3) hierarchical, groups who have power usually are unaware that they benefit from the subordination of others; (4) complex, multiple, cross-cutting relationships, privileged people have relationships that cross social groups; (5) internalized, by both the oppressed and oppressors; and (6) manifested by such isms as classism, sexism, racism, and heterosexism. The article also briefly mentions that the
oppressions in cultural identity development affect the self-esteem of those oppressed.

Contemporary Rhetorical Theories

The overall concept of identification is that in order to persuade someone you must have some connection or similarities with that person or group. Foss, Foss, and Trapp (2002) indicate that at the center of identification is division, and at its core is the reason for rhetoric, "an attempt to bridge the conditions for estrangement that are natural and inevitable (p. 193).

Burke pinpoints three basic functions of why people identify with one another. The first function is that identification is used as a means to an end. By using identification as a means to an end, one attempts to make a connection with an audience to create a certain outcome. Secondly, identification features the operation of the antithesis. Third is persuasion on the unconscious level. Using identification as an antithesis is uniting, despite differences, in order to oppose a certain individual or a group. The third function of identification is to persuade people on the unconscious level. Individuals and groups can be divided based on various characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexual orientation.
Making a connection with another is beneficial in order to improve the outcome of communication.

With different concepts of the meaning of rhetoric there are various approaches to rhetorical criticism. Brummett explores seven approaches, or schools of thought, to rhetorical criticism. They are: Marxist, visual, psychoanalytic, dramatistic/narrative, media centered, culture centered, and feminist.

Rhetorical Research

There have been many rhetorical studies to contribute to the dialogue of understanding African American women. From politics to standards of beauty, various rhetorical approaches have been applied to cultural artifacts in an attempt to empower marginalized groups. Examining issues, such as image and beauty, music and literature, attempt to discover and continue to develop the ideological concepts of African American womanhood.

Image and beauty are as issues of gender as well as race and appear not only in the discussion of sexism but also in various forms of racism. Although image and beauty are not direct elements of study that I will be exploring in the lyrics of the blues, discussing the importance of what defines beauty in America helps in order to
understand how stereotypical images have been constructed and continue to evolve in society.

All women are held to the same set of standards when measuring beauty. The gauge of beauty for women was and remains to be based on skin tone, hair texture, and body shape. Spellers highlights the thoughts of African American female scholars such as Hill-Collins (2000) and Banks (2000). She indicates, “Black women’s ideas about beauty and femininity are largely shaped through a discursive understanding of hierarchies based on hair texture and skin tone” (Spellers, 2000, p. 223). The closer an African American woman appears to being White, the more accepted she is in society. Fairer skin, long straight hair, and thin curvaceous figures were and remain the desired custom of beauty to which women are measured in the United States.

African American woman adapt to this expectation by altering their natural hair from tight and curly to long and straight. Banks (2000) addresses the issues of African American women and hair texture by interviewing over 100 African American women from various age groups from around the United States to discuss why hair matters. “Most of the girls and women in the individual interviews discussed the social, cultural, and personal reasons of why hair
matters" (p. 22). Banks also indicates that historically African American women have tried to adjust or assimilate to this standard of beauty. Prior to slavery, the tight and curly natural hair was often used to identify clans, hairstyles represented age range, and hair was used as a symbolic status in general. Enslaving Africans and bringing them to America where people had European images and characteristics automatically devalued the African look, "thus the pride and elegance that once symbolized curly and kinky hair immediately became a badge of racial inferiority" (p. 7). Banks' study helped to explore both gender and racial ideologies of African American women and outlined what and how African American women felt about the standards of beauty that were set within American society.

For many African American women, the way we wear our hair has become an unconscious and often cognizant political and/or rhetorical statement. It is not necessarily just a simple matter of choice. Spellers (2000) explores the concept of the way African American women choose to wear their hair as a rhetorical political statement. It was her primary goal "to examine the discursive formations that emerge as African American women define beauty and to describe the complex preverbal
Jackson (2005) dynamics that emerge for them as they engage in the process of constructing their corporeal representations, specifically their hair” (p. 224).

During the 1960s and the Black Power Movement, Black people, even sisters, wore their hair in Afros, shouted the phrase “Black is Beautiful,” and were tools in helping to create a positive public self image of African Americans (Banks, 2000, p. 43). The song I’m Black and I’m Proud, by James Brown carried the weight to help positively define African American identity. The goal was to have African Americans become proud of their naturally tightly curled hair that was deemed different and unacceptable in American society. Some believe that instead of offering just a way to easier manage one’s hair, instruments such as the straightening comb and hair products that straighten African type hair perpetuated the concept that to be White was right and to Black was unacceptable, therefore not beautiful.

Racist issues regarding the variety of African American skin tones are also reflected in the blues. Bourgeois (1996) indicates, “Racism in women’s blues lyrics is multidimensional” (p. 13). She indicates that the emergence of intraracial racism in a variety of ways. Some blues women will sing about preferring a
lighter-skinned man over one with a darker complexion, and another will sing that her man might have left her for a lighter woman. Alberta Hunter in many ways protests the controversy of light versus dark by indicating that in the bedroom it does not matter the complexion of the man in her song You Can’t Tell the Difference After Dark. The reality that issues such as this appear in the music indicates that African Americans co-opted White racism, generating racial prejudices within their ethnic group.

The controversy of image and beauty did not only exist in the music of the blues; it continues with such genres as hip-hop. Rap artists as well as the hip-hop culture in general come under much scrutiny for both their language when referring to women and the images they present in their videos. Male and female artists are subject to controversy for their rhetoric. The images within videos are part of the rhetoric of hip-hop because they convey meanings that are representative of the lyrics.

Many people want to place societal degradation on the morals of hip-hop, such as with the issue with Don Imus and his racist and sexist comments about the Rutgers Women’s basketball team. Some African American scholars examine hip-hop from an Afrocentric viewpoint. African
American female scholars also explore hip-hop from a Black feminist as well as hip-hop feminist perspective. Perry (2001) explores the images and identities of various women in hip-hop as well as the contradictions between the artists and images. Perry (2001) also argues, “that the tensions between feminism and female subjugation often reflect the tensions between artistic creation and record company image making and the artist as creator versus the artist as commodity” (p. 136).

Perry (2003) also acknowledges that there are intensely sexual images displayed in hip-hop presented by both the men and women, yet there is a feminist presence within the genre. “From Salt n Pepa to Queen Latifah to MC Lyte and others, there is a feminist legacy in hip-hop, and hip-hop feminism continues to exist despite the widespread objectification of Black female bodies” (Perry, 2003, p. 139). Mainstream media often overlooks artists such as Jill Scott, India Arie, and Alicia Keys because they do not promote the objectified image of women. Perry (2001) also acknowledges artists such as Missy Elliot and Lil’ Kim. Lil’ Kim and several other hip-hop artists present themselves as sexually charged women while Elliott crosses gender lines by wearing her tailored suit and fedoras. While some people would say that many African
American female artists such as Kim and Elliot objectify themselves and other women, one may claim that they make themselves and other African American women the subject by defining images for themselves.

Perry (2003) indicates that the place artists hold in the public sphere is multitextual. “Lyrics, interviews, music, and videos together create a collage often finely planned, out of which we are supposed to form impressions” (Perry, 2003, p. 141). Perry (2003) refers to Carby’s examination of women of the blues, “Carby’s article speaks to the tone, content, and goals that the blues singers asserted in their music and particularly to the ways in which constructing oneself as a sexual subject was a liberating act for them” (p. 525). This suggests that women of blues, as well as African American female hip-hop artists define their individual and public image rather than have mainstream society and/or White record producers construct images for them.

Pough (2004) explores how African American women in hip-hop fit into the public sphere and the concept of spectacle. She initially renegotiates Habermas’ concept of the public sphere as defined by various theorists of Black public culture in order to fully understand how intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality
further complicate understandings of the public sphere (p. 11). She also explores Black female cultural rhetoric, the role of women in hip-hop, and the meaning of "wreck." Pough (2004) also examines how Black women can claim a public voice in the era of hip-hop and challenges "Black feminism to look at the effect rap's constructions of masculinity and femininity have had on Black women rappers and other young Black women" (p. 12).

Brooks (2003) also examines African American women in the public sphere. She specifically asks how hip-hop artists Miss Elliot and Lil' Kim present themselves in the public as a construction of Black womanhood and whether or not they break the stereotypes or create new representations of African American women. Brooks (2003) acknowledges "Black women presenting themselves publicly must reconcile this historical baggage with the desire to express themselves freely in all their capacities" (p. 4). By looking at images in videos, lyrics, and photos in magazines such as Essence, Vibe, Honey, and Ebony Brooks concludes, "These images carry very real consequences" (2005, p. 28). Therefore, she is indicating that African American women who are in the public eye have a responsibility to other African American women in the
process of negotiating and reconstructing their group identity.

Within the public sphere African American women have been objectified and commodified through controlled images such as Jezebel, Mammy, Sapphire, and Matriarch. Stephens and Phillips (2003) explore images such as freaks, gold diggers, divas and dykes that have been reconstructed from previous stereotypes of African American women to fit into a more modern society. These images that Stephens and Phillips call sexual scripts were the foundation for newer stereotypes of African American women that include: gold digger, freak, diva, dyke, gangsta' bitch, sister savior, baby mama, and earth mother. They explain how the media has influenced all the stereotypical images of African American women, and as culture evolved and hip-hop became popular, stereotypes have been negotiated and reconstructed. They believe that “the African American female body and its attendant sexuality was recolonized by a new media elite that might include White or African American males or females in positions of power” (Stephens and Phillips, 2003, p. 13).

A damaging image that has been manifested and glorified in society is that of Mammy. St. John (2001) explores the cultural fantasy of Mammy and how the
stereotype continues “in the context of the cultural construction of Whiteness” (p. 129). She does this primarily by studying both the literary and cinematic adaptation of Gone With the Wind. St. John not only explores the visual representation of Mammy; she also examines the literary description of Mammy. The literal depiction of Mammy in the book describes her as an animalized, larger than life, Black woman who is so devoted to her White employer and their children that she is threatening to other Black servants. St. John acknowledges the commodification of Mammy through commercial items such as cookie jars, mugs, and doorstops, and the modernization of the Mammy image through Aunt Jemima. St. John proposes, “that the social system of race represents such a stress point and that Mammy is erected to sooth the strain” (2001, p. 138).

Givens and Monahan (2005) examine how the media influences controlled images of African American women. They conducted a comparative study that tested how quickly or slowly people respond to African American and White women based on negative and positive words. They hypothesized “that mediated images of African American women activate specific African American female schemas and make them salient for subsequent information
processing” (Givens & Monahan, 2005, p. 90). Their hypothesis is based on Devine’s research that argues stereotyping is automatic and controlled. The research suggests that society shares the basic assumption of social groups, such as all Black men are trouble. When people interact with individuals from a member of that socialized group, the stereotype(s) automatically appear. The second process is how one decides to react to the stereotype that has appeared. To conduct their research Givens and Monahan (2005) subjected participants to watching media clips of Mammy and Jezebel. Participants completed a Likert Scale to indicate whether or not they agreed or disagreed with various personality features. The characteristics they assigned to Mammy were ones such as nurturing, maternal, loyal, tender protective, patient, and caring. Givens and Monahan assigned the following characteristics to Jezebel: (1) sexual; (2) alluring; (3) erotic; (4) calculating; (5) exotic; (6) vain; (7) seductive; (8) forward and (9) sensual (2005, p. 93).

Purnell (2002) explores the life and lyrics of Billie Holiday and how she responded to racism and classism through her public image and in her lyrics. In addition he looks at Holiday’s life through her autobiography, documented interviews and public appearances. Touching on
various controlled images, such as Mammy, Jezebel, Tom, and Matriarch. Purnell (2002) specifically examines the role of the tragic mulatto. Purnell notes that Holiday spoke out against racism in her song *Strange Fruit*. Known as "Lady Day," Holiday was an outspoken African American blues and jazz singer who exemplified the language of the blues to speak out against racism.

Bourgeois (1996) postulates that racism appears in various forms in women’s blues lyrics. It appears as interracial racism with the emergence of the image controversy, that is light complexion versus darker skin tone in men and women. In addition, Bourgeois indicates that African American women were not the subject/object of the racism sung about in the blues, rather the focus was on the experiences of African American men.

Racism and classism are often bundled together with lyrics expressing how the women cannot cook a sufficient meal or keep the house in order because their men do not bring home enough money to support the family. Their frustrations are not directed at the men not bringing home the money but the system that is set in place that does not provide African American men the financial means to adequately take care of their homes. Another way racism and classism are bundled in the lyrics of women’s blues is
the attention that is given to the oldest profession in the world, prostitution. Many women sing about getting paid, finding a John, or just getting by, as a necessity, not as a desire.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Artist Selection

The first step in choosing artists was to create a list of African American female blues singers based on personal knowledge, Internet research, and books on the blues. From that list I narrowed the names to women who performed and recorded between 1920s and 1930s. The next process was to explore which artists wrote lyrics for themselves and other performers. There were many female blues singers during time, many of whom were considered classic blues artists. A lot of the women were interpreters of other writers and not songwriters themselves. Several artists were also songwriters, but they did not write enough songs from which to select. The next step was to explore what information had been written about these blues artists. I found the most popular to be ‘Ma’ Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holliday. Other artists such as Ida Cox, Sippie Wallace, and Mammie Smith were popular, but they did not gain the height of mainstream popularity as Rainey, Smith, and Holliday but were part of the 1960s and 1970s blues revival.
I chose artists based on their song lyric portfolios, women who had varying degrees of mainstream popularity, had different musical talents, were representative of different types of blues, and performed jazz. The artists whom I chose are Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Memphis 'Guitar' Minnie, Alberta Hunter, and Victoria Spivey. Having lived through Jim Crow and worked in the sexist music industry, all of these women faced various hardships due to racism and sexism that should be reflected in various ways in their music. "Much of the sadness in blues music reflected the shattered hopes of a people who had escaped slavery only to find a world in which freedom was still just a mirage" (Jackson, 2005, p. 17).

Although all of these women are classified as blues artists, each has a different style and talent, which may have caused them to be classified outside of the classic blues genre. "Ma" Rainey was considered the "Mother of the Blues" and a classic blues artist; she is credited as being Bessie Smith's mentor and was openly bisexual. Rainey's sexual orientation creates an added factor in her experiences and dealings with oppression, which may be reflected in her lyrics.

Memphis Minnie was considered more of a country blues artist and was well known for her guitar playing. In a
subgenre dominated by male guitar blues players, Minnie hustled to make herself known and recognized as a force in that subgenre of blues. Alberta Hunter co-wrote the groundbreaking song for Bessie Smith, *Down Hearted Blues*. She had a successful career singing both blues and jazz. After getting out of show business, around the age of 80 Hunter returned to singing after she retired from a nursing job. Victoria Spivey was not only a writer, but she owned a recording company in her later years. She wrote many songs not only for herself but for many other artists, both men and women. The biographies of these women are detailed in Chapter 4.

**Texts Interpretation**

The theoretical framework I will use to interpret the text is rhetorical criticism from an Afrocentric feminist perspective. In James and Sharpley-Whiting (2000), Collins is cited as believing that “since Black women have access to both the Afrocentric and the feminist standpoints, an alternative epistemology used to rearticulate a Black women’s standpoint reflects elements of both traditions” (p. 190). The purpose of conducting Black feminist analysis is to explore what it means to be an African American woman as it is reflected in such fields as
literature, music, theater, media, and academia. These reflections embody the actuality that racial, sexual, and class politics are interlocked and are manifested in everyday society (Bobo, 2001, p. 9).

As previously noted, rhetoric has several meanings. Traditionally rhetoric was concerned with the art of persuasion and the elements of presenting a speech. The Sophist would say that the function of rhetoric is to persuade others while participating in a democratic society, and Plato would say that the function of rhetoric is to flatter or mislead people. But the general function of influence essentially remains the same (Brummett, 2006, p. 49). Rhetorical criticism should educate, should challenge individuals as scholars, and should help one to grow intellectually as well as personally. It also should help us to further our knowledge as well as assist in understanding how we relate to the world.

As outlined in Chapter Two, Rhetoric and Criticism, Brummett describes seven schools of thought or approaches to rhetorical critique: Marxist, psychoanalytic, framatistic/narrative, visual, media-centered, culture-centered, and feminist. Based on these concepts, for the purposes of this paper, I will be using a combination of culture-centered and feminist approaches to
examine the lyrics of African American blues artists' songs. The Afrocentric perspective encompasses a culture-centered approach in this research. Although Afrocentrism and feminism have different ideologies, each approach is grounded in the theoretical concepts of ideological critique, and they share many concepts. Therefore, I will be using several steps of ideological criticism.

Foss indicates, "When rhetorical critics are interested in rhetoric primarily for what it suggests about beliefs and values, their focus is on ideology" (p. 239). She also indicates that groups whose members are mutually independent as well have a collective desire and/or problem have shared ideologies (p. 240). Therefore, defining the values and beliefs that present themselves in an artifact is essential to feminist critique.

Sillars and Gronbeck (2000) refer to Stuart Hall, saying that, "Understanding ideology, basically as the 'pattern of ideas, belief systems, or interpretive schemes found in a society or among specific social group'" (p. 263). Sillars and Gronbeck continue to look at how ideological formations reflect power relations. Exploring power relations is important in cultural and feminist critique. Foss describes three types of power relations
resulting from ideologies: political, social, and relational/interpersonal. Each power relationship has the ability to influence thoughts, decision, and actions of others by some means. Political power can do so through enacting laws or having control over group and individual rights. Social power can do so through race, ethnicity, and gender, as well as social hierarchies and caste-type relationships (p. 263). Exploring the aspects of power relationships will help to identify the political, social, and relational status of African American women.

Ideological critiques look first to describe the ideology that is embodied in the artifact. They seek to answer questions regarding membership, activities, goals, values and norms, positions and group relations, and resources. Foss (2004) indicates that upon identifying the ideological nature, one should be able to answer the following questions regarding the ideology of the artifact:

What is the preferred reading of the artifact? What does the artifact ask the audience to believe, understand, feel or think about? What arguments are being made in the artifact and for what? What are the particular characteristics, roles, actions, or ways of seeing being commended in the artifact? What
values or general conceptions of what is and is not
good are suggested? What are the assumptions or
premises of the artifact? What doesn’t the artifact
want the audience to think about? What ways of seeing
does it ask the audience to avoid? What alternative
interpretations of the world are possible to the one
offered by the ideology in the artifact? What does
the artifact suggest is unacceptable, negative,
undesirable, marginal or insignificant? (p. 245)
I will be incorporating several variations of these
questions in my analysis of the text, which will allow me
to answer the proposed research questions.

Culture-centered critique is a form of ideological
criticism. Sillars and Gronbeck (2000) classify cultural
studies as race-class-gender studies. They suggest that
ideological critique helps one understand his or her
identity while helping to better relate to others.
“Discourses that ideologically construct relationships
between White and Black, rich and poor, male and female,
reveal the particular (power-centered) arrangements in
operation and provide the linked groups with
identities-understanding of who they are, a
self-consciousness” (p. 272). Cultural studies that
explore aspects of race, gender, and class and even sexual orientation can assist in enhancing group identity.

An Afrocentric concept of ideological critique studies artifacts from an African rooted perspective. Sillars and Gronbeck indicate that "raced discourse was being defined in those days as grounded in both sociocultural circumstances and a morally driven ideology that allowed an ethnic people to rework their relationship with White America and to reconstruct their own identity" (p. 273). An Afrocentric approach places African values at the center of the analysis, and it "identifies a number of ideas, or tenets, that are especially important in African cultures and that must therefore be incorporated into the methods used to study cultures ground in an African heritage" (Brummett, 2006, p. 205).

Brummett outlines methods used to study artifacts: unity and harmony, orality, and signifying. An Afrocentric approach values unity and harmony, and has the goal to create a sense of balance amongst dissonance, and looks at what artifacts mean based on shared group experiences. Orality is another idea central to an Afrocentric approach to rhetoric. African cultures often value orators who pass on traditions and history through storytelling. Africans value the power of the spoken word. A third strategy of
Afrocentric centered rhetoric is signifying, which is "a strategy for obscuring the apparent meaning, a way to colonize a White sign and make it have a meaning appropriate one's own culture" (p. 208). Therefore a rhetorical critic will explore whether or not an artifact has a double meaning.

Another form of ideological criticism is feminist critique. "Feminist criticism has emerged as one method by which scholars engage in research designed to intervene in the ideology of domination" (Foss, 2004, p. 157). Foss indicates that there are two steps in feminist criticism: analyzing the identity construction in the artifact and exploring what the artifact suggests dominant ideology is constructed and maintained, or how it can be changed and/or confronted. The first step of feminist critique is to analyze how women and femininity are depicted in the text. Also, one must identify with how the audience/women are positioned, whether they are placed as the object or the subject. The next step is to see how identity is constructed in the text. Is the presented identity positive or negative and does it objectify or subjectify women.

Black feminist criticism encompasses both Afrocentric and feminist perceptions of analysis. Although there are
several Black feminist cultural critics, it is difficult to find one outlined process of how to conduct a Black feminist critique. Essentially, Black feminist critique focuses on the goals of African American women and the ability to empower not only African American women but people who have been traditionally oppressed and marginalized in society. Bobo (2001) indicates that “two significant purposes are key in Black feminist criticism: to intervene strategically in privileged discourses that attempt to undervalue the merits of Black women’s creative work and to advance the causes of Black women and those of others at risk of oppression” (p. xviii).

Black feminist cultural criticism looks at issues and works of those whose cultural works are usually marginalized. Often the artifact generated by African Americans and women are overlooked when conducting rhetorical criticism. Placing marginalized artifacts at the center of research often helps to bring light to various unrecognized works. According to Davis (1998), “A Black feminist approach to rhetorical criticism celebrates identities within and oppressive, socially-constructed reality” (p. 1). In addition, Bobo (1998) states “A Black feminist approach to literature that embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well as the
politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers is an absolute necessity” (p. 9).

Conclusion

The goal of this research is to combine each of the aforementioned approaches in rhetorical criticism in order to analyze the texts. The first step will be to define the ideological concepts in the texts. In order to do so, I will explore who creates the texts and explore which groups they identify with. I will be looking for evidence of double jeopardy, therefore, searching for words that may signify issues of race, gender, and class. These signs may not be blatant; therefore, it is necessary to read beyond the written words and decipher how the lyrics help to define the Black female experience. An additional aspect that I will be exploring is the evidence of stereotypical images of African American women, specifically Mammy, Sapphire, Matriarch, and Strong Black Woman. Again, these images may not be directly stated in the lyrics.

Based on the process of feminist and cultural critique, I will first identify the primarily audience of the blues artists during that time. I will explore what
the lyrics want the audience to believe about race, ethnicity, gender, and class. In addition, I will examine how the lyrics suggest African American women cope with issues of double jeopardy. Exploring what images of African American women are represented in the lyrics and examining what the images represented say and want the audience to believe about African American women is the next step in the process. What standpoint is presented in the texts? Finally, I will explore whether or not any alternative interpretations of the work can be conducted. To apply an Afrocentric approach, I will be looking for double meanings within the words. I will also recognize the importance of blues as a form of communication and view the singers as orators who are informing others about life as African American women.
CHAPTER FOUR

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

Introduction

I have chosen to examine the lyrics of Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Memphis "Guitar" Minnie, Victoria Spivey, and Alberta Hunter. "The women who sang the blues did not typically affirm female resignation and powerlessness, nor did they accept the relegation of women to private and interior spaces" (Davis, 1998, p. 20). After dedicating their lives to singing and playing, many African American female blues artists found themselves with little royalties and a diminished fan base. Even in death, the contributions of artists such as Ma Rainey and Big Momma Thornton were dismissed. They were called laborers or housekeepers in their obituaries and on their death certificates, an act that testifies to both the racist and sexist atmosphere of the era.

Some blues women died too soon, but others such as Spivey and Hunter were fortunate enough to see a blues revival that helped to establish their legacies in blues and music history. Rainey, Minnie, Spivey, and Hunter represent a variety of Black female blues artists who struggled to become successful in a male-dominated...
business that reflected the patriarchal society in which they lived. Their contributions to the genre of blues provided joy and entertainment for many people. These four women are just a few women who have paved the way for all female artists. Their biographies are as follows:

Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey (1882-1939)

'Ma' Rainey was born as Gertrude Pridgett in Columbus, Georgia. Her mother and father performed in minstrel shows, which explains Rainey's interest in performing. She started her musical career at the age of 14 in vaudeville and travelled throughout the South, singing, acting, and dancing. At the age of 28 Rainey married a fellow performer, William "Pa" Rainey. This is when she became known as the infamous "Ma Rainey." She and her husband were part of the most popular minstrel groups of the South, Rabbit Foot Minstrels. They were billed as "Assassinators of the Blues." Ma and Pa toured together throughout the South for several years.

Many people say that Rainey set the example of a blues woman; "she seemed to embody freedom, and in this embodiment established an archetype for the women in music who followed her: the 'stubborn woman'; the 'bad woman'; the 'wild woman' of the blues" (Jackson, 2005, p. 16).
Although this was not the desired image for a woman to maintain, the persona of the blues women helped to give a voice to many young African American women searching for a place in a bigoted and chauvinistic society. It is said that Rainey’s personal life mirrored her stage persona. When Rainey started recording, her record company gave her the title “The Paramount Wildcat.” It was her unrestricted ways and uncompromising attitude that made Rainey so interesting. “She was a folk hero whose private life was a topic of conversation among her fans, and Rainey’s onstage personality was enhanced only by her performances offstage” (p. 16).

Although Rainey was a married woman, it was no secret that she took pleasure in extramarital relations with young men and women. Her bisexuality was reflected through her public image as well as in her music. Rainey often wore pant suits which were considered male clothing at the time. In the song “Prove It On Me,” the lyrics are as follows (Davis, 1998, p. 41):

Wear my clothes just like a fan
Talk to the gals just like any old man
Cause they say I do it, ain’t nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it one men
Jackson recounts a story of Rainey being arrested for having an indecent party. Police were called to her party by neighbors who heard loud noises and found "Rainey and several naked young women in flagrante delicto" (2005, p. 18). *Flagrante delicto* is a Latin term that describes being caught having sex. After Rainey's mother and sister died and the blues market weakened, Rainey went back to Columbus, Georgia. She bought and managed two theaters until she died from heart disease in 1939.

**Alberta Hunter (1895-1984)**

Often remembered as a jazz singer, Hunter was once billed "Alberta Prima Donna of the Blues," and in her elder years was named "Grandma of the Blues." Born in Memphis, Tennessee, Hunter ran away from home at the age of 14 and headed for Chicago. After arriving in the city, Hunter worked as a potato peeler for a friend's employer. In 1910 at the age of 15 Hunter tried to get jobs as a singer in clubs, but she was turned away because of her age. Hunter altered her look by dressing older and wearing more make-up in order to appear more womanly. She was soon hired as a singer at "Dago Franks, a hangout for prostitutes and pimps" (Harrison, 1988, p. 203).
Soon Hunter began working at a sporting house that was frequented by high-class Black con men. Eventually Hunter became the headliner at “Dreamland Café,” which was known as a meeting place for the wealthy and a showplace for Black talent. Hunter was more than a singer; she was a composer. She, along with Lovie Austin, her pianist, wrote “Down Hearted Blues,” which became a hit for Bessie Smith, who recorded the song on Paramount (1988, p. 208).

In 1921 Hunter made her first recording with Black Swan. Her musical style was similar to dance hall and the foxtrot, which was the craze for White audiences. In 1922 Hunter was picked up by Paramount and recorded what some refer to as a cleaned-up version of the blues in order to make the genre more appealing to White America. By 1923 Hunter had taken to the stage as an actress and replaced Bessie Smith at the Apollo Theater in Harlem in the play How Come. By late 1924 Hunter began to record under a pseudonym, Alberta Prime, with the Biltmore label, where she sang with Duke Ellington’s band. She also recorded with Louis Armstrong and the Red Onion Jazz Babies on the Gennett label under the name of Josephine Beatty. In 1925 she began recording with Okeh records under her birth name.
In 1927 Hunter was on her way to Europe for several engagements. Like many young artists she found the European culture alluring, and she stayed. Soon she went to London and appeared as Queenie in Paul Robeson's *Show Boat*, and travelled between London and Paris for two years singing, jazz some blues, and show tunes in various night clubs, then she returned to America in 1929. The Stock Market Crash and the Depression did not stop Hunter from pursuing a career in music. She continued to tour and record with various bands and returned to Europe on a USO tour. Hunter withdrew from show business to take care of her sick mother after World War II. At the age of 59, she earned a certificate in nursing and worked as a nurse for over 20 years. The hospital retired Hunter when she was 81.

During this time Hunter refused to sing, but after her retirement from nursing she began to write songs again and took to the stage at The Cookery in New York in 1977. "In the span of six years, she wrote the soundtrack for the film *Remember My Name*, recorded an album of new and old blues, *The Glory of Alberta Hunter*, supervised reissues of her 1930's recordings and her 1934 London broadcasts, and appeared frequently on commercial and
public television while maintaining a long-running engagement at The Cookery" (Harrison, 1988, p. 217).

Hunter had a long, successful and versatile music career. Her complex experiences as a young Black woman contributed to her brilliance. "The characters met in her adolescent years left indelible images from which to draw for her lyrics. In that extra-legal society, she learned quickly how to fend for herself, when to hang in there and not be pushed around and when to pack up and move on" (p. 207). Hunter continued performing until her death in 1984.

Memphis ‘Guitar’ Minnie (1897-1973)

Born in 1897 as Lizzie Douglas, in Algiers, Louisiana, the artist was given the name Memphis Minnie by White record company personnel in 1929. She was known as "Kid" to her family. In 1904 Minnie’s family moved to Walls, Mississippi, a small town outside Memphis, Tennessee. Her family worked on the farm all of their lives, but sharecropping was not a fate Minnie saw for herself. Minnie was given a guitar in 1905 and was determined not to work on the farm. She would go to the now-famous Beale Street in Memphis every chance she had;
only returning to the farm when times were hard and funds were low.

Before starting her recording career, Minnie would perform throughout the South with various bands and companies. In 1915 Minnie started joined fellow guitarist Willie Brown in Bedford, Mississippi. In 1917 Minnie joined the Ringling Brothers traveling circus where she danced, played, and sang. In the early 1920’s Minnie moved to Memphis and worked as a street musician with the Beal Street Jug Band. Minnie married a fellow guitarist, Joe McCoy, in 1929, and they began recording with Paramount. This was when she was given the name “Memphis Minnie,” and McCoy was named Kansas Joe. Minnie and Joe recorded together for Columbia, Vocalition, Decca, Okeh, and Bluebird recording companies. For many years they travelled between Memphis, Chicago, and New York for their recording sessions.

During this time a female blues guitarist was a phenomenon. Picking strings was considered a talent reserved for men. Someone once said she played like a man. Meant as a comment, it was also a sexist remark regarding the perceived limited musical abilities of women. A popular blues tradition during the 1930’s in Chicago was having competitions among the guitar players. Minnie and
Big Bill Boonzy competed against one another one night in 1933. According to Boonzy in his autobiography, the audience deemed Minnie the winner, taking the price of a bottle of whiskey and a bottle of Gin, one of which Boonzy is said to have taken.

Minnie and Joe lived in Chicago during the early 1930s. In the mid 1930s the couple parted ways. Joe is rumored to have been a jealous man, and their breakup is said to have been in part because Minnie’s success. In 1935 Minnie began playing and recording for the talent scout and producer, Lester Melrose. During this time Minnie did not play the guitar much because she was backed up by a band. The country blues tradition was a guitarist playing rhythm, bass, and treble. Having a band that divided the parts left only the singing to the diva on stage.

In 1939 Minnie married another guitar player, Ernest Lawler, who was known as “Little Son Joe.” Minnie and Joe recorded together for several years. With interest in the blues waning, Minnie’s last recording was in 1949 with Regal Records. Minnie had a debilitating heart attack in 1957. She and Joe moved back to Memphis with her sister Daisy, who took care of them until Joe passed away in
1962. After Joe's death, Minnie went into a nursing home, where she stayed until she died at the age of 76 in 1973.

Victoria Spivey (1906-1976)

Victoria Spivey, who was also called Vickey, was born in 1906 into a family of vaudeville musicians in Houston, Texas. It was through them she developed her love of music. At the age of 7 she lost her father to a work-related accident. As a young girl Spivey played the piano and sang blues in shady nightclubs throughout Houston. By the age of 12 she obtained a job as a pianist for the Lincoln Theater in Houston, but she lost the job when the manager discovered she could not read music. Not giving up, Spivey went to find work in gay-houses, whiskey joints and brothels, wherever she found an opportunity to perform. She visited music halls regularly listening to singers such as Ma Rainey, Mammie Smith, and Ida Cox. "The satin-swathed bronze goddess, Cox, was her idol, inspiring Spivey to press on with a blues career" (Harrison, 1988, p. 149).

Spivey began to perform in towns throughout Texas and started to make a name for herself. According to Harrison (1988), Spivey had a distinctive voice. Her voice was edgy and forceful, which was accented with moans, or what she
called her "tiger squall," which became her signature sound on her recordings (p. 148). In addition to playing clubs, Spivey played at house parties. Supposedly, her idol Cox heard Spivey at one of these performances and was highly impressed. Cox asked Spivey to join her show, but for some unknown reason, Spivey did not accompany her idol on the road.

Soon to be 20, Spivey took the advice of a family member and headed for St. Louis. While there, she approached a talent scout with Okeh records who recognized Spivey's talent, and she released her first single in July 1926. Spivey wrote and recorded at least 38 songs in the next two years for Okeh records. When the stock market crashed, interest in the blues market took a turn as well. Spivey took to the theatrical stage, like many of her counterparts. Upon her debut, Spivey was labeled as the "Newest Star" by the Pittsburgh Courier for her performance in *Hits and Bits from Africana* that opened at the Lincoln Theater in New York in November 1927 (Harrison, 1988). The musical did so well that it went on the road, but at the first stop, Philadelphia, the road manager took notice of how successful the performances were going, lifted the receipts, and hit the road. This brought Spivey's first main theater endeavor to a halt.
Harrison (1988) indicates "Spivey’s seeming obsession with eerie subjects pervaded her next releases" (p. 155). The songs contained issues of murder, snakes, nightmares, and cocaine. Gambling with public interest, the company released the sides, but Spivey’s next releases were more lighthearted and notably erotic (p. 155). In several of the songs she had duets with Lonnie Johnson. The songs were "humorous and laden with double entendres." The pornographic lyrics are probably the only reason they were issued (p. 156).

In 1933 she met and managed Billy Adams, a Harlem dancer. After marrying, they created a dance-comedy act and became one of the major acts in a Broadway musical review Hellzapoppin. "During this period Spivey also performed in the company of such stellar musicians as Louis Armstrong and Bessie Smith" (Harrison, 1988, p. 158). Spivey and Adams parted ways in the early 1940s and she left show business. Harrison (1988) indicates "Subsequently the long slinky, satin gowns were replaced by ordinary street clothes as she turned to church for fulfillment. The boogie-woogie piano gave way to the organ and choir loft in the Brooklyn church where she served for about fifteen years" (p. 160).
The 1950s brought a new spark to Spivey’s life, Leanard Kunstadt, a young White jazz aficionado who gave her the ambition to take up music again. She toured in various blues revival concerts and also started her own business, The Victoria Spivey Recorded Legacy of the Blues. Spivey recorded talented older musicians who were considered washed up. During the blues revival, she called herself Queen Vee and performed at both the European and the American Folk Blues Festival in 1963 with long-time friend, Sippie Wallace, who was known as the Texas Nightingale. Spivey was also deemed the Texas Moaner. Spivey’s last major stage show was in 1963 with Mamie Smith, and in 1964 she recorded with an all-White blues band for the first time. “Blues was her business, and Victoria Spivey devoted nearly sixty years of her life to their development and promotion” (Harrison, 1988, p. 162). She died in 1976 at the age of 70.

Artists Summary

As the old cliché has it, “write what you know,” and if memory serves correctly, it was advice about fiction writing, but that guidance holds true for song writers as well. Rainey, Minnie, Spivey, and Hunter embody a number of African American women blues artists who had stunning
voice, poignant songs in their hearts and struggled to become successful in the music business. Most did not achieve the level of success that these women did, yet their offerings to the blues both soothed souls and elated spirits for many years. These four women are only a few of several female artists who have paved the way for all female artists.

The four songwriters analyzed here wrote about a rough and turbulent time and culture. Each artist was born in the racist south and dealt with Jim Crow as well as lived through the Great Depression. Both 'Ma' Rainey and Victoria Spivey grew up in homes that required them to travel and surrounded by music and entertainment, Rainey's parents being in minstrel shows, and Spivey's family being in vaudeville. No strangers to music, Spivey learned how to play the piano before she was ten and Minnie started playing the guitar at a very young as well.

Each artist had a desire to entertain and had the opportunity to perform on stages around the world. Not an easy business to break into, particularly for a woman, they all endured performing in sometimes rough and tumble place such as juke joints, brothels, and seedy night spots early in their careers, and early in their lives, as teenagers and young adults. Upon being picked up by
different record labels they provided a transcendental means of escape for many African Americans and eventually sang, danced, played, and acted their way into the lives and hearts of White American and European society.

While Spivey and Hunter both had careers after their time on stage and being sojourners of the blues, Minnie returned to her home to take care of her family and eventually had several health problems of her own. Rainey had the opportunity to own two theaters, but unfortunately died at relatively young age and did not have the pleasure of seeing a blues revival as Hunter and Spivey did. Each artist wrote songs that reflected their lives and stayed true to that old adage of “write what you know.” They carved a place in history with timeless and universal songs epitomizing the lives of Black woman in America.
CHAPTER FIVE
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis

As aforementioned in Chapter One, there are two purposes for this thesis. The first is to examine to what extent multiple jeopardy appears in the lyrics of the African American female blues artists, Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Alberta Hunter, Memphis Minnie, and Victoria Spivey. The second purpose of this thesis is to examine to what extent the stereotypical images of African American women, including Mammy, Sapphire, Strong Black Woman, and Matriarch, appear in the lyrics of the previously stated artists, based on an afrocentric and Black feminist perspectives.

Representations of racism, classism, and sexism, as well as the previously mentioned stereotypes, did not blatantly appear upon first reading and listening to the lyrics. As I continued to read, reread, and listen to the lyrics, certain themes and subthemes began to come into focus. Some themes were exclusive to one particular artist, while other themes carried over from one artist to another. As I annotated the lyrics, I began to categorize themes and subthemes into specific stereotypes. The
primary theme of every song was relationships, and various subthemes revolved around the female subject dealing with a male partner, specifically her cheating man. Some themes include violence, drinking, gambling, jail time, and "the dozens." "Playing the dozens is about more than fun; it's a battle for respect and a verbal duel. The dozens is an exhibition of emotional strength and verbal agility" (DeSalvo, 2006, p. 62).

The following seven graphs outline each artist and group the songs according to their themes and characteristics. Please note that there are certain characteristics for Sapphire and Strong Black Women that cross over, therefore, there will be a shared graph for those themes.

In order to match the subthemes within the song lyrics to specific stereotypes, it was necessary to examine the meanings and characteristics of the stereotypes as well as explore concepts of femininity while going through the process of reading and listening to the lyrics. Upon looking at the descriptions of stereotypes and examining the concepts of femininity, specifically according to mainstream White society, it was concluded that behaviors such as drinking, gambling, fighting and threatening, which were described in the
songs, were not considered feminine attributes. The characteristics of femininity in mainstream society included the expectation that White women did not work, they were expected to stay at home and take care of their family and homes, and activities such as drinking, fighting, and gambling were considered non-feminine behaviors.

The stereotype of Mammy is one of a domesticated woman, a depiction of a content Black female house servant. The stereotype of a Matriarch is a woman who is in control and does not necessarily need a man, and if she does have one, she will take care of his needs. The stereotypical image of Sapphire is one of a woman who is feisty and often out of control with her emotions. A Strong Black Woman stereotype is one who is in control of her life; she takes care of her family and does not outwardly show any weaknesses. The Strong Black Woman often carries the weight of the world on her shoulder.

Therefore, it was necessary to place characteristics such as drinking, gambling, violent behavior, and spending time in jail with the stereotype of Sapphire due to the protagonist being aggressive enough and rough; the characteristics of being independent and in control, as well as rambling were placed with the stereotype of a
Strong Black Women because that indicated women were mentally independent enough to take the chance to leave, as well as possibly having the money to travel. Taking care of one's man by being in control were the characteristics expressed for the Matriarch stereotype because they are motherly characteristics. The concept of devoted domesticity with matched with the Mammy stereotype.

The themes of multiple jeopardy came by first examining how racism, sexism, and classism can surface. Both racism and classism could be either overt or subtle, and one could directly experience it or be indirectly affected by it. They both could also surface as institutionalized forms of oppression. It was also difficult to separate the categories of racism and classism because they are intrinsically linked; therefore, the theme of occupational status was linked to both racism and classism. Dealings with the criminal justice system were also added as representations of racism in the lyrics. Sexism emerged in the themes of prostitution and physical abuse within relationships.
Graph 1. *Sapphire*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alberta Hunter</th>
<th>Memphis Minnie</th>
<th>'Ma' Rainey</th>
<th>Victoria Spivey</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence and/or Threat of Violence</td>
<td>Aggravatin' Papa</td>
<td>Biting Bug Blues</td>
<td>Leavin' This Mornin' Broken Hearted Blues Cell Bound Blues Louisiana Hoodoo Blues Rough and Tumble Blues See See Rider Blues Prove it on Me Countin' the Blues</td>
<td>Murder in the First Degree</td>
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<td>Time in jail and/or Possibility of Going to Jail</td>
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<td>Moonshine</td>
<td>Cell Bound Blues Countin' the Blues Broken Hearted Blues</td>
<td>Don't Trust Nobody Blues Murder in the First Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking</td>
<td></td>
<td>Moonshine</td>
<td>Dead Drunk Blues Moonshine Blues</td>
<td>Don't Trust Nobody Blues</td>
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<td>Gambling</td>
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<td>Good Girl Blues Georgia Skin I'm A Gamblin' Woman</td>
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<td>Dirty Dozens</td>
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<td>New Dirty Dozens</td>
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Graph 2. *Strong Black Woman*

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<th>Independence</th>
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<th>Victoria Spivey</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not needing a man</td>
<td>He’s Gota a Punch Like Joe Louis Someone Else Will Take Your Place You Can have My Man</td>
<td>I’m Gonna Bake My Biscuits Caught Me Wrong Again In My Girlish Days What Fault You Found in Me (Part 1)</td>
<td>Prove it on Me</td>
<td>Down Hill Pull Good Cabbage Give it to Him I’ll Keep Sittin’ On It</td>
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<td>Yelpin the Blues Second Hand Man The Castle’s Rockin’ Take Your Big Hands Off</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nothin’ In Rambling In My Girlish Days Frisco Town</td>
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Graph 3. *Matriarch*

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<tr>
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<td>Second Hand Man</td>
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<td>Rough and Tumble Blues Leavin’ This Mornin’</td>
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<td>Controlling</td>
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<td>Giving money</td>
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Graph 4. Mammy

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<td>Domestic Occupation w/ devotion to family</td>
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Graph 5. Racism

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<td>Christmas Mornin' Blues Murder in the First Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
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<td>Sylvester and His Mule Livin' the Best I Can</td>
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Graph 6. Sexism

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<tr>
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<td>Hustlin’ Woman Blues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Domestic Violence</strong></td>
<td>Yelpin’ the Blues</td>
<td>Down Hearted Blues</td>
<td>You Can’t Do What that Last man Did</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

I examined 8 to 15 songs from each artist, looking at a total of 44 songs. Please see Appendixes A, B, C, and D for the complete lyrics. Ma Rainey, the most popular woman of the artists that I studied, wrote a multitude of songs as a solo artist. She also co-wrote several songs with other blues artists. I examined one song that she co-wrote with J. Sammy Randall, *Sweet Rough Man*. Rainey was known
for being a tough woman both on and off stage. Rainey had the most songs that included the themes of violence and/or the threat of violence and spending time in jail and/or the possibility of going to jail. Another song in Rainey’s repertoire, *Louisiana Hoodoo Blues*, refers to resorting to violence in an unorthodox way, using dark magic. I examined a total of 12 of Rainey’s songs.

Alberta Hunter is accredited with co-writing *Down Hearted Blues* with Lovie Austin, which was a popular song for Bessie Smith. The signature Smith hit *Down Hearted Blues* is one of Hunter’s 11 songs that I explored. Unlike Rainey, Hunter was not known for being rough off stage and only had one song that referred to violence and/or jail, *Aggravatin’ Papa*. Most of Hunter’s songs revolved around relationships and consisted of sexual undertones, some of which included, *You Can’t Do What That Last Man Did, That Castle’s Rockin’* and *Someone Else Will*. Her song *Yelpin’ the Blues* is a direct reference to the determination and strength of women.

Memphis “Guitar” Minnie is not only considered one of the best female blues guitarists of her time, she is one of the best and most innovative blues guitarists ever and is the only artist that I studied who played an instrument in her recordings. Having been married twice, she wrote
and performed several songs with both her spouses. The song *What Fault You Found of Me (Part 1)*, Minnie sings with her husband, Kansas Joe. I studied 15 of Minnie’s songs. Just as Hunter only had one song that referred to violence and/or jail, so did Minnie. Several of Minnie’s songs had sexual undertones. The song *Sylvester and His Mule*, has hints of politics, and *Hustlin’ Woman Blues* touched on prostitution and the violence that is associated with that lifestyle. The theme of rambling or traveling appears in her songs *Frisco Tow, Nothing in Rambling*, and *In My Girlish Days*.

Victoria Spivey, perhaps the least popular of all of the examined artists, wrote several songs of which I looked at eight. Just as Minnie and Hunter sang little songs with references to violence and/or jail, so did Spivey. Many of Spivey’s songs were laced with expressions of sexual freedom in subtle ways, including *Good Cabbage, I’ll Keep Sittin’ On It if I Can’t Sell It*, and *Down Hill Pull*. Her song *Christmas Mornin’ Blues* has underlying aspects of the country’s politicized racism, and her song *Murder in the First Degree* has one reference to the common occupation for African American women, domestic servant.
Results: Stereotypes

Son-House, an African American male blues guitarist from the 1920s and 1930s indicates that the only type of blues is the one that exists as a result of love. Going through the struggles of a relationship will give any man or woman the blues. As previously mentioned, the primary theme in almost every song I studied was about relationships, and there were underlying themes, such as gambling, drinking, violence, jail, and playing the dozens, as well as others. The stereotypical image of Sapphire was the representation most frequently found throughout the lyrics of each artist. I placed these previously stated themes as being representative of the Sapphire stereotype because these characteristics were not considered womanly and/or acceptable by mainstream society. The characteristics of Sapphire are a woman who is aggressive, domineering, and almostemasculating.

Sapphire: Violence

There were several representations of women threatening or carrying out violent acts. Often the theme revolved around getting revenge on a cheating man, not putting up with his behavior any longer, or attacking the woman or women the man had been cheating with.
Ma' Rainey’s songs have more references to violence than the other three artists. In *Rough and Tumble Blues* the main character has killed three women for cheating with her partner. She has bought clothes for her man, and now that she has fixed him up, he looks handsome. Women, whom Rainey refers to as little devils, are nicknamed for their height, Tree Top Tall and Miss Shorty Toad, along with another, are the three little devils that “Mama” goes after, as well as her man, while on a warpath. She knows she’s going to go to jail for it and figures she might as well announce that she did it and suggests sending out the information via Western Union:

I'm going to the Western Union, type the news all down the line
I'm going to the Western Union, type the news all down the line
'Cause mama's on the warpath this morning and don't mind dyin'
Then every little devil got on my man's road
Then every little devil got on my man's road
Mama Tree Top Tall and Miss Shorty Toad
I got rough and killed three women 'fore the police got the news
I got rough and killed three women 'fore the police got the news
'Cause mama's on the warpath with those rough and tumble blues

Another one of Rainey’s songs that threatens violence is *See See Rider Blues*. DeSalvo (2006) indicates that the term *See See Rider* used to be C. C., which stood for
Calvary Corporal during the Civil War. The initials eventually became See See, which is Rainey’s recording:

I’m gonna buy me a pistol, just as long as I am tall,
Lord, Lord, Lord Gonna kill my man and catch’ the Cannonball
If he won’t have me, he won’t have no gal at all

In this song the main character is going to get a gun to kill her man then skip town on the Cannonball, which is the train. If the man she loves does not want her, then she vows that no other woman will have him either.

Rainey’s song Leavin’ This Morning has references to two themes, both violence and drinking. The main character is this song establishes several things. The first is power because she has money to give to the man who is cheating on her. She also creates a sense of independence by taking the situation of infidelity into her own hands.

When I get through drinkin’, gon’ buy a Gatlin gun
Fine my man, he better hitch up and run
‘Cause I’m leavin’ this mornin’, I’m leavin’ this mornin’
I’m going to Kansas City to bring Jim Jackson home
I went up Eighteenth Street, found out where the other woman stays
Cure my man of his triflin’ ways
‘Cause I’m leavin’ this mornin’, honey, I’m leavin’ this mornin’
I’m goin’ to Kansas City to bring Jim Jackson home
Rainey's song *Prove it on Me Blues*, not only has the protagonist fighting while out partying, but it has an underlying theme of homosexuality. It was well known that Rainey was bisexual, and this song seems to be a self-proclamation by indicating that the woman she was out partying with left during the fight:

Went out last night, had a great big fight  
Everything seemed to go on wrong  
I looked up, to my surprise  
The gal I was with was gone

Although I did not analyze the representations of homosexuality within blues, this subject can be researched in future studies. Rainey's song *Louisiana Hoodoo Blues* discusses getting revenge on a cheating man by finding a witchdoctor to try to get her man to stop cheating. The central character in this song uses nontraditional means as a form of revenge.

Going to Louisiana bottom to get me a hoodoo hand  
Gotta stop these women from taking my man  
Down in Algiers where the hoodoos live in their den

Their chief occupation is separating women from their men
According to DeSalvo (2006) people often interchange the terms hoodoo and voodoo, but they are not the same. "Hoodoo, in contrast, is an African American system of folklore" (p. 86). Unlike voodoo, hoodoo is not a religion but rather a practice that uses magic and tales derived from various African and European religions. The other songs that had references to violence were Memphis Minnie’s song *Biting Bug Blues* and Hunter’s song *Aggravatin’ Papa*. In Minnie’s song *Biting Bug Blues*, she characterizes the woman who has taken her man as a bug and sings about killing that bug. She uses a weapon to kill the bug:

> I'm gonna kill that biting bug, so she won't follow me no more
> Till I taken my pistol and I shot that biting bug dead
> I done stopped that biting bug from breaking up other women’s homes

In Alberta Hunter’s song *Aggravatin’ Papa*, the subject has two weapons, both a razor and a gun and threatens to kill her man if she catches him cheating on her:

> 'Cause I possess a forty-four that don’t repeat
> So aggravating papa, don’t try to two-time me
> Got one hand on my razor, one arm around my gun
> If I catch you foolin’ round, I’ll tear your doghouse down
> So aggravating papa, don’t try to two-time me
Some may think that singing about murdering one’s partner and/or his lover(s) is extreme, but of course the songs are not literal. They were meant for a Black audience, particularly for African American women who could identify with the frustrations the women were singing about. The theme of relationships, as well as the subtheme of retaliation, is timeless. Any woman who may be in a relationship today may know the frustrations of dealing with a cheating man or with someone who has somehow mistreated her and can appreciate the release these songs may provide.

**Sapphire: Jail**

Often, songs of violence lead into themes of spending time in jail. In several of Rianey’s songs the protagonist first commits a crime then ends up in jail. The song *Broken Hearted Blues*, tells the story of threatening violence, then the main character, who is Rainey herself because she refers to herself in the third person, ends up in front of a judge:

I’m going to buy me a pair of meat hounds to lead this lonesome trail.

I’m going to buy me a pair of meat hounds to lead this lonesome trail.
If I don’t find my good man, I’ll spend the rest of my life in jail.

Good Morning Judge, Mama Rainey’s done raised sand

Good Morning Judge, Mama Rainey’s done raised sand

She killed everybody, judge, she’s even killed her man


The main character is going to get a pair of hound dogs to help track the man down, and after the man is found, she will more than likely spend the rest of her life in jail for killing her man.

Another song that Rainey sings that references jail is *Cell Bound Blues*:

All bound in prison, all bound in jail
All bound in prison, all bound in jail
Cold iron bars all around me, no one to go my bail

In this song the subject is in jail because she killed her man after a fight, apparently in self defense:

I walked in my room the other night
My man walked in and begin to fight
I took my gun in my right hand,
"Hold him folks, I don’t wanna kill my man."
When I did that, he hit me ‘cross my head
First shot I fired, my man fell dead.
Victoria Spivey’s song *Murder in the First Degree* is another song that tells a story about committing an act of violence, due to a bad relationship, which results in jail time. In this song Spivey also makes reference to the job of the main character as being a domestic servant. Essentially it seems as if she spends her time working hard for White people, and the money she makes is used to take care of the house as well as her man. His sneaking around with another woman is an insult to her and almost makes her hard work in vain; therefore, she kills him. She calls the man trifling, an insignificant and trivial part of her life. The protagonist tries to have the judge identify with her by asking if he had a woman whom he took care of and she cheated on him, he would probably kill her, and if she were the judge, she would set him free. She also claims the man as a possession.

Well, I’m layin here in this jailhouse scared as any fool can be,
Yes, I’m layin here in this jailhouse scared as any fool can be.
I believe they’re gonna hang me from what my lawyer say to me.
My man got runnin’ around with a woman he know I can’t stand
My man got runnin’ around with a woman he know I can’t stand.
That’s why I got my gun and got rid of one trifling man.
I scrub them pots and kettles, I washed and ironed the White folks’ clothes
I scrub them pots and kettles, I washed and ironed the White folks’ clothes
He got it like I make him, I kill him, Judge, that’s all I know
If you’d a killed a woman who trifled and had to come before me,
I’d send her to the jailhouse and, Judge, let you go free.
I said I ain’t done nothin’ but kill a man, what belongs to me.
I said I ain’t done nothin’ but kill a man, what belong to me.
And yet they got me charged with murder in the first degree.
Spivey’s song *Don’t Trust Nobody Blues* refers to the main character not minding going to jail if someone messes with her money:

Oh, friendship ain’t no good, that’s why I’m hittin’ that long, long trail
Oh, friendship ain’t no good, that’s why I’m hittin that long, long, trail
Because to fool with my money, mama don’t mind goin’ to jail.

This song tells a story about the protagonist not trusting or loving anyone other than God and her mother:

I don’t trust nobody, but the good Lord above
I don’t trust nobody, baby, but the good Lord above
And aside of my mother, there’s nobody that I love.
This song also revolves around a bad relationship, which causes her not to trust anyone:
Men will love you and fool you, make you spend all your dough  
Love you and fool you, make you spend all your dough  
After they get what they want, why, they don't like you no more.

There are songs that do not tell stories about going to jail. Rainey's song Countin' the Blues does not really tell a story of how the main character goes to jail, it just makes a reference to being in jail:

Lord 'rested at Midnight, Jail house made me lose my mind  
Lord 'rested at Midnight, Jail house made me lose my mind  
Bad Luck and Bo-Weevil made me think of old Moonshine  
Many times in a relationship the woman was the one who had to work, more often then not in White people's houses, mainly because the system of Jim Crow was established to create difficulties for African American men to find work. As a result the African American woman used her money to take care of the house as well as her man. Often, not having much else to do, the men would travel and find women to have affairs with. This can be based on the fact that there was a system that created a group of people who had nothing to occupy their time and stimulate their lives. In addition, African Americans were only a few generations removed from slavery; the concept
of being able to love freely was still new for many African Americans.

**Sapphire: Drinking**

There were several songs that represented women drinking alcohol. These songs were written during prohibition, a time when the purchase, sale, and consumption of alcohol was illegal. Many White people found ways to bring alcohol into their communities as did African Americans. The act of selling moonshine was not reserved for men; Minnie’s *Moonshine* has references to drinking as well as spending time in jail because she was in the illegal business of selling moonshine:

> I’ve got to leave this town, I’ve got to go before the sun goes down

> I’ve got to leave this town, I’ve got to go before the sun goes down

> ‘Cause I done got tired of these coppers running me around

> I stayed in Jail last night and the last night before

> I stayed in jail last night and the last night before

> I would have been there now if my daddy hadn’t sprung the do’

> I stay in so much trouble, that’s why I’ve got to go

> I stay in so much trouble, that’s why I’ve got to go

> But when I get out this time, I won’t sell moonshine no more
Although a dangerous business to be in, women had to find ways to earn money in order to take care of themselves. Whether working in a White family’s home, prostituting, or conducting illegal trafficking, it was a way to earn money. This theme also is timeless and appears in the African American musical genre of rap. Many rap artists sing about selling drugs in their communities. They do so because the social and political climate has created a cycle of despair and poverty. The distribution of drugs yields a significant profit, but selling the only way for them to have a better life for themselves as well as their families.

In many blues songs women drink in order to forget about the pain of lost loves, such as in Spivey’s Don’t Trust Nobody Blues:

Here I lay after midnight, drinkin’ my fool self to sleep.

Lay after midnight, drinkin’ my fool self to sleep.

While that low down man of mine is tryin’ to make his four day creep

Ma Rainey’s Dead Drunk Blues has the main character drinking large amounts of alcohol for the purposes of forgetting about a particular situation that she is in, trying to forget about her what her man has done.
Oh, gimme Houston, that’s the place I crave.
Oh, gimme Houston, that’s the place I crave.
Oh, way down South I’ll take whiskey (straight).
Oh, whiskey, whiskey, in from old down home.
Oh, whiskey, whiskey, in from old down home.
But if I don’t get whiskey I ain’t no good at all.
When I was in Houston drunk most everyday.
When I was in Houston drunk most everyday.
I drank so much whiskey I thought I’d pass away.
Have you ever been drunk, slept in all of your clothes?
Have you ever been drunk, slept in all of your clothes?
And when you wake up you’re out of doors.
Daddy, I’m gonna get drunk, just one more time.
Honey, I’m gonna get drunk, papa, just one more time.
‘Cause when I’m drunk nothin’ gonna worry my mind.

This is also the reason in her *Moonshine Blues*

I’ve been drinkin’ all night, babe, and the night before.
When I get sober, ain’t gonna drink no more.
‘Cause my (feet, head and hands are in the door).

While they consume alcohol, the blame is not placed on
themselves, but rather on the men who caused their pain;
in some way alcohol acts as a medicine for these women.
Sapphire: Gambling

Gambling was another theme that appeared in the lyrics, which is another illegal activity that was used as an outlet to forget about the hardships affecting one's everyday life. Just as drinking was seen as a sinful act, hence prohibition, so was gambling. In Minnie's Good Girl Blues gambling is set up as an evil act. The young lady grew up in the church and then wanted to do activities that were not Christian:

I have been a good girl, going to church all of my days
But I'm going to learn to gamble so I can stay out late
Crying dice, oh dice, please don't fail on me
Crying dice, oh dice, please don't fail on me
If you don't seven/eleven, don't you crap and three

The act of gambling was also seen as an activity that was reserved for men, in Minnie's song, Georgia Skin, she disputes that concept:

The reason I like the game, the game they call Georgia Skin
Because when you fall, you can really take out again
Hmmm, give me Georgia Skin
Because the women's can play, well, so as the men
In her song *I’m a Gamblin’ Woman*, the main character gambles significantly, possibly habitually:

I’m a gambling woman, gamble everywhere I go
I’m a gambling woman, gamble everywhere I go
I’ve lost so much money, bettin’ the dice on 5, 10, 4
I’ve got me a mojo, for as I can’t lose no more
Yes, I’ve got me a mojo, for as I can’t lose no more
Well, you know you can’t beat me, I’ve got to win everywhere I go
I gambled all last night, all last night before
I gambled all last night, all last night before
I win so much money, I start to take back my mojo
I shot crap all last night until the break of day
I shot crap all last night until the break of day
I been haulin’ in all that pretty money, and that market man had to run away
Mmmmmmm. Got me a three on twelve
Mmmmmmm. Got me a three on twelve
If you roll seven eleven, this mojo can go to hell

The main character not only gambles quite a bit but she also has a mojo. According to DeSalvo (2006) a mojo is “an ineffectual bundle of twigs, nail clippings, and other junk; however, a conjurer catches a spirit inside” (p. 110). The meaning has also evolved to be one’s sexual
vitality and appeal. This song also establishes a sense of power for the woman. Not only does she have enough money to bet and gamble, she often wins. Therefore, it can be assumed that either her mojo is working, or she has skills in betting, perhaps a combination of both.

Sapphire: Dirty Dozens

Playing the dozens is a traditional African American game in which people, usually men, would hurl insults at each other in front of an audience. Because hurling insults at someone was not characteristic of femininity, I placed playing the dozens under the stereotype of Sapphire. One of the purposes of the game was to see who had the thicker skin; therefore, several verses were aimed at relatives. This is seen in Minnie’s song New Dirty Dozens:

Now the funniest thing I ever seen, tom cat jumping on a sewing machine
Sewing machine run so fast, took 99 stitches in hi yas, yas, yas
Now I’m gonna tell you all about old man Bell, he can’t see but he sure can smell
Fish-man passed here the other day, hollering “Hey, pretty mama, I’m going your way”
I know all about your pappy and your Mammy,
your big fat sister and your little brother Sammy, 
your auntie and your uncle and your ma’s and pa’s, 
they all got drunk and showed their Santa Claus 
Now they’re all drunken mistreaters, robbers and cheaters 
Slip you in the dozens, your papa and your cousin 
Your mama do the lordy lord 
When playing the dozens, the first person to get upset 
would be the loser. As a note of interest, Yas was a clean 
way of saying ‘ass.’ This is one of very few songs that 
does not center around relationships between men and 
women. 

In many ways women who sang the blues were 
automatically playing the dozens. Oftentimes bars or clubs 
would hold competitions to see who was the best guitar 
player and/or blues singer. Getting on stage meant 
performing in front of an audience and cutting down the 
competition. To do so one would have to have confidence 
and a thick skin to participate because there was a risk 
of being booed and disliked by the audience. 

Matriarch 

There were few representations of the Matriarch 
stereotype in the lyrics of Hunter, Minnie, Rainey and 
Spivey. A stereotypical matriarch is a domineering woman 
who takes care of everyone and everything, almost like the
Strong Black Woman, but often more motherly. Therefore, I looked for evidence that indicated a woman would purchase items such as clothes for her man and take care of her partner. The songs that had representations of women taking care of men were Ma’ Rainey’s *Rough and Tumble Blues*:

My man’s so good lookin’ and his clothes fit him so cute
My man’s so good lookin’ and his clothes fit him so cute
I cut up his box-back and bought him a struttin’ suit

As well as Rainey’s *Leavin’ This Mornin’*:

I give him all my money, treat him nice as I can
Got another woman, wait ‘til I find my man
Lord, I’m leavin’ this mornin’, I’m leavin’ this morning
I’m leavin’, trying to find a man of my own

Hunter’s song *Second Hand Man* does not have representations of taking care of a man, but rather one of controlling a man:

Now it’s a long, long story, but you want to hear it?
Say yes, ’cause I’m gonna tell it anyhow
I’ve got a man trained to my hand
And I think I’m through huntin’ now

*Mammy*

With regards to the Mammy stereotype I looked for words and/or themes that would put the main character in a
position of caregiver or domestic servant to Whites, as well as indicate a devotion and/or loyalty to that family. Graph 4: Mammy, I found no real representations of Mammy with the four artists I studied. The blank columns, in a sense say a lot about Black feminism in blues music. Those blank columns would be filled if this were about White male-dominated society’s vision of roles for African American women.

**Strong Black Woman: Independence**

Themes of the blues and the blues lifestyle itself have always aroused controversy. Issues such as gambling, drinking, and sexual freedom were considered immoral and devilish by all Christians, and that testament was adopted and verbalized by African American church goers as well as the African American bourgeoisie. Singing about such things, particularly the sexual freedom of women was taboo in mainstream society. Yet many African American blues artists offered “enlightenment on love and sexuality” (Davis, 1998, p. 124). Consequently, these singers “often have been treated as secular counterparts to Christian ministers, recognized by their constituencies as no less important authorities in their respective realms (p. 124).

The characteristics of the Strong Black Woman that I searched for was a woman depicted as not needing a man,
having the ability to easily overcome adversity, usually of a relationship, and not settling for being mistreated within a relationship. The song that directly referred to a woman being strong was Alberta Hunter’s *Yelpin’ the Blues* which indicates:

> ‘Cause there ain’t but one way you can keep a good woman down. 
> Lord, there ain’t but one way to keep a good woman down. 
> You’ll have to put her on an island and have her walk the bound

In this song, the female subject is considered a good woman coming out of bad relationship. By saying that the only way to keep a good woman down is to isolate her on an island and have her essentially commit suicide, Hunter is saying that no matter what life throws at this woman, she can take it and still rise out of the heartache.

Alberta Hunter sings that it is easy for another man to replace her old one in *Someone Else Will Take Your Place*:

> When you’re leavin’ me, pretty baby, someone else will take your place  
> For many years, I’ve been long waiting, just anyplace with so much grace  
> Some place like a millionaire  
> Lord I do declare

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With my dainty figure and my baby stare
So, if you’re leavin’, pretty baby, someone else will take your place
In this song the main character is very confident in her looks and ability to catch another man, possibly a rich one. She has known for some time that this breakup would eventually arrive, but it did not worry her because there were more men waiting to find a pretty woman.

In her song *He’s Got a Punch Like Joe Louis*, Hunter sings:

Lord, a woman is a fool to put all her trust in just one man
Yes, a woman is a fool to put all her trust in just one man
She can never get him when she wants him, just has to catch him when she can
Yes, when I was crazy ‘bout you, you were crazy ‘bout somebody else
Yes, when I was crazy ‘bout you, you were crazy ‘bout somebody else
I know I was a fool to let you jive me, Lord, but I just couldn’t help myself
So get away from my window, stop knockin’ on my door
Lord, get away from my window, stop knockin’ on my door
‘Cause I got myself some pig meat and I don’t want you no more

Spoken: Nice and young
Essentially saying that she was fooled once and she would not be fooled again, therefore, suggesting that a woman should not only have a regular man, but one on the side because you cannot trust them to do what you may want or need them to do. In addition, she has found someone else who is younger to take his place.

Spivey also sings about there being more men when one leaves in *Arkansas Road Blues*:

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Ahhh, ayyy, ayyyy, ayyyyy, ahhhhhh, baby, why'd you let me go
Daddy, if you don't want me there are plenty more
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In another one of Spivey’s songs, *Down Hill Pull*, the main character claims that her love for one man has gone, and she can easily find another to love as well as give her money:

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Got a down hill pull, and I ain’t getting’ you no more
Got a down hill pull, and I ain’t getting’ you no more
Can find a man to give me money most anyplace I go
Oooh... done dropped my love for you
Mmm...done dropped my love for you
Ain’t got you on my mind, and any man I find will do
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In the song *You Can Have My Man* Hunter sings about a protagonist who apparently is speaking to a woman who wants her man. Because he’s cheated, she believes he’s no good and could care less what happens to him; therefore,
the other woman can have him, she won’t put up a fight, besides, she has a new partner.

Don’t have to start a row
Go on and take him now
Go on, I say, take him to stay
‘Cause I’ve got a new papa now
Now you can have that man
If you say he comes to see you, too
Go on and take that man
You will find out that his love ain’t true
A man like him ain’t worth a cent
He just wants you to pay his room rent
Take him from me, I’m glad I’m free
So you can have than man

Hunter’s song Second Hand Man appears again under the Strong Black Woman stereotype because of the line:

I’ve got a man trained to my hand

In addition, toward the end of the song Hunter mentions that he’s the last man for the main character, but perhaps not:

Ah this baby’s all the flavors, there ain’t none after him
‘Cause I’m kind fickle, ‘cause I said the same thing when I met Sonny Jim
This indicates that the main character has implemented her prerogative as a woman to change her mind, thus exercising her sexual freedom.

Blues is often filled with double entendres. Hunter's song *The Castle's Rockin'* is a classic example of this. At first glance it appears to be about a party at a club:

Come on by some night, my castle's rockin'
You can bust your cunk cause everything's free
On the top floor, in the rear is where I am residin', the stuff is here
And the chicks fairly romp with glee

Often clubs would front for whore houses, thus having two purposes. The meaning of the word cunk can either stand for a woman's or man's private parts. People could go in and drink and dance, but in the back or on a second floor would be a brothel. The main character in this song has a need for protection and has enough money to pay for it. It is also implied that she has enough money to pay off the police:

You don't have to be afraid 'cause I'm payin' the boys to protect me
Tell them cat's downtown they can let their conscience be
Come on up, bring your gang, we'll start that ball a rollin'
My castle's rocking run on by and see
The underlying theme of prostitution is not surprising for Hunter because, as mentioned in her biography on (p. 68), she was hired as a singer at a club that was a hangout for prostitutes and pimps.

Blues songs are often filled with metaphors and sexual innuendos. In Hunter's song *Take Your Big Hands Off* the main character exercises her right to say no or decline the sexual advances of a man:

I got a pretty something a lot of cats would like to get
But I won't let 'em have it cause it hasn't been used yet
So take your big hands off it. Ooh, but wouldn't you like
to have it

Throughout the song the Hunter does not specify what she is talking about regarding taking one's big hands off until the end where she indicates she is referring to her rose:

I'm talkin' 'bout my big red rose
It's too delicate for you
I'm talkin' bout this big red rose
Ain't that a shame

Spivey has several songs in which she has various sexual metaphors as well. One would be *I'll Keep Sittin' On it if I Can't Sell It*. Spivey does not immediately mention what she's sitting on until she can sell it:
If I can’t sell it, keep sittin’ on it, before I give it way
You’ve got to buy it, don’t care how much you want it,
I mean just what I say
She continues to sing of how the item she is sitting on is in good condition:
Just feel that nice old bottom bit, no wear and tear
Then she indicates what she does not want to give away:
I really hate to part with such a lovely chair
In this particular instance, the chair is representative of her sexual organs. In the song *Good Cabbage* Spivey sing about her cabbage that she bought being good and she’s going to sell it over town:
There’s a change in this world, baby there’s a change in me
There’s a change in this world, baby there’s a change in me
And from now on I’ll be the dirtiest woman you want to see
I bought a load of cabbage the same day you let me down
I bought a load of cabbage the same day you let me down
I’m gonna have fun selling them all over this town
DeSalvo (2006) indicates that “The blues are rife with food metaphors for genitalia” (p. 31) and filled with to cooking references, which is “a form of signifying, or the use of innuendo and double talk that is fully understood only by members of one’s community” (p. 12). An example is in Minnie’s song *I’m Gonna Bake My Biscuits*:
I ain’t got no flour and ain’t got no meal
If you got no man you got to rob and steal
I’m gonna bake my biscuits
I’m gonna bake my biscuits
I’m gonna bake my biscuits
Ain’t gonna give nobody none

The double entendre in many of these songs such as *Good Cabbage, I’ll Keep Sittin’ on It, and I’m Gonna’ Bake My Biscuits*, is the possible underlying theme of prostitution. The songs can be seen one of two ways. The protagonist in each of these songs is either withholding sex until a man comes along who is willing to pay the right price or waiting to find a man with money who will take care of her.

Sexual freedom comes in various concepts and is a sign of independence. Minnie sings about being young and carefree in her song *In My Girlish Days*:

Late hours at night, trying to play my hand
Through my window, out stepped a man
I didn’t know no better
Oh boys
In my girlish days
She indicates that she used to be carefree, but although she’s older, she hasn’t given up the things she used to do in her girl days:

All of my playmates is not surprised
I had to travel ‘fore I got wise
I found out better
And I still got my girlish ways.

Minnie also takes on the role of cheater in Caught Me Wrong Again:

Well, you caught me, baby, we was makin’ friends
I can’t say nothin’ because I’m wrong again
You caught me, my daddy, we was makin’ friends
Well, I can’t say nothin’, you caught me wrong again

The term “makin’ friend” is an innuendo for making love. This is an example of a woman being free and independent of what mainstream society deems appropriate for female behavior. Not only does the character in this song cheat, she is caught and tells of another time she was cheating:

You know you’re parked at my house and you can’t get in
That’s the time you caught me and my baby makin’ friends
You caught me my daddy, we was makin’ friends
Well, I can’t say nothin’, you caught me wrong again

The song What Fault You Found in Me is a duet Minnie’s sings with Kansas Joe. In this song Joe accuses her of
cheating by implying her actions make it seem she has another man:

When I had you, wouldn’t treat me right
Stay out from me both day and night
Now I’ve got tired the way you treated me
And I believe I’ll go now, back to my used to be
Went to your house about half past ten
Knocked on your door, you wouldn’t let me in
I’ve got tired the way you treated me
And I believe I’ll go now, back to my used to be

The main character in Rainey’s song Prove it on Me exercises her sexual freedom by dating a woman:

I looked up, to my surprise
The gal I was with was gone

The protagonist in this story also exercises her freedom to dress the way she pleases, which is not like a woman:

It’s true I wear a collar and a tie
Make the wind blow all the while
‘Cause they say I do it, ain’t nobody caught me
They sure got to prove it on me

The stereotype of a Strong Black Woman, although derived negatively from the concept that African American female slaves could handle the verbal, physical, and emotional abuse inflicted on them by the White slave owner
has evolved into somewhat of a positive stereotype, possibly due in part to the lyrics of the blues. The Strong Black Woman stereotype of today is an image of a woman who can handle all that life throws at her without complaining or getting down, whether being discriminated against on the job or cheated on by her man, she takes it with a grain of salt and goes on. Unlike that image, the women who sang the blues had Strong Black Women characters in their music while still expressing weakness and vulnerability. Perhaps their weakness and vulnerability yield to their strength and ability to bounce back from bad situations. Their resiliency can be seen by taking revenge and/or finding another man, but they make the best out of a bad situation.

**Strong Black Woman: Rambling/Traveling**

Another activity that could be considered a male characteristic was traveling and/or rambling. There are two connotations to rambling. "To ramble is to move from place to place, never settling down. Rambling is also used to describe sexual voraciousness" (DeSalvo, 2006, p. 119). For the purposes of this study, I specifically used the term interchangeably with traveling, thus moving from place to place. I positioned rambling as an activity of Strong Black Woman because to ramble requires confidence.
in familiar environments as well as the financial means to travel. Memphis Minnie sings about it in three songs. The first is *Frisco Town*:

That old 'Frisco train makes a mile a minute
That old 'Frisco train makes a mile a minute
Well, in that old coach, I'm gonna sit right in it
I'm on my way, to 'Frisco town
I got something to tell you, gonna break your heart
I got something to tell you, gonna break your heart
We been together so far, we gotta get apart
I'm on my way to 'Frisco town

The main character, for what ever reason, is leaving her man and in the process going to break his heart. The town of San Francisco is calling her. Minnie’s song *In My Girlish Days* is a story with an apparent lesson, that once rambling and traveling, along with being promiscuous was something fun to do as a young lady, but perhaps it is not as wise in one’s elder years:

I flagged a train, didn’t have a dime
Trying to run away from that home of mine
I didn’t know no better
Oh boys
In my girlish days
I hit the highway, caught me a truck
Nineteen and seventeen, when the winter was tough
I didn't know no better
Oh boys
In my girlish days

*Nothin’ in Rambling* is a song about a character who
travels all her life but perhaps is ready to settle down:

I was born in Louisiana, I was raised in Algiers
And everywhere I been, the peoples all say
Ain’t nothing in rambling either running around
Well, I believe I’ll marry, oooo, wooo, Lord, and settle down
I first left home, I stopped in Tennessee
The peoples all begging, “Come and stay with me”
’Cause ain’t nothing in rambling, either running around
Well, I believe I’ll marry, oooo, wooo, Lord, and settle down

Having the ability to move from place to place was
important to African Americans during this time. Again,
only a few generations removed from slavery, most African
Americans were still settling into the idea that they were
free. For many years the only move most African Americans
could make was based on the decision of the White slave
master. Being able to hop on a train gave African American
access to the entire United States and the ability for
many to leave the pain and sorrow of Jim Crow behind and
look for a better life up North and out West.
Results: Multiple Jeopardy

Examining the evidence of multiple jeopardy required looking for different words and themes within the lyrics. Regarding multiple jeopardy, aspects such as racism, classism, and sexism do exist. Racism and classism are sometimes linked in their themes. When singing about racism, the lyrics usually refer to a male, and classism appears primarily for women working as domestic servants for White families or having no other alternative than to prostitute. The element of sexism appears both overtly and subtle in the way men treat women. Few lyrics directly pertain to physical abuse, but more refer to women being treated unfairly; some of the lyrics indicate the women being disturbed by this treatment, while other lyrics indicate that the women can easily get over the betrayal.

Racism

When looking at data that represented racism, I looked to see whether or not there were references to African American men being racially discriminated against. When examining the representations of multiple jeopardy, the topic of racism does not come up a lot in the lyrics of these blues women. When referring to racism, the phrases often mention an African American man being discriminated against directly by Whites, or indirectly
through institutionalized and political forms of racism, such as Jim Crow. Minnie’s song *Sylvester and his Mule* is an example of both racism and classism appearing in the lyrics. In this song about a sharecropper who is on the verge of losing his land, Minnie writes that Sylvester has called the White House and has gotten the turn around, and although he calls to try to speak with the commander in chief, Sylvester finally reaches the President, who ignores Sylvester’s pleas and indicates that his situation is not important:

He thought about the President, he got on the wire
“If I lose my home, I believe I’ll die”
He thought about the President, he got on the wire
“If I lose my home, I believe I’ll die”
First time he called, he get him somebody else
“I don’t want to talk to that man, I want to speak to Mr. President Roosevelt
First time he called, he get him somebody else
“I don’t want to talk to that man, I want to speak to Mr. President Roosevelt
He said, “Now, Sylvester, you can rest at ease catch that big, Black jackass and go to the field
He said, “Now, Sylvester, you can rest at ease catch that big, Black jackass and go to the field
Although this song only refers to one sharecropper, it may be seen as being representative of how the government did not care about African Americans and, their situations during this particular era. Victoria Spivey also has an underlying theme of racism in her song *Christmas Mornin’ Blues*. This song depicts a woman who is sad about her man not being there with her for Christmas because he is on death row. Although the man only stole livestock, he was charged and convicted for murder. The lyrics read:

> My man so deep in trouble the White folks couldn’t get him free
> My man so deep in trouble the White folks couldn’t get him free
> He stole a hog, the charge was murder in the first degree

*(Bourgeois, 1996, p. 137).*

This is a representation that many Black men were given punishments that did not fit their crimes, a result of the institutionalized racism that existed in this era. Racism also appears in Minnie’s song *Nothin’ in Rambling*:

> I was walking through the alley with my hand in my coat
> The police start to shoot me, thought it was something I stole
> You know it ain’t nothing in rambling, either running around
> Well, I believe I’ll marry, oooo, wooo, Lord, and settle down

The racism in this song is experienced by a woman at the hands of a police officer.
Classism

One cannot separate racism and classism. The characteristics of classism were based on whether or not the subject(s) appeared to be in a bad financial situation and whether or not any blame was directed at a system of government that created and/or perpetuated the situation. The aspect of classism also appeared in the lyrics, but in different ways. The aforementioned song Sylvester and his Mule is one example of classism within the examined lyrics. The classist element also appears in Minnie’s song Livin’ the Best I Can as she indicates:

Everybody’s talkin’ ‘bout how I’m livin’, but I’m livin’ the best I can
Everybody’s talkin’ ‘bout how I’m livin’, but I’m livin’ the best I can
When you see me up around about four, down on my knees scrubbing somebody’s floor
Everybody’s talkin’ ‘bout how I’m livin’, but I’m givin’ it the best I can

The main character works very hard cleaning someone’s house, and although it is not specifically mentioned, it is more than likely a White person’s home. Although things are not perfect for the protagonist, she’s trying to do
the best she can considering her situation. The occupation of working in a White family's home also appears in Spivey's *Murder in the First Degree*, and she specifically indicates that it is for a White family:

I scrub them pots and kettles, I washed and ironed the White folks' clothes
I scrub them pots and kettles, I washed and ironed the White folks' clothes

**Sexism**

Characteristics of sexism were indicated by the female subject being physically and/or emotionally mistreated by a man. The following songs have reference to physical abuse. Often physical abuse was reflected in songs about prostitution, as in Minnie's *Hustlin' Woman Blues*:

My man stops in the window with a .45 in his hand
My man stops in the window with a .45 in his hand
Every now and then he gets up and hollers at me, and tells me, "You better not miss this that man"

Other songs just reference being mistreated as in Hunter's *Down Hearted Blues*:

Gee, but it's hard to love someone when that someone don't love you
I'm so disgusted, heartbroken, too
I’ve got those down hearted blues
Once I was crazy ’bout a man
He mistreated me all the time
The next man I get has got to promise me
he’ll be mine, all mine
Or being treated like a dog as in Rainey’s Little Low Mama Blues

Mmmmm, Lordy Lordy Lord
Mmmmm, Lordy Lordy Lord
The man I’m loving treats me like a dog
I know I’ve been your dog since I’ve been your gal
I been your dog since I’ve been your gal
I loves you, pretty papa, follow you everywhere

Hunter’s You Can’t Do What That Last Man Did
You can’t do what my last man did.
Boss me ‘round, and treat me like he did,
I’m wise to what you’d like to do,
So from now on, let me miss you,
My last man tried to drag me down,
But he was one good man to have around;
But when the clock on the wall strikes half past three,
I want all the things you took from me,
‘Cause you can’t do what my last man did.
There are also songs that reflect physical abuse in a relationship that is not between a pimp and his prostitute, such as is Rainey's *Sweet Rough Man*:

I woke up this mornin', my head was sore as a boil
I woke up this mornin', my head was sore as a boil
My man beat me last night with five feet of copper coil
He keeps my lips split, my eyes as Black as jet
He keeps my lips split, my eyes as Black as jet
But the way he love me makes me soon forget
Every night for five years, I've got a beatin' from my man
Every night for five years, I've got a beatin' from my man
People says I'm crazy, I'll explain and you'll understand.

**Rhetorical Analysis**

**Memphis Minnie: Livin' the Best I Can**

The first song that I will conduct an in depth rhetorical analysis of is Memphis Minnie's *Livin' the Best I Can*. There are several reasons for choosing this song to do an in depth rhetorical analysis. This song is universal, timeless and cross cultural. The major proclamation of the song is that the protagonist is living the best she can, essentially coping with what life throws at her:
Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm givin' it the best I can.
I mean, givin it the best I can.
The above lyrics indicate that the protagonist is doing the best jobs that she can.

The song is universal, timeless, and cross cultural in that there are many people in the world, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, even gender, most people try to get by and deal with whatever life sends their way. This song is also a testimony of many African American women during this time in that most had to deal with issues of multiple jeopardy, yet they survived and made it through no matter how difficult the task, they 'did the best they could'.

There are various questions indicated in Chapter Three, from Foss (2004) that I will apply to the analysis of Livin' the Best I Can. The first question that Foss suggests to ask is; what is the preferred reading of the artifact? In several ways this song has a passive voice. The protagonist is simply getting by and doing what needs to be done in order to survive. The artifact asks the audience to take the standpoint from that of a working class African American woman during the 1920s and 1930s.
Another question Foss suggests to ask is; what does the artifact ask the audience to believe, understand, feel or think about? This song wants the audience to understand that the protagonist is a woman who works in a domestic occupation, earns her money, and takes care of her home, including her man to the best of her ability. It also wants you to believe that she does not have a choice in the matter, therefore, she’s doing good job.

Within the Livin’ the Best I Can an argument can me made that the protagonist wished for others, possibly neighbors and/or friends to stay out of her business. Others should not judge her, and it is implied that they should worry about their own lives. This is seen in the repeated chorus, as if she’s trying to strongly get her point across:

Everybody’s talkin’ ’bout how I’m livin’, but I’m givin’ it the best I can.

Everybody’s talkin’ ’bout how I’m livin’, but I’m givin’ it the best I can.

The fact that the protagonist is employed, takes care of her home and has a regular man is something that she takes pride in and enjoys.

I got a man who stays in the shade, I’m tryin’ to work to make this grade.
Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm givin' it the best I can.
When you see me up around about four, down on my knees scrubbin' somebody's floor.
Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm givin' it the best I can.
When you see me up around about six, tryin' to get my dinner fixed.
Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm givin' it the best I can.

By telling people what she's doing, she seems to say that this is my life, and this is what I'm doing, thus don't worry about and mind you own business. It may also be assumed that people who are questioning how's she's living do not have jobs and/or a significant other.

Foss also suggests questioning what values or general conceptions of what is and is not good are suggested? The main character in this song values her job, her relationship, and her home, which suggests that she is an ethical individual. One can now ask what are the assumptions or premises of the artifact? It may be assumed that the woman is working in the home of white people as a maid and works to keep up her home. It may be assumed that
she is happy or perhaps thankful for her she has because it could be worse.

In addition Foss also asks what doesn’t the artifact want the audience to think about? The artifact doesn’t want the audience to think about the possibility that the protagonist’ life could be better or worse. By saying that she’s doing the best she can indicates that her life cannot get any better. The final question Foss suggests asking in a rhetorical analysis is; what does the artifact suggest is unacceptable, negative, undesirable, marginal or insignificant? Livin’ the Best I can is written in a passive voice and asks the audience to accept what is given to you. Because her claim is directed at others, it seems to imply that judging and worrying about someone’s life other than one’s own is unacceptable and undesirable.

Gertrude ‘Ma’ Rainey: Prove It On Me

The purpose for choosing ‘Ma’ Rainey’s Prove It on Me is due to the content of homosexuality/bisexuality. The subject of homosexuality/bisexuality is and has been taboo in the United States. It was hushed and placed on the backburner during the 1920s and 1930s, but has become an emerging issue in today’s society. Although Rainey was open with her bisexuality with her friends, the song Prove It On Me announces her sexual orientation to the world.
According to Dr. Nancy Walker, PhD, a Licensed Professional Counselor in Charlotte, NC, the process of coming out happens in stages (personal interview, October 24, 2007). First one must come out to one's self, next one will come out to a small group of friends and/or family, and finally one may announce his/her sexual orientation to the world. Rainey's song Prove It On Me is like her 'coming out song.' This song is timeless in that by announcing her orientation Rainey took great risk. Being a homosexual in the African American community could have led to physical altercations and possibly could have disenfranchised her blues career.

This song is relevant because even in today's society, many popular musicians, athletes, and/or actors who announce their homosexuality in today's society also take a risk of being ostracized in their communities. Due to the possibility of damaging their careers many choose not to come out publically. In many ways, Rainey is taunting people to attest her homosexuality. On one hand she admits to being a homosexual woman, yet she dares someone to call her on it, hence the title, Prove It On Me.

The preferred reading of this song is that the audience may see that it reflects Rainey's life. It asks
the audience to believe that the protagonist enjoys spending time with women. She is more than likely a butch lesbian because she announces that she likes to wear male clothing as indicated in the following lines:

  It's true I wear a collar and a time
  Make the wind blow all the while
  'Cause they say I do it, ain't nobody caught me
  They sure got to prove it on me.

It is also indicated that she likes to talk to women like a man:

  Wear my clothes just like a fan
  Talk to the gals just like any old man
  'Cause they say I do it, ain't nobody caught me
  They sure got to prove it on me.

The chorus doesn't specifically say she likes women, but it does announce that the protagonist does not like men. Therefore she must prefer being with women:

  Went out last night with a crowd of my friends
  They must've been women, 'cause I don't like men.

The protagonist seems to display a hint of mystery as well as anger in the song by challenging the audience to prove what they may speculate about her lifestyle.

  The main assumption of the artifact is that the protagonist is homosexual. The song makes the argument
that homosexuality and/or bisexuality is within the African American community whether one wants to accept it or not. It also proclaims a sense of defiance in that this is a personal issue which is not anyone’s business but her own; therefore one should not worry about the issues in her life. The way of seeing being commended in the artifact is that one takes ownership of her lifestyle and has the right to individual privacy. The artifact also suggests that homosexuality is not a popular and/or accepted alternative lifestyle; by asking people to prove it on her, it appears that the main character challenges the possibility of acceptance within the community.

The artifact doesn’t ask the audience to think about whether or not they agree with the lifestyle of the main character. It appears that she is going to live her life regardless of what anyone else thinks. She suggests that this is her issue and that anyone else can think what they want about it, period. I believe that the artifact asks people to avoid jumping to conclusions about one’s sexual preference in terms of definitive labels. Prove It On Me also implies that alternative interpretation, suggesting and openness and acceptance of people as they are regardless of their differences in ethnicity, dress, behavior and sexual preferences, thus calling into
question the concept of gender identity. I believe that
the artifact suggests that definite attempts to label a
person based on such characteristics as race, gender,
behavior and/or sexual orientation are wrong. Ones
identity awareness is private and is not something for
others to necessarily question or concern.

Discussion

Davis (1998) indicates that “the blues idiom requires
absolute honesty in the portrayal of Black life. It is an
idiom that does not recognize taboos; whatever figures
into the larger picture of working-class African-American
realities, however morally repugnant it may be to the
dominant culture or to the Black bourgeoisie is an
appropriate subject of blues discourse” (p. 107).
Therefore, the themes of violence, incarceration,
prostitution, drinking, gambling, rambling, and sexual
independence that appeared in the lyrics of Ma Rainey,
Victoria Spivey, Alberta Hunter and Memphis Minnie were
common within the African American community. While the
lyrics have various themes that appear to be gloomy and
repulsive, they also reflect a cycle of multiple jeopardy
for African American women’s lives during this time, and
while racism, sexism and classism are not always directly
apparent in the lyrics, they are underlying factors of what contributes to the souls of these songs.

As marginalized performers, these women, along with many other African American female blues artists, wrote and performed songs for women living in an oppressive society. The songs allowed African American women to have a group consciousness and collective identity regardless of how revolting, depressing, and even sinful the culture may have been. Just as many rap artists today do not consider themselves to be feminist, the blues artists of the 1920s and 1930s would probably not have considered themselves feminists as well. While they many not have considered themselves feminists, they did pave the way for other female artists, both African American and White to be openly expressive and culturally true in their music.

While African American women could identify with these themes during the 1920s and 1930s, many of these themes remain timeless. As an aficionado of the blues today, I can listen to many of these songs and identify with some of the themes. The blues is timeless and universal, as seen with Rianey’s song Prove It On Me and Minnie’s song Livin’ the Best I Can. It not addresses issues of racism, classism, and sexism it also address such taboo subjects as sexual orientation. Thus, bringing
into question additional aspects of cultural identity of African American women that one can research and explore.

Many of these songs personify the lives of African American women of the past and present. Although I may not know what it is like to work in a White person's home and struggle to make ends meet, I do know the meaning of working hard and trying to do the best I can with whatever life hands me. In addition I can do two other things: first recognize the fact that my grandmother, mother, and or cousin could have been or be a character in any one of these songs, and in turn appreciate, as well as learn, from the deeply embedded cultural roots laid by my African American foremothers.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION, CHALLENGES, AND FUTURE STUDIES

Conclusion

With regard to the first research question, to what extent did representations of multiple jeopardy appear in the lyrics of African American female blues artists; racism, sexism and classism emerged to a small degree in the lyrics of 'Ma' Rainey, Memphis Minnie, Alberta Hunter, and Victoria Spivey. The symbols appeared primarily within the story lines of the relationships, while various subthemes emerged. Representations of racism appeared in the songs with references to being treated unfairly within the criminal justice system as well as making references to types of jobs for both men and women. Symbols of classism also appeared with references to employment, usually domestic jobs, while representations of sexism were either developed within the themes of prostitution and/or domestic violence.

In reference to the second research question, to what extent did stereotypical representations of multiple Mammy, Sapphire, Matriarch, and Strong Black Woman emerge in the lyrics of the aforementioned African American female blues artists; three stereotypes emerged to a great
extent in the lyrics, while one stereotype did not appear at all. The representations also appeared primarily and the story lines of relationships, with various materialized subthemes. The subthemes for the stereotype of Sapphire included spending time in jail and/or the possibility of going to jail, acting out violent acts or threatening to do so, playing the dozens, gambling, and drinking. Subthemes for the stereotype of Strong Black Woman include independence and rambling/traveling. The Matriarch subtheme consisted of a woman taking care of a man as well as giving him her earned wages. Each artist had several songs that were representative of the Sapphire, Strong Black Woman, and Matriarch stereotypes. There were no representations of the Mammy stereotype within any of the lyrics.

The findings in this research entail several meanings regarding the lives of African American women during the 1920s and 1930s. The first implication would be that while African American women were oppressed and experienced racism, sexism, and classism daily. Because representations of racism, sexism, and classism did not overly manifest themselves in a large amount of songs, it was almost as if these aspects were second nature and subsequently engrained in society, without the possibility
to change; thus, why spend the time and energy singing about something one could not change. Therefore, because there was a feeling of not being able to do much about these isms, the women tried to live their lives to the best of their ability and focus on aspects of their lives that they could control and possibly change, such as relationships.

During this time of Jim Crow, the United States was a non-accepting place for African Americans, particularly African American women. A second implication is that these women were faced with a need to become accustomed to White American values and ways of living; however they were not taught the unwritten societal rules and/or given the tools, as well as the opportunity to adapt. African American women earned and made a living in defined roles as domestic servants in many of the white women’s homes, while some worked in factories, plants, and mills. The luxuries of White femininity were not afforded to Black women, both professionally and personally; therefore standards of femininity and womanhood that one would relate to the stereotypical representations essentially do not apply to African American women.

Oftentimes the frustrations were verbalized in songs. Although the women did not blatantly always sing about
hardships, they could sing about their relationships and their experiences with men, which was something that most African American women during that time could identify with. The behaviors that represented the stereotypes of Sapphire, Matriarch, and Strong Black Woman in these lyrics were ways to communicate and identify with other African American women, as well as release the frustrations of coping with the underlying struggles inherent in surviving in an oppressive society.

According to Bourgeois (1996) "The poetry of the woman blues singer during this time period centers on sexism and racism. It is only natural that such an oppressed people would reveal the cause of their suffering in their folklore, which is largely accounted for in the blues verse" (p. 2). While most of the songs reflected the theme of relationships, in many instances the unspoken cause of the turmoil within the relationships was based on racism and sexism, but classism cannot be left out of that equation as well. Although there were only a few songs that directly addressed multiple jeopardy, it may be implied that it is the underlying cause of the anger and frustration demonstrated by the female protagonist and reflected through various subthemes.
Most, if not all, of the songs examined had some stereotypical representations of African American women. The female characters in these songs had opposite characteristics of what was deemed as womanly by mainstream societal standards. Women were expected to be there for men, regardless of the man’s actions, and they were expected not to drink, gamble, have minds, and/or a will of their own. The women who sang the blues told stories with their music. They expressed both weakness as well as strength. The songs often had women lamenting over their lost loves, but by the end, they most likely bounced back by finding another man, kicking the “no gooder” out of their lives, and either seeking revenge or finding another man.

Although I classified various representations within the songs under stereotypical categories, the reality is that stereotypes are not true unless 100% of the population represent that stereotype. The African American women as well as men were only a few generations removed from slavery and were still experiencing the pangs of slavery through institutionalized racism with such laws as Jim Crow. Stereotypes such as Sapphire, were loosely based on the actions of some African American women, often reflected in blues music and glamorized without the
consideration and acknowledgement of the culture and society in which the African American women were accustomed, then taken to the extreme and exploited by Whites in the media.

The stereotype of Strong Black Woman, although created out of a negative image, has in some ways turned to a positive and can be celebrated by acknowledging an African American woman's strength through her weakness. Although there were not many representations of the Matriarch stereotype within the lyrics that I examined, it may appear in the lyrics of other African American female blues artists and/or come into focus by examining different characteristics. The one stereotype that was not represented in the lyrics that I examined was Mammy. White producers in Hollywood would portray African American women as Mammy figures for most of the first 60 years of the 20th Century. In contrast, African American female blues artists were speaking out about the difficulties that challenged them and not about the simplistic caricatures the White Hollywood producers would box them into.

Essentially, the underlying goal of this research was to add to the dialogue of understanding African American women and how the experiences of blues women were
expressed in the poetry of their music. I chose the genre of the blues because there are few scholars who choose to study the genre and particularly tackle the issues that may be associated with African American women and the blues. Other than scholars such as Bourgeois (1996), Davis (1998), Wright (2001) who studied the topic of African American female blues artists by conducting an ethnographic study of whether or not issues of multiple jeopardy emerge in the current lives and careers of four blues women from Gates City, Texas, not many studies explore the richness and vitality African American women added to the blues genre. In addition, historically blues has been left out of some parts of African American history and ignored by many African American elite, such as those from the Harlem Renaissance because Black artists and intellectuals attempted to "articulate - in often divergent ways - a uniquely Black aesthetic" (p. 123) that left out the genre of the blues.

Many female blues artists still go unrecognized for their contributions and talents. While more popular artists such as Bessie Smith, Ma' Rainey, Billie Holiday, and Dinah Washington have received long over due recognition, many lesser-known artists such as Memphis Minnie and Alberta Hunter have only recently started to
gain notoriety many years after their deaths. There are still many lesser known artists such as Lovie Austin, Lucille Bogan, Sippie Wallace, and Ida Cox to name a few, who endured many hardships as marginalized individuals but had many stories to tell through song, thus contributing to a consciousness of African American women.

Personally, I have gained knowledge and insight regarding rhetoric, Black feminist thought, and the blues during the process of this research. Prior to examining the lyrics of Black female blues artists, I understood rhetoric as its traditional form of speech analysis and was only beginning to recognize its more modern concepts in analyzing discourse. Black feminist thought was a concept that I understood and believed in as an African American woman, yet the ability to apply such ideologies to theoretical research was somewhat of a foreign concept. Also, for several years blues was just a genre of music that I enjoyed listening to. I knew of some Black female blues artists from various time periods but was more familiar with the current popular male blues artists. Names such as Bessie Smith and 'Ma' Rainey were stored in my memory bank of well-known performers, but I often thought that their classic style of music would not appeal to my more modern tastes.
Rhetoric now is more than speech analysis. Rhetoric, as Foss, Foss, and Trapp (2002) describe it, is "an art and a discipline that facilitates our understanding of the nature and function of symbols in our lives" (p. 1). Symbols appear in our everyday lives through words and images. Researching the rhetoric of a particular musical genre allows a researcher to explore various cultural aspects and understandings of discourse. In addition, Black feminism can be a tool for understanding rhetoric. Black feminism and feminist thought exceeds strong feelings of connection, and blues is an escape from an oppressive reality.

By applying Black Feminist concepts to rhetorical theory, an open dialogue is continued and contributions are made to understanding Black femininity and what it means to be an African American woman. This research has helped me as a student and scholar to grow past the elements of basic understanding and has generated a desire to combat racism, sexism, and classism, as well as eliminate oppression by the dominant society.

While conducting this research, I also found that there are several similarities between blues and hip-hop. Many scholars correlate blues and hip-hop based on their origins and lyrical content. Chang (2005) indicates, "If
blues culture had developed under the conditions of oppressive, forced labor, hip-hop would arise from the conditions of no work" (p. 13), thus drawing the comparison that both blues and hip-hop were created during unstable times for African Americans. Other scholars correlate the two based on the fact that both genres contain sexually explicit lyrics and controversy over the women who participate in the genres.

Perry (2001) discussed the sexual images of women in hip hop and compared them to women of blues by indicating, "We just need to refer to the history of blues music, which is full of raunchy, irreverent, and transgressive women artists, for examples" (p. 141). Both male and female performers have been scrutinized for exploiting Black sexuality, but women have been scorned for being too explicit and accused of contributing to the objectification of women rather than combating the sexist and misogynistic concepts that are attached to the genres.

The subject of homosexuality is rarely discussed within the mainstream Black community and is often ridiculed within Black music communities such as hip-hop. While sexuality is a dominant theme within blues music, a subject that is overlooked is homosexuality that sometimes appears in the music, as with 'Ma' Rainey and Bessie
Smith. Lucille Bogan is another artist who sings about homosexuality. Bogan recorded the song "B.D. Woman’s Blues" which has the following lyrics:

Comin’ a time, B.D. women ain’t gonna need no men
Comin’ a time, B.D. women ain’t gonna need no men
Oh they way treat us is a lowdown and dirty sin
B.D. women, you sure can’t understand
B.D. women, you sure can’t understand
They got a head like a sweet angel and they walk just like
a natural man
B.D. women, they all done learnt their plan
B.D. women, they all done learnt their plan
They can lay their jive just like a natural man
A final realization was that racism and sexism still exist within the music culture, particularly the blues. Recently, while watching the documentary Lightning in a Bottle, Dr. John, a blues singer and pianist indicates that Shemieka Copeland, a young African American female blues performer, “sings like a man.” John’s comment, although meant as a compliment, not only hyped the already glorified status of male blues singers, but it also downplayed the contributions and abilities of African American female blues artists.
Challenges

There were several challenges in the process of conducting this study. The primary difficulty was finding the lyrics of the selected African American female blues artists. These women wrote and performed during the 1920s and 1930s, which was known as the classic blues era. They continued to write and perform toned-down versions of the blues as well as jazz when jazz was America's popular music of choice. While these women wrote many lyrics, some songs were not popular, others were not regularly performed, and songs were often borrowed or shared. Although one artist might have written a song, another artist would borrow the concept and guitar riff, alter a few notes and words, and add a particular creative twist, thus creating a new song to call her own.

Another difficulty with finding lyrics is that many books contain only the words of male blues performers. In addition, there were discrepancies in who wrote various songs. As a reflection of the sexism that existed during that time, many of the women, who performed with their spouses, such as Memphis Minnie were not given top billing, and the men were often credited with composing the songs. In some instances, record producers took credit for writing the songs in order to increase their profits.
from the sales. Therefore, in order to obtain an accurate account of the lyrics from these selected artists, I had to conduct several cross-references among different books, various websites, and album covers.

An additional challenge was the amount of information available about the artists to include in their biographies. 'Ma' Rainey and Memphis Minnie are the two most popular artists in the study. A biography was recently published that highlighted the life and music of Minnie, and there are several books that examine the music and life of Rainey. Essentially, there was an abundance of information, but the excess of information on Rainey and Minnie was often scattered and extraneous. Victoria Spivey and Alberta Hunter were not as popular as Rainey and Minnie. A documentary was recently released that highlighted Hunter in her elder years as well as outlined her life as a singer in the 1930s and 1940s. The documentary allowed me to cross-reference some of the information that I read in books and online resources. Although the documentary was interesting, much of the information in it was not essential to the study. Information regarding Hunter's and Spivey's biographies was obtained from only one or two books and internet resources.
A limitation of the study was the use of an Afrocentric feminist rhetorical prospectus as the methodology. Afrocentric and Feminist rhetorical approaches have different concepts and theories, yet they share similar goals, such as empowering the oppressed. Both are grounded in ideological criticism, but there are also no step-by-step instructions as to how to conduct an Afrocentic or feminist critique. Therefore, it was necessary to generate questions and concepts from each an ideological, Afrocentric and feminist approach.

Future Studies

The research and challenges of this project have lead to further questions and possibilities for further research. There are various avenues that one could take for future areas of study. The first would be to explore the visual images of African American female blues artists and determine what stereotypes exist in these representations. While conducting this study, I noticed that there were often two representations of blues artists presented to the public. The first was the vision of what an African American blues women should look like, as interpreted by White producers and presented in advertisements. The other image was the actual stage
presence created and presented by the performers themselves. Conducting a comparative analysis of the images could allow one to examine the impact of racism and sexism during the early development of the music industry. This could be further examined by exploring images in advertisements and performances of African American female artists in different genres of Black music, such as rhythm and blues, soul, and hip-hop.

Another possible future study would be to focus on the rhetoric of blues and examine the audience’s reaction to the lyrics. Performance style would be important to examine and discuss in this study because artist presentation affects how an audience receives the music. During the early stages of blues, the primary audience was African American. When performing in front of White audiences, the music was often toned down and made less offensive. Many of the blues songs that were written during the classic and Delta blues eras have been slightly modified and musically enhanced, but they are currently in various artists repertoires without being toned down for any audience. By observing audience reactions and conducting surveys after concerts, a researcher could examine how different groups respond to a form of music
that was created by African Americans for a predominantly African American audience.

Yet another avenue of study would be to compare the lyrics of classic blues women to contemporary African American female hip-hop artists, seeking to find out whether there are similarities and differences in content and style. With this line of study a researcher could also look for stereotypical images represented, as well as issues of double jeopardy embedded in the music. Although images such as Mammy may not appear, others such as Sapphire, the Strong Black Woman, and even the Tragic Mulatto may be apparent. Other images such as Freak, Gold Digger, Diva and Dyke (Stephens and Phillips, 2003), which have recently developed, are manifested in the lyrics of male rap artists and may also appear in the lyrics written by female hip-hop artists.

Blues was once an identification of African American culture. It was an outlet for individuals to express their emotions and release the frustrations that strained the African American community. It was performed in a style that African Americans could understand and identify with. Since its development, blues has journeyed far away from being considered “race” music, a genre specifically for African Americans, and has filtered into the American
mainstream society, as well as other cultures around the world. It has influenced such genres as rock and roll as well as rhythm and blues. It has also influenced rap, the basis of hip-hop culture. Rap is another genre, like the blues, which is no longer a marginalized style but a popular choice for all American youth.

Although these songs were written nearly 80 years ago, even today, African American women continue to be bombarded with stereotypes that are perpetuated through the media. They also face racism, sexism and classism and thus remain a largely marginalized group in American society. With an enlightened consciousness and the dialogue of what it means to be an African American woman continued, the question still remains of what needs to be done to alter stereotypes and combat multiple jeopardy. Now, it is necessary to move forward and go beyond the point of awareness. I suggest education, dialogue and community building as a ways to progress. One focus of education would be to target all youth of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Young people should be exposed to the influences of the blues in American culture, as well as African American history in general.

It is essential to educate youth about the past in order to influence the future. hooks (1994) discusses the
concept of “engaged pedagogy” and indicates that “to educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn” (p. 13). hooks also suggests that educators must teach youth about aspects how to combat racism, sexism, and classism in order to free oneself from the oppressions of a supremacist patriarchal society. Thus challenging educators to engage their students and make them feel a part of their learning process will generate scholars. Individuals who not only want to learn but who have the capacity to grow, gain, and initiate a process of change.

Elementary, intermediate, and high school curricula are not inclusive with regard to the subject of feminism and/or the accomplishments of African Americans, particularly women. During the past seven years of working in education I met many African American girls. Some were essentially oblivious to the fact they are a marginalized group in America. Other girls were hungry for the knowledge of understanding who they are as African American females in society. Several have accepted a status thrown upon them with the over-used terms of bitch and whore without understanding the oppressive dominant male origins of the words. Also, many have adapted stereotypical characteristics and claim to be strong Black
women without understanding the true origins of the term and the struggles their African American foremothers endured while these stereotypes were being created and perpetuated.

Because this study specifically looks at African American women in blues, it is my suggestion to start an open dialogue in music and art classes that highlight the contributions of African Americans musicians in all genres of music. Educators should also acknowledge the accomplishments of African American female artists in various gender studies classes on the collegiate level. As a mentor I challenge myself to create an open classroom that engages students in their education and involves them in the process of understanding cultural awareness. I consider it a personal mission to hopefully enlighten African American female youth become aware of their identities and culture. In addition, I will challenge myself to talk with and work with other educators, particularly with intermediate and post secondary educators, to develop curricula that address both gender and ethnic issues to be implemented not only in the classroom but also in such outlets as afterschool programs and extracurricular activities.
It is also my suggestion that a documentary be created as an educational tool highlighting the accomplishments and contributions of African American female blues artists. A section of the documentary should linking artists of the 1920s and 1930s to the hip-hop artists of today. Current female blues and hip-hop artists could have an open dialogue regarding issues such as multiple jeopardy and stereotypes that continue to oppress African American women. As a way to give back and start a process of community building, the proceeds from any sales would be recycled into a fund aimed at educating youth about African American music and/or scholarship funds for African American women. Knowledge is fundamental to change, and without an 'engaged pedagogy' that stimulates the learning process, youth will remain ignorant of the influences of the past, and the cycle of oppression will continue in American society.
APPENDIX A

ALBERTA HUNTER LYRICS
Aggravatin' Papa
They call him Triflin' Sam,
He lives in Birmingham,
'Way down in Alabam,
Now, the other night,
He had a fight
With a gal called Mandy Brim,
She sadly stated, she was aggravated,
And she yelled these words to him:

Aggravating Papa, don't try to two-time me!
Aggravatin' Papa, treat me kind or let me be;
Listen while I get you told,
Stop messin' round with my jellyroll,
If I catch you out with your high-brown baby,
I'll smack you down, and I don't mean maybe!
Aggravating Papa, I'll do anything you say,
But when you start to running, don't you run around my way;
Now, Papa, treat me pretty, nice and sweet,
'Cause I possess a forty-four that don't repeat,
So, Aggravatin' Papa, don't try to two-time me!

Aggravating Papa, don't try to two-time me!
Aggravatin' Papa, treat me kind or let me be;
Listen while I get you told,
Stop messin' round with my jellyroll,
If I catch you out with your high-brown baby,
I'll smack you down, and I don't mean maybe!
Aggravating Papa, I'll do anything you say,
But when you start to running, don't you run around my way;
Got one hand on my razor, one arm around my gun,
If I catch you foolin' round, I'll tear your doghouse down,
So, Aggravatin' Papa, don't try to two-time me!
(http://members.home.nl/zowieso/blues/alberta%20hunter%20lyrics.html)
You Can’t Do What That Last Man Did

Listen, daddy mine, what do you want of me?  
I’ve been just as good as can be;  
Now the love I had for you has turned to hate;  
You don’t appreciate,  
So, Daddy, there’s the gate.

You can’t do what my last man did.  
Boss me ‘round, and treat me like he did,  
I’m wise to what you’d like to do,  
So from now on, let me miss you,  
I weep and pine all the time,  
While you show off with friends of mine!

My last man tried to drag me down,  
But he was one good man to have around;  
But when the clock on the wall strikes half past three,  
I want all the things you took from me,  
‘Cause you can’t do what my last man did.

Early this morning, you wanted to fight,  
‘Cause you heard I cabareted last night,  
Tried to take my money, and pawn my flat,  
Now you’ve worn the welcome clean off my mat.

‘Cause you can’t do what my last man did:  
Hold me tight, treat me right, every night;  
I’d love you if you only did,  
Every night, treat me right, hold me tight,  
You’re mighty old to be so bold,  
And I can’t stand a man that’s cold,  
Why you can’t love me sufficiently,  
To make me forget my used-to-be.

He could love like a lover should,  
Always could, when he would, he was good,  
You’ve lost your nest, go east or west, but go, just go  
Now that last cruel papa, he Blacked my eye,  
Then left me alone to sigh and cry,  
But you can’t do what that last man did.  
(http://members.home.nl/zowieso/blues/alberta%20hunter%20lyrics.html)
He's Got a Punch Like Joe Louis
Lord a woman is a fool, to put all her trust in just one man
Yes a woman is a fool, to put all her trust in just one man
She can never get him when she wants him,
Just has to catch him when she can

Yes when I was crazy about you, you were crazy 'bout somebody else
You know when I was crazy about you, you were crazy 'bout somebody else
I know I was a fool to let you jive me,
Lord but I just couldn't help myself

So get away from my window, stop knockin' on my door
Lord get away from my window, ooh stop knockin' on my door
Cause I got myself some pigmeat,
And I don't want you no more

He's got a punch like Joe Louis, and other charms that I admire
He's got a punch like Joe Louis, and other charms that I admire
And when that baby startin' to love me,
Oh Lord he sets my heart on fire.
(http://members.home.nl/zowieso/blues/alberta%20hunter%20lyrics.html)

Down Hearted Blues
My man mistreated me, and he drove me from his door
Lord he mistreated me, and he drove me from his door
But the Good Book says you've got to reap just what you sow

I got the world in a jug, got the supper? right here in my hand
I got the world in a jug, got the supper? right here in my hand
And if you want me sweet papa you gotta come under my command

Say I ain't never loved but three men in my life
Lord I ain't never loved but three men in my life
't was my father and my brother and a man that wretched my life

Lord it may be a week and it may be a month or two
I said it may be a week and it may be a month or two
All the dirt you're doin' to me sho' comin' home to you

Lord I walked the floor, hang my head and cried
Lord I walked the floor, hang my head and cried
Had the down hearted blues, and I couldn't be satisfied.
(http://members.home.nl/zowieso/blues/alberta%20hunter%20lyrics.html)
Someone Else Will Take Your Place
I've cried both night and day,
You've always had your way;
But now you're leavin',
You're goin' away to stay.

What grieves my weary mind
I've been so good and kind;
If you had to leave me,
Why did you wait till today?

When you're leavin' me, pretty baby,
Someone else will take your place;
For many years, I've long been waiting,
Just anyplace with so much grace,
Some place like a millionaire,
Lord, I do declare,
With my dainty figure and my baby stare,
So if you're leavin' me, pretty baby,
Someone else will take your place.

I said, you're leavin' me, pretty baby,
Someone else will take your place.
For many years I've long been waiting,
Just anyplace with so much grace,
So if you didn't want me,
Tell me to my face,
'Cause five or six women long to take your place,
If you're dissatisfied and feel like leavin'
Someone else will take your place.

Spoken: Hit that thing, big boy!

When you're leavin' me, pretty baby,
Someone else will take your place.
For many years I've long been waiting,
Anywhere with so much grace,
So have a drink,
You're in for fun,
The chance is gone, you might be wrong,
If you're dissatisfied and feel like leavin'
Someone else will take your place.
(http://members.home.nl/zowieso/blues/alberta%20hunter%20lyrics.html)
**You Can Have My Man if He Comes to See You Too**

I'm leavin' town today,
I'm gonna have my way;
You say my man is not my own,
Well, you can have him; just give him a home.

Don't have to start a row,
Go on and take him now;
Go on, I say, take him to stay,
'Cause I've got a new papa now!

Now you can have that man,
If you say he comes to see you, too;
Go on and take that man,
You will find out that his love ain't true.
A man like him ain't worth a cent,
He just wants you to pay his room rent,
Take it from me, I'm glad I'm free,
So you can have that man!

I will gladly give that bird to you,
Got all my clothes packed, gonna leave this shack,
Don't want nobody, Lord, to call me back!
My daddy wants me, sweet papa wants me,
For me to come there,
I'm going now,
I'm going to take the fastest train!
So you can have that man!

Now, you can have that man,
If you say he comes to see you, too;
Go on, and take that man,
You will find out that his love ain't true.
Lord, a man like that ain't worth a cent,
Just wants you to pay his room rent,
Take it from me, I'm glad I'm free,
So you can have that man!

I will gladly give that bird to you,
Got all my clothes packed, gonna leave this shack,
Don't want nobody, Lord, to call me back!
My daddy wants me, sweet papa wants me,
For me to come there,
I'm going now,
I'm going to catch the fastest train!
So you can have that man!

(http://members.home.nl/zowieso/blues/alberta%20hunter%20lyrics.html)
**Yelpin' the Blues**

I'll stand in my back door and yelp the blues all day  
I can stand in my back door and yelp[ the blues all day  
I can see the man that leads my poor mind astray

My man was built like Gable, had a face just like a hog  
My man was built like Gable, had a face just like a hog  
He was a dirty no gooder and he treated me just like a dog.

Did you ever wake up with the blues all around your bed?  
Did you ever wake up with the blues all around your bed?  
And you didn't have a human being to hold your achin' head.

As sure as there's a heaven and as sure the stars do shine  
Just as sure as there's a heaven and as sure the stars do shine,  
I'm gonna tease that dirty rascal when his troubles will be just like mine

'Cause there ain't but one way you can keep a good woman down.  
Lord, there ain't but one way to keep a good woman down.  
You'll have to put her on an island and have her walk the bound.  
(Bourgeois, 1996, 70)

**Second Hand Man**

Now it's a long, long story, but you want to hear it?  
Say yes, 'cause I'm gonna tell it anyhow.  
I've got a man trained to my hand  
And I think I'm th rough huntin'now  
And what I'm tellin' you is private and I hope it will be keep that way.  
No, he's not new, 'cause I'm number two, and that is why I say:  
He's been used, but not abused, and I choose not to lose that second hand man o' mine.

Now he's kinda worn and he's slightly torn, and still I've sworn not to loan that second handed man o' mine  
Now you talk about promotions, that baby's made the grade and how.  
He used to be , you know, just my extra man, ah, but he's on regular now.  
He's kinda bold and he likes to scold, but folds, he brings salvation to my soul.  
I'm talkin' 'bout that, 'bout that second handed man o' mine  
Now, he ain't no beau, but he's kinda cute.  
And he plays music, but not a flute.  
And still I'm talkin' 'bout that second handed man o' mine.  
Ah this baby's all the flavors, there ain't non after him.  
'Cause I'm kind fickle, 'cause I said the same thing when I met Sonny Jim.  
An he's just like Babe Ruth at a bat.  
I'm ravin' 'bout that second handed man o' mine.  
(Bourgeois, 1996, 70)
The Castle's Rockin'
Come on by some night, my castle's rockin'.
You can bust a cunk cause everything's free.
On the top floor, in the rear is where I am residen',
and the stuff is here and the chicks fairly romp with glee.

You don't have to be afraid 'cause I'm payin' the boys to protect me. 
Tell them cat's downtown they can let their conscience be. 
Come on up, bring your gang, we'll start that ball a rollin',
My castle's rockin' run on by and see.

I say, come on up some night, my castle's rockin'.
You can bust your cunk cause everything's free.
On the top floor, in the rear, ah, that's where I am residen', the stuff
is here and the chicks fairly romp with glee.

You don't have to be afraid 'cause I'm payin' the boys to protect me.
Tell them cat's downtown they can let their conscience be.
Ah, run on up, bring your gang, we'll start that ball a rollin',
Say, my castle's rockin', come on by and see.
(Bourgeois, 1996, 71)

Take Your Big Hands Off
I got a pretty something a lot of cats would like to get.
But I won't let 'em have it cause it hasn't been used yet.
So take your big hands off it. Ooh, but wouldn't you like to have it?
They're plenty of others just like you.
You swear you're gonna get it; Well, you'll never live to tell it,
'Cause I'm savin' it for a man that's true.
Now I've made a vow to keep it and to that vow I'm holdin' on
And not a livin' Abe's gonna get it till the right man comes along.
So take your big hands off it.
I'll call the law if you try and touch it.
It's too good for a guy like you.
Yes, take your big claws off it.
I ain't thinkin' 'bout lettin' you touch it.
It's too delicate for a cat like you.
You're wasitin' time to crave it.
I've made up my mind to save it for a man kind and true.
Now those flashin' eyes of yours may shine, and your pearly teeth may grit,
But not one peek of this precious thing of mine, brother, are you gonna get.
So take your big hands off it, I'll call the law if you try and touch it.

I'm talkin' 'bout my big red rose.
It's too delicate for you.
I'm talkin' 'bout my big red rose.
Ain't that a shame?
(Bourgeois, 1996, 73)
Georgia Skin
The reason I like the game, the game they call Georgia Skin
The reason I like the game, the game they call Georgia Skin
Because when you fall, you can really take out again

When you lose your money, please don't lose your mind
When you lose your money, please don't lose your mind
Because each and every gambler gets in hard luck sometime

I had a man, he gambles all the time
I had a man, he gambles all the time
He throw the dice so in vain until he like to lose his mind

Hmmm, give me Georgia Skin
Hmmm, give me Georgia Skin
Because the women's can play, well, so as the men

Spoken:
Georgia Skin is the best game that I know
Georgia Skin is the game that I bet all of my money
(Garon and Garon, 1992, p. 119)

I'm a Gamblin' Woman
I'm a gamblin' woman, gamble everywhere I go.
I'm a gamblin' woman, gamble everywhere I go.
I've lost so much money, bettin' the dice on 5, 10, 4.

I've got me a mojo, for as I can't lose no more.
Yes, I've got me a mojo, for as I can't lose no more.
Well, you know you can't beat me, I've got to win everywhere I go.

I gambled all last night, all last night before.
I gambled all last night, all last night before.
I win so much money, I start to take back my mojo.

I shot crap all last night until the break of day.
I shot crap all last night until the break of day.
I been haulin' in all that pretty money, and that market man had to run away.

Mmmmmmmm, Got me a three on twelve.
Mmmmmmmm, Got me a three on twelve.
If you roll seven eleven, this mojo can go to hell.
(Bourgeois, 1996, p. 53)
**Sylvester and His Mule**
Sylvester went out on his lot, he looked at his mule
And he decided he send the President some news
Sylvester went out on his lot, and he looked at his mule
And he decided he send the President some news

Sylvester walked out across his field, begin to pray and moan
He cried, "Oh, lord, believe I'm gonna lose my home"
Sylvester walked out across his field, begin to pray and moan
He cried, "Oh, lord, believe I'm gonna lose my home"

He thought about the President, he got on the wire
"If I lose my home, I believe I'll die"
He thought about the President, he got on the wire
"If I lose my home, I believe I'll die"

First time he called, he get him somebody else
"I don't want to talk to that man, I want to speak to Mr. President Roosevelt"
First time he called, he get him somebody else
"I don't want to talk to that man, I want to speak to Mr. President Roosevelt"

He said, "Now, Sylvester, you can rest at ease
catch that big, Black jackass and go to the field"
He said, "Now, Sylvester, you can rest at ease
catch that big, Black jackass and go to the field"
(Garon and Garon, 1992, p. 252)

**Caught Me Wrong Again**
Well, you caught me, baby, we was makin' friends.
I can't say nothin' because I'm wrong again.
You caught me my daddy, we was makin' friends.
Well I can't say nothin', you caught me wrong again.

You know you're parked at my house and you can't get in.
That's the time you caught me and my baby makin' friends
When you come to my house and you can't get in.
Well I can't say nothin', you caught me wrong again.

If it hadn't a been for me my man would never been in pen
Every time he look around he catch me makin' friends.
If it hadn't a been for me my man would not been in pen.
Now he got himself thrown in jail, he done caught his wife wrong again.

You know when you give me that money go down town and pay that bill you owe.
I take that money and buy my man a suit of clothes.
'Cause I was tryn' to make friends, yes, I'm makin' friends.
Well I can't say nothin', you caught me wrong again.
Now if I give you my money you better not run around.  
If you got that in your mind you better lay my money down.  
Lord, don't try to make friends, yes, you makin' friends,  
Well you can't say nothin', your wife just caught you wrong again.  
(Bourgeois, 1996, 54)

I'm a Gamlin' Woman  
I'm a gamlin' woman, gamble everywhere I go.  
I'm a gamlin' woman, gamble everywhere I go.  
I've lost so much money, bettin' the dice on 5, 10, 4.  

I've got me a mojo, for as I can't lose no more.  
Yes, I've got me a mojo, for as I can't lose no more.  
Well, you know you can't beat me, I've got to win everywhere I go.

I gambled all last night, all last night before.  
I gambled all last night, all last night before.  
I win so much money, I start to take back my mojo.

I shot crap all last night until the break of day.  
I shot crap all last night until the break of day.  
I been haulin' in all the pretty money, and that market man had to run away.

Mmmmmmm, Got me a three on twelve.  
Mmmmmmm, Got me a three on twelve.  
If you roll seven eleven, this mojo can go to hell.  
(Bourgeois, 1996, 53)

Hustlin' Woman Blues  
I sit on the corner all night long,  
Counting the stars one by one.  
Sit on the corner all night long,  
Counting the starts one by one.  
I didn't make no money, of, and then I can't go back home.  
Spoken: I got a bad man.

My man stops in the window with a .45 in his hand.  
My man stops in the window with a .45 in his hand.  
Every now and then he gets up and hollers at me, and tells me, "You better not miss that man."

My daddy ain't got no shoes, but now he's done got cold.  
My daddy ain't got no shoes, but now he's done got cold.  
I gonna grab me somebody, if I don't make me some dough.  
Spoken: I'm goin' to the carnival bar. Can you camble? No, it's abd when you can't do nothin'. I just want to know can you shoot the dice? No, can't shoot no dice, I can't gamble myself. But I can't do nothin'. But I bet a man that I can gamble."
I'm goin to the corner store, see what I can find.
And if I make a hundred dollars, I will bring my daddy ninety-nine.
(Bourgeois, 1996, 57)

**Biting Bug Blues**
Just a biting bug been following me everywhere I go
Just a biting bug been following me everywhere I go
I'm gonna kill that biting bug, so she won't follow me no more

Just a biting bug been following me from town to town
Just a biting bug been following me from town to town
Yes, she kept on a following me, till my good man have done put me down

I woke up this morning and that biting bug was in my bed
Till I taken my pistol and I shot that biting bug dead

*Spoken:* Yes, yes

Hmmmmm, I won't be worried with that biting bug no more
I done stopped that biting bug from following me everywhere I go

Now you girls don't have to worry, because that biting bug is gone
I done stopped that biting bug from breaking up other women's homes

(Moonshine)
I've got to leave this town, I've got to go before the sun goes down
I stayed in jail last night and all last night before
I would have been there now if my daddy hadn't sprung the do'

I stay in so much trouble, that's why I've got to go
But when I get out this time, I won't sell moonshine no more

Now I won't be bothered with these big bad bulls no more
Just keep me a-moving going from door to door
Just keep me a-moving going from door to door
I done made up in my mind not to sell moonshine no more

Spoken: Yeah!
(Garon and Garon, 1992, p. 118)

Good Girl Blues
I have been a good girl, going to church all of my days
I have been a good girl, going to church all of my days
But I'm going to learn to gamble so I can stay out late

Crying dice, oh dice, please don't fail on me
Crying dice, oh dice, please don't fail on me
If you don't seven/eleven, don't you crap and three

Hmmmm, hmmmmm, hmmmmm
Hmmmm, hmmmmm, hmmmmm
Hmmmm, hmmmmm

When your home get unhappy, just as well to pack up and move
When your home get unhappy, just as well to pack up and move
Ain't no use trying to live in confusion, just like you was a fool

Oh Lord, oh Lord, Lord, what shall I do?
Oh Lord, oh Lord, Lord, what shall I do?
I done did everything, baby, to get along with you

Hmmmm, hmmmmm, hmmmmm
Hmmmm, hmmmmm, hmmmmm
Hmmmm, hmmmmm
(Garon and Garon, 1992, p. 121)

New Dirty Dozens
Come all you folks and start to walk, I'm fixing to start my dozen¹ talk
What you're thinking about ain't on my mind, that stuff you got is the sorriest kind
Now you're a sorry mistreater, robber and a cheater
Slip you in the dozens, your papa and your cousin
Your mama do the lordy lord

Come all of you women's outta be in the can, out on the corner stopping every man,
Hollering "Soap is a nickel and the towel is free, I'm pigmeat, pappy, now who wants me?"
You's a old mistreater, robber and a cheater
Slip you in the dozens, your papa and your cousin
Your mama do the lordy lord
Now the funniest thing I ever seen, tom cat jumping on a sewing machine
Sewing machine run so fast, took 99 stitches in his yas, yas, yas
Now he's a cruel mistreater, robber and a cheater
Slip you in the dozens, your papa and your cousin
Your mama do the lordy lord

Now I'm gonna tell you all about old man Bell, he can't see but he sure can smell
Fish-man passed here the other day, hollering "Hey, pretty mama, I'm going your way"
I know all about your pappy and your Mammy,
your big fat sister and your little brother Sammy,
your auntie and your uncle and your ma's and pa's,
they all got drunk and showed their Santa Claus
Now they’re all drunken mistreaters, robbers and a cheaters
Slip you in the dozens, your papa and your cousin
Your mama do the lordy lord
(Garon and Garon, 1992, p. 170)

**I'm Gonna Bake My Biscuits**
I got a brand new skillet and a brand new lid
I ain't got no stove but I bake my bread
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
Ain't gonna give nobody none

I'm gonna lock my door, nail my windows all down
You know by that, I don't want no bums around
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
Ain't gonna give nobody none

I ain't got no flour and ain't got no meal
If you got no man you got to rob and steal
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
Ain't gonna give nobody none

I'm-a tell you something I don't know if I'm wrong or right
But if you want my bread, you got to stay all night
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
Ain't gonna give nobody none
Ain't no need of you getting mad now, and poking out your mouth
You ain't gonna give me no bread when my bread runs out
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
Ain't gonna give nobody none

Come here, come here, I want you to come here now
I ain't got tight for my bread ain't brown
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
I'm gonna bake my biscuits
Ain't gonna give nobody none

(http://blueslyrics.tripod.com/artistswithsongs/memphis_minnie_1.htm)

**In My Girlish Days**
Late hours at night, trying to play my hand
Through my window, out stepped a man
I didn’t know no better
Oh boys
In my girlish days

My mama cried, papa did, too
Oh, daughter, look what a shame on you
I didn’t know no better
Oh boys
In my girlish days

I flagged a train, didn’t have a dime
Trying to run away from that home of mine
I didn’t know no better
Oh boys
In my girlish days

I hit the highway, caught me a truck
Nineteen and seventeen, when the winter was tough
I didn’t know no better
Oh boys
In my girlish days

**Spoken:** Lord, play it for me now
All of my playmates is not surprised,
I had to travel ‘fore I got wise
I found out better
And I still got my girlish ways

(http://blueslyrics.tripod.com/artistswithsongs/memphis_minnie_1.htm)
What Fault You Found in Me (Part 1)

KJ:
Worked all summer and I worked all fall
Had take my Christmas in my overalls
Now I've got tired the way you treated me
And I believe I'll go now, back to my used to be

MM:
Well, you know I love you baby, I can't help myself
I'd rather be with you than anyone else
Lord, tell me baby, what fault you find of me?
Ah, that you want to quit me, baby, for your old time used to be

U:
When I had you, wouldn't treat me right
Stay out from me both day and night
Now I've got tired the way you treated me
And I believe I'll go now, back to my used to be

MM:
I been wondering, I been wondering, I can't see to save my life
How come we can't get along like man and wife
Now I've got tired the way you treated me
And I believe I'll go now, back to my used to be

KJ:
Went to your house about half past ten
Knocked on your door, you wouldn't let me in
I've got tired the way you treated me
And I believe I'll go now, back to my used to be

(Nothin' in Rambling)
I was born in Louisiana, I was raised in Algiers
And everywhere I been, the peoples all say
Ain't nothing in rambling, either running around
Well, I believe I'll marry, oooo, wooo, Lord, and settle down

I first left home, I stopped in Tennessee
The peoples all begging, "Come and stay with me"
'Cause ain't nothing in rambling, either running around
Well, I believe I'll marry, oooo, wooo, Lord, and settle down

I was walking through the alley with my hand in my coat
The police start to shoot me, thought it was something I stole
You know it ain't nothing in rambling, either running around
Well, I believe I'll marry, oooo, wooo, Lord, and settle down
The peoples on the highway is walking and crying
Some is starving, some is dying
You know it ain’t nothing in rambling, either running around
Well, I believe I’ll marry, oooo, wooo, Lord, and settle down

You may go to Hollywood and try to get on the screen
But I’m gonna stay right here and eat these old charity beans
‘Cause it ain’t nothing in rambling, either running around
Well, I believe I’ll marry, oooo, wooo, Lord, and settle down
(Garon and Garon, 1992, p. 192)

**Frisco Town**
That old ‘Frisco train makes a mile a minute
That old ‘Frisco train makes a mile a minute
Well, in that old coach, I’m gonna sit right in it
I’m on my way, to ‘Frisco town

You can toot your whistle, you can ring your bell
You can toot your whistle, you can ring your bell
But I know you been wanting it by the way you smell
I’m on my way to ‘Frisco town

There’s a boa constrictor and a lemon stick
There’s a boa constrictor and a lemon stick
I don’t mind being with you but my mama’s sick
I’m on my way to ‘Frisco town

I would tell you what’s the matter, but I done got scared
I would tell you what’s the matter, but I done got scared
You got to wait now, until we go to bed
I’m on my way to ‘Frisco town

If you was sick, I wouldn’t worry you
If you was sick, I wouldn’t worry you
I wouldn’t want you to do something that you couldn’t do
I’m on my way to ‘Frisco town

Well, if you want it, you can get it, and I ain’t mad
Well, if you want it, you can get it, and I ain’t mad
If you tell me this is something that you ain’t never had
I’m on my way to ‘Frisco town

Look-a here, you get mad everytime I call your name
Look-a here, you get mad everytime I call your name
I ain’t never told you that you couldn’t get that thing
I’m on my way to ‘Frisco town
I woke up this morning about half past five
I woke up this morning about half past five
My baby turned over, cried just like a child
I'm on my way to 'Frisco town

I got something to tell you, I don't want to make you mad
I got something to tell you, I don't want to make you mad
I got something for you, make you feel glad
I'm on my way to 'Frisco town

Look-a here, look-a here, what you want me to do
Look-a here, look-a here, what you want me to do
Give you my jelly, then die for you
I'm on my way to 'Frisco town

I got something to tell you, gonna break your heart
I got something to tell you, gonna break your heart
We been together so far, we gotta get apart
I'm on my way to 'Frisco town
(Garon and Garon, 1992, p. 211)

Livin' the Best I Can
Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm livin' the best I can.
Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm livin' the best I can.
I got a man who stays in the shade, I'm tryin' to work to make this grade.
Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm givin' it the best I can.

Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm livin' the best I can.
Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm livin' the best I can.
When you see me up around about four, down on my knees scrubbin' somebody's floor.
Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm givin' it the best I can.

Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm livin' the best I can.
Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm livin' the best I can.
When you see me up around about six, tryin' to get my dinner fixed.
Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm givin' it the best I can.

Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm livin' the best I can.
Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm livin' the best I can.
I don't think I'm doin' so bad, I've got the same man now I've always had.
Everybody's talkin' 'bout how I'm livin', but I'm givin' it the best I can.

I mean, givin it the best I can.
(Bourgeois, 1996, p. 55)
APPENDIX C

GERTRUDE 'MA' RAINY LYRICS
GERTRUDE 'MA' RAINLEY LYRICS

**Dead Drunk Blues**
Oh, gimme Houston, that's the place I crave.  
Oh, gimme Houston, that's the place I crave.  
Oh, way down South I'll take whiskey (straight).  
Oh, whiskey, whiskey, in from old down home.  
Oh, whiskey, whiskey, in from old down home.  
But if I don't get whiskey I ain't no good at all.  
When I was in Houston drunk most everyday.  
When I was in Houston drunk most everyday.  
I drank so much whiskey I thought I'd pass away.  
Have you ever been drunk, slept in all of your clothes?  
Have you ever been drunk, slept in all of your clothes?  
And when you wake up you'll you're out of doors.  
Daddy, I'm gonna get drunk, just one more time.  
Honey, I'm gonna get drunk, papa, just one more time.  
'Cause when I'm drunk nothin' gonna worry my mind.  
(Bourgeois, 1996, p. 98)

**Moonshine Blues**
I've been drinkin' all night, babe, and the night before.  
When I get sober, ain't gonna drink no more.  
'Cause my (feet, head and hands are in the door).

My head goes round and I around  
Since my daddy left town.  

(I don't know the river down in the Harlem town).  
But there's one thing certain, mama gonna be leavin' town.  
You'll find me regal and rockin',  
Howlin' like a hound.  
Catch the first train that's goin' South bound.  
No, stop, you hear me say stop.  
Like a my brain, oh, stop that train.  
So I can ride back home again.  
Here I'm upon my knees.  
Put out again (I see)  
For I'm about to be  
Settin' my mind at ease
‘Cause I can’t stand ‘em
Can’t stand ‘em
The man I love, the man from town
I felt like screamin’, I feel like cryin’, Lord,
I been defeated so’s I don’t mind dyin’
I’m bound home, I’m gonna settle down.
I’m bound South now, gotta slow down.
Tell everybody I’m on my way, Lord.
I got the moonshine blues, I say.
I got the moonshine blues.
(Bourgeois, 1996, p. 99)

Leavin’ This Mornin’
See me reelin’ and rockin’, drunk as I can be
Man I love tryin’ to make a fool of me
I’m leavin’ this mornin’, I’m leavin’ this mornin’
I’m leavin’, tryin’ to find a man of my own

When I get through drinkin’, gon’ buy a Gatlin gun
Find my man, he better hitch up and run
‘Cause I’m leavin’ this mornin’, I’m leavin’ this mornin’
I’m gong to Kansas City to bring Jim Jackson home

I give him all my money, treat him nice as I can
Got another woman, wait ‘til I find my man
Lord, I’m leavin’ this mornin’, I’m leavin’ this mornin’
I’m leavin’, tryin’ to find a man of my own

I went up to Eighteenth Street, found out where the other woman stays
Cure my man of his triflin’ ways
‘Cause I’m leavin’ this mornin’, honey, I’m leavin’ this mornin’
I’m goin’ to Kansas City to bring Jim Jackson home

I walked down the street, didn’t have on no hat
Asking everybody I see where my daddy’s at
I’m leavin’ this mornin’, honey, I’m leavin’ this mornin’
I’m leavin’, tryin’ to find a man of my own.
(Davis, 1998, p. 226)

Broken Hearted Blues
Lord I wonder, what is it worryin’ me
Lord, I wonder, what is it worryin’ me
If it ain’t my regular, must be my used to be
I'm going to buy me a pair of meat hounds to lead this lonesome trail
I'm going to buy a pair of meathounds to lead this lonesome trail
If I don't find my good man, I'll spend the rest of my life in jail

Good morning, judge, Mama Rainey's done raised sand
Good morning, judge, Mama Rainey's done raised sand
She killed everybody, judge, she's even killed her man.
(Davis, 1998, p. 209)

**Cell Bound Blues**
Hey, hey jailer, tell me what have I done
Hey, hey jailer, tell me what have I done
You've got me all bound in chains, did I kill that woman's son?

All bound in prison, all bound in jail
All bound in prison, all bound in jail
Cold iron bars all around me, no one to go my bail

I've got a mother and father, livin' in a cottage by the sea
I've got a mother and father, livin' in a cottage by the sea
Got a sister and brother, wonder do they think of poor me

I walked in my room the other night
My man walked in and begin to fight

I took my gun in my right hand,
"Hold him, folks, I don't wanta kill my man."

When I did that, he hit me 'cross my head
First shot I fired, my man fell dead

The paper came out and told the news
That's why I said I got the cell bound blues
Hey, hey, jailer, I got the cell bound blues.

**Louisana Hoodoo Blues**
Going to Louisiana bottom to get me a hoodoo hand
Going to Louisiana bottom to get me a hoodoo hand
Gotta stop these women from taking my man

Down in Algiers where the hooodoo live in their den
Down in Algiers where the hooodoo live in their den
Their chief occupation is separating women from men
The hoodoo told me to get me a Black cat bone
And shake it over their heads, they'll leave your man alone

Twenty years in the bottom, that ain't long to stay
If I can keep these tush-hog women from taking my man away

So I'm bound for New Orleans, down in goofer dust land
Down where the hoodoo folks can fix it for you with your man.

**Rough and Tumble Blues**
I'm going to the Western Union, type the news all down the line
'I cause mama's on the warpath this mornin' and don't mind dyin'

My man's so good lookin' and his clothes fit him so cute
I cut up his box-back and bought him a struttin' suit

Then every little devil got on my man's road
Mama Tree Top Tall and Miss Shorty Toad

Tree Top Tall give a stomp as I stepped in the door
Miss Shorty Toad and my man was shimmying down to the floor

I got rough and killed three women 'fore the police got the news
'Cause mama's on the warpath with those rough and tumble blues

**See See Rider Blues**
I'm so unhappy, I feel so blue
I always feel so sad

I made a mistake, right from the start
Lord, it seems so hard to part

Oh, but this letter that I will write
I hope he will remember, when he receives it
See, see rider, wee what you done, Lord, Lord, Lord
Made me love you, now your gal done come
You made me love you, now your gal done come

I'm goin' away, baby, I won't be back till fall, Lord, Lord, Lord
Goin' away, baby, won't be back till fall
If I find me a good man, won't be back at all

I'm gonna buy me a pistol, just as long as I am tall, Lord, Lord, Lord
Shoot my man, and catch a cannonball
If he won't have me, he won't have no gal at all
(Davis, 1998, p. 226)

Prove it on Me
Went out last night, had a great big fight
Everything seemed to go on wrong
I looked up, to my surprise
The gal I was with was gone

Where she went, I don't know
I mean to follow everywhere she goes
Folks say I'm crooked, I don't know where she took it
I want the whole world to know

They said I do it, ain't nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me
Went out last night with a crowd of my friends
They must've been women, 'cause I don't like no men

It's true I wear a collar and a tie
Make the wind blow all the while
'Cause they say I do it, ain't nobody caught me
They sure got to prove it on me

Say I do it, ain't nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me
I went out last night with a crowd of my friends
They must've been women. 'cause I don't like no men

Wear ,y clothes just like a fan
Talk to the gals just like any old man
'Cause they say I do it, ain't nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me.
(Davis, 1998, p. 238)
**Countin' the Blues**

Layin' in bed this mornin' with my face turned to the wall
Layin' in bed this mornin' with my face turned to the wall
Trying to count these blues so I could sing 'em all

_Memphis, Ramport, Beale Street_ set 'em, free
_Memphis, Ramport, Beale Street_ set 'em, free
_Graveyard, 'Bama Bound_ , Lord, Lord, come from stingaree

Lord sittin' on the Southern
gonna ride all night long
Down hearted, Gulf Coast - they was all good songs

Lord, 'rested at midnight, Jailhouse made me loose my mind
Lord, 'rested at midnight, Jailhouse made me loose my mind
_Bad Luck 'n' Boll-Weevil_ , made me think of old _Moonshine_

Lord, goin' to sleep now for Mama just got bad news
Lord, goin' to sleep now for Mama just got bad news
To try to dream away my troubles, countin' these blues
(http://blueslyrics.tripod.com/artistswithsongs/ma_rainey_1.htm)

**Little Low Mama Blues**

Mmmm, Lordy Lordy Lord
Mmmm, Lordy Lordy Lord
The man I'm loving treats me like a dog

I know I've been your dog since I've been your gal
I been your dog since I've been your gal
I loves you, pretty papa, follow you everywhere

If you don't want me, papa, why don't you tell me so?
If you don't want me, papa, why odn't you tell me so?
I'm little and low, can get a man anywhere I go

I'm gonna build me a scaffold, papa, to hang myself
I'm gonna build me a scaffold, papa, to hang myself
Can't get the man I love, don't want nobody else

Aiii, Lord Lord Lord
Aiii, Lordy Lordy
Aiii, Lord, ain't gonna sing no more
(Davis, 1998, p. 227)
**Sweet Rough Man**

I woke up this mornin', my head was sore as a boil
I woke up this mornin', my head was sore as a boil
My man beat me last night with five feet of copper coil

He keeps my lips split, my eyes as Black as jet
He keeps my lips split, my eyes as Black as jet
But the way he love me makes me soon forget

Every night for five years, I've got a beatin' from my man
Every night for five years, I've got a beatin' from my man
People says I'm crazy, I'll explain and you'll understand

My man, my man, Lord, everybody knows he's mean
My man, my man, Lord, everybody knows he's mean
But when he starts to lovin', I wring and twist and scream

Lord, it ain't no maybe, 'bout my man bein' rough
Lord, it ain't no maybe, 'bout my man bein' rough
But when it comes to lovin', he sure can strut his stuff.
(Davis, 1998, p. 226)
APPENDIX D

VICTORIA SPIVEY LYRICS
VICTORIA SPIVEY LYRICS

Christmas Mornin' Blues
Spoken: Bless you there, woman.
Spoken: For what, not a child or chicken in the yard?

Woke up Christmas mornin’, went out to get the mornin’ mail.
I woke up Christmas mornin’, when out to get the mornin’ mail.
A letter sent from Georgia, the postman marked it last from jail.

In a mean ole jailhouse, ‘cause he broke the Georgia law.
In a mean ole jailhouse, ‘cause he broke them Georgia laws.
New Year’s he won’t be here, ‘cause death will be his Santa Claus.

My man so deep in trouble the White folks couldn’t get him free.
My man so deep in trouble the White folks couldn’t get him free.
He stole a hog, the charge was murder in the first degree.

I ain’t never had a Christmas with trouble like this before.
I ain’t never had a Christmas with trouble like this before.
Them bells is my death bells and hard luck knockin’ at my door.

Next Christmas I won’t be here to get this bad bunch of news.
I won’t be here to get this bunch of bad news.
It’s written on my tombstone I died with Christmas mornin’ blues.
(Bourgeois, 1996, 136)

Murder in the First Degree
Well, I’m layin’ here in this jailhouse, cared as any fool can be,
Yes, I’m layin here in this jail house scared as any fool can be.
I believe they’re gonna hang me from what my lawyer say to me.

My man got runnin’ around with a woman he know I can’t stand.
My man got runnin’ around with a woman he know I can’t stand.
That’s why I got my gun and got rid of one triflin’ man.

I scrub them pots and kettles, I washed and ironed the White folks’ clothes
I scrub them pots and kettles, I washed and ironed the White folks’ clothes
He got it like I make him, I kill him, Judge, that’s all I know.

Judge if you would’ve killed your woman and had to come before me,
If you’d a killed woman who trifled and had to come before me,
I’d send her to the jailhouse and, Judge let you go free.
I said I ain't done nothin' but kill a man, what belongs to me. 
I said I ain't done nothin' but kill a man, what belongs to me. 
And yet they got me charged with murder in the first degree. 
(Bourgeois, 1996, 133)

**Down Hill Pull**
Hmmmmm.... Aah, got a down hill pull and I ain't gettin' you no more 
There's an undercurrent somewhere, and I can't put my foot on land 
Undercurrent somewhere, can't put my foot on land 
I don't seem to nowhere no matter how hard I plan 
There's a change in the ocean, baby there's a change in me 
There's a change in the ocean, baby there's a change in me 
I'm gonna find solid ground, you'll travel on to the deep blue sea 
Oooh... done laid my love down for you 
Mmm... laid my love down for you 
The middle o' the time I do anything you told me to do 
Got a down hill pull, and I ain't gettin' you no more 
Got a down hill pull, and I ain't gettin' you no more 
Can find a man to give my money most anyplace I go 
Oooh... done dropped my love for you 
Mmm... dropped my love for you 
Ain't got you on my mind, any man I find will do. 

**Don't Trust Nobody Blues**
I don't trust nobody, but the good Lord above. 
I don't trust nobody, baby, but the good Lord above. 
And aside of my mother, there's nobody else I love.

Men will love you and fool you, make you spend all your dough. 
Love you and fool you, make you spend all your dough. 
After they get what they want, why, they don't like you no more.

Drunken friend, oh and sick too, waiting for a chance to double cross you. 
Mmmmmm, this ain't no place for me. 
Well I'm goin' out the country, I mean across the deep blue sea.

Oh, friendship ain't no good, that's why I'm hittin' that long, long trail. 
Oh, friendship ain't no good, that's why I'm hittin' that long, long trail. 
Because to fool with my money, mama don't mind goin' to jail.
Here I lay after midnight, drinkin’ my fool self to sleep.
Lay after midnight, drinkin’ my fool self to sleep.
While that low down man of mine is tryin’ to make his four day creep.
(Bourgeois, 1996, 132)

**Good Cabbage**
There’s a change in this world, baby there’s a change in me
There’s a change in this world, baby there’s a change in me
And from now on I’ll be the dirtiest woman you want to see

I bought a load of cabbage, the same day you let me down
I bought a load of cabbage, the same day you let me down
I’m gonna have my fun sellin’ all over town

I got cabbage slaw, got cabbage raw
Got cabbage on the shelf, got cabbage in my drawers
Got cabbage good, got cabbage bad
Got the best damn cabbage you ever had
Oh cabbage, I got cabbage by the pound
And if you ever taste my cabbage, I know they would run you wild

I’m putting them out on trial, they don’t cost a single dime
Got them out on trial, they don’t cost a single dime
But I bet I’ll get my pay, cause I really know how to take my time

My cabbage is good, they really will sell
‘Cause everybody know good cabbage don’t smell
I got cabbage boil, I got cabbage fried
I’m sleepin’ by myself, but I’m dog on tired
Oh cabbage, you can buy ‘em for a dime
But you will have to Gorgie to beat these cabbage of mine
(Victoria Spivey Vol. 4 1936-1937)

**Give it to Him**
To my fullest satisfaction I have learned that men like action.
But that doesn’t mean that you should go and cheat on me.
I am one who (penalizes) even when and if it’s speaking pleasure,
And I go for givin’ myt men what a man should need.
Girl, don’t get the wrong impression, men don’t care for much discretion.
Don’t hold out your best assertion, give it to him.
That machinery must have oilin’, meat keeps long wrapped in foilin’
Love itself ain’t free from spolin’, give it to him
Have to give away a fortune may not be so bad.  
Give him credit for the bunch of fun they must've had.  
Men have taught to gamble a lot, they want all the love you got.  
And they'd rather have it hot, so give it to him.  
Men don't care for lots of chatter, and I know gal, it just don't matter.  
Don't vare if it's gonna splatter, give it to him.  
Now, if you are plum or slender, long as you are sweet and tender,  
Let your man know you surrender, let him have it.

You may be a kick at fishin', men don't get a bite.  
So get catchin', and get cookin', fix your bait just right.  
Gals, this must be understood, don't love like a chunk of wood.  
Make your man know that it's good, make him like it.  
Never let a man (employ) if he has a lot in store,  
If he wants a little bit more, give it to him.  
If he's got it don't make him blow it, if you got 'em bigger show 'im,  
let him also know it, shake 'em at 'im.  
Why, see old Patrick, give it to him, after pick my dad,  
why she's Exhibit A through U and everything's been had.  
Every man that I can find, love to know that he is mine.  
Even when I'm too tired, I throw it at 'em.  
(Bourgeois, 1996, 134)

*I'll Keep Sittin' on It if I Can't Sell It*  
If I can't sell it, keep sittin' on it, before I give it away.  
You've got to buy it, don't care how much you want it, I mean what I say  
Just feel that nice old bottom bit, no wear or tear,  
I really hate to part with such a lovely chair.  
If I can't sell it, keep sittin' on it, before I give it away.  
If I can't sell it, I'll keep sittin' on it, before I give it away.  
You've got to buy it don't care how much you want it, I mean just what I say  
When you want something good you've got to spend your jack.  
I'll guar'ntee you will never want your money back.  
If I can't sell it, I'll keep sittin' on it, before I give it away.  
If I can't sell it, I'll keep sittin' on it, before I give it away.  
You've got to buy it, don't care how much you want it, I mean just what I say.  
When you want something good you've got to spend your jack.  
I'll guar'ntee you will never want your money back.  
If I can't sell it, I'll keep sittin' on it, before I give it away.  
Oh, daddy, yes before I give it away.  
(Bourgeois, 1996, 137)
REFERENCES


