Barbara Christian spends a lot of time and paper exploring the works of African American women writers and depicting a writing tradition prevalent in those works. In an essay, "Trajectories of Self-Definition: Placing Contemporary Afro-American Women's Fiction," she asserts that the fiction of the early 1970s represents a phase "in which the black community itself becomes a major threat to the survival and empowerment of women, one in which women must struggle against the definitions of gender. The language of this fiction therefore becomes a language of protest" (178-9). Definitions of gender include what society considers feminine or how it defines a woman, what it sees as valuable for a female to possess, which in this Western society begins with beauty. Thus, criteria of beauty are necessary. These criteria according to Western society is where the language of protest comes into play because this threat to the survival of the African American woman shows up in the form of colourist attitudes. These authors' literary works comment on the African American condition in response to colourism (along with other -isms) and its present standards of beauty, which have been adopted from the Western ideals: long (blond), straight hair, light (blue) eyes and a fair complexion.

In another essay, "The Concept of Class in the Novels of Toni Morrison," Christian sees America's conception of woman (past and more than likely present) as beautiful in an ornamental way, pious, married, eventually a mother, respectable in that she does not work. Black women could not achieve this ideal because they had to work, couldn't be withdrawn, and, by the country's standards, were not (are not) beautiful. So, on the one hand they could not (cannot) achieve true womanhood, but on the other hand, biologically they were females so they were also continually restricted by the limitations of their gender.

Christian also notes about the works of black women writers of the 1970s that "there is always someone who learns not only that white society must change, but also that the black communities' attitudes toward women must be revealed and revised" ("Trajectories" 179). We find these elements present in the works, including Gloria Naylor's The Women of Brewster Place, Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye, Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, and Alice Walker's essay, "If the Present Looks Like the Past, What Does the Future Look Like?" so that once their women characters are introduced to the attitudes of the world and their communities, they then "possess the possibility of constructing their own self-definitions and affecting the direction of their communities because they have witnessed the destruction of women in the wake of prevailing attitudes" ("Trajectories" 179), i.e. racism, sexism, classism, and especially colourism. Thus, we find that the African American woman writer must define or rather redefine herself by first defining herself by the popular
standards and then recreating those standards to fit her true identity. Christian writes, "Afro-American women writers have necessarily had to confront the interaction between restrictions of individual personalities, backgrounds, talents" ("Creating" 159-60). This confrontation seems the aim of each of these authors.

Gloria Naylor's The Women of Brewster Place takes an interesting perspective on colour. The book focuses on the lives of several women all living on the same street dealing with all sorts of seemingly hopeless situations. The diversity doesn't end, however, with the women's separate dispositions in life. Diversity is also illustrated through the complexions women wear and respond to everyday.

Naylor for the most part provides positive re-enforcement when choosing the descriptors she uses when assessing skin colour in the novel. These positive descriptors, or adjectives seen consistently throughout the novel, sound very positive or at least non-derogatory. One of the earliest references in the book refers to complexion with adjectives such as "cinnamon-red," "ebony," "golden," "copper," "nut-brown," and "saffron." They have been set apart from the typical "light," "dark," "black," and "yellow." The descriptor words when taken out of context are exactly what they should be - physical descriptions to help paint a physical picture. But, once they are placed back into their context, they may become stigmatized again with stereotypical negativity.

For instance, the cinnamon red character, a man named Butch, is quickly proven to be a womanizer, which is a common stereotype about lighter-skinned men. One of the characters, Mattie, accuses him of being a womanizer and he explains in his stereotypical smoothness, "Mattie, I don't run after a lot of women, I just don't stay long enough to let the good times turn sour" (16).

Interestingly enough, Naylor takes a dual approach to handling the colour line, the same approach she takes in her writing in general. Naylor switches easily between her narrative voice and that of the characters in her novel, sometimes even in the same sentence. For the two voices she utilizes, she has two distinct approaches to the colour line. When the narrator speaks in The Women of Brewster Place, there is a more positive tone and use of colour as it relates to complexion. She uses beautiful descriptors to describe the diverse skin tones of the people represented in the novel. She writes, "Children bloomed in Brewster Place during July and August with their colourful shorts and tops plastered against gold, ebony, and nut-brown legs and arms; they decorated the street, rivaling the geraniums and ivy found on the manicured boulevard downtown" (56). She uses non-derogatory or positively connotated descriptors for several skin tones. She goes on to use these descriptors in conjunction with such verbs as "decorated" and to compare the tones with such pleasantries as geraniums and ivy.

This narrator's description is in direct contrast with Naylor's characters' comments or everyday dialogue, however. They use the more common, stereotypical colour words, categories that can be connected to negative connotations. She writes, "Mattie saw that the evening light had hidden the yellow undertones in the finely wrinkled white face, and it had softened the broad contours of the woman's pug nose and full lips" (30-1). Even though Mattie is not speaking aloud, Naylor is tracing her thoughts at this point. And Mattie along with other characters speak and think in terms of the colour line. The woman Mattie is describing, Miss Eva, asks Mattie a few sentences earlier, "Where you headin' with that pretty red baby?" No cinnamon-red or golden browns here in the minds and words of Naylor's characters. Here Naylor holds up a mirror of reality to her audience's faces while countering such thoughts and mental conditioning with her own personal preferences to convey
complexion. I certainly see the elaborate adjectives she chooses to use with her authorial voice as a conscious effort to acknowledge and address the issue of the colour line.

In African American literature, wealth has a way of showing up as a specific colour, and it is not green. For instance, in Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, IVaylor writes about Etta Mae's love interest, "The tone of his skin and the fullness around his jawline told her that he was well-off, even before she got close enough to see the manicured hands and diamond pinkie ring" (66). The fact that Naylor doesn't specify which skin tone suggests wealth means that somehow it is already implied in the fact that the individual is "well-off." One could bet that this individual is not dark-skinned. Although a dark man can "get along" when it comes to his marketability in attractiveness and relationships, it is usually the lighter-skinned individual who prospers in matters of economic wealth.

Bell Hooks addresses economic wealth and its relation to colour as seen through the eyes of herself as a young girl in *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood*. In chapter three, she writes, "The people with lots of money can buy many [raffle] tickets - can show they are 'big time.' Their flesh is often the colour of pigs in the storybook. Somehow, they have more money because they are lighter, because their flesh turns pink and pinker, because they dye their hair blond, red, to emphasize the light, lightness of their skin. We children think of them as white. We are so confused by this thing called Race" (7).

Hooks looks at this through the eyes of a child, but also seems to insinuate something more with her confession about racial confusion. The light-skinned adults, too, are confused since they not only try to assimilate into the white culture, but also have come to think of themselves as white. Hooks makes the connection between economics and aesthetics, and aesthetics and status and opportunity. Thus there is a connection between economics and status and opportunity. In the same chapter, a page later she tells of a mock wedding to be performed by her school. She insists, "Like every other girl I want to be the bride but I am not chosen. It has always to do with money. The important roles go to the children whose parents have money to give" (8). She has been rejected because of her economic situation, but is "saved" by her aesthetic "luck": "They tell me that I am lucky to be lighter skinned, not black black, not dark brown, lucky to have hair that is almost straight, otherwise I might not be in the wedding at all, otherwise I might not be so lucky" (9). So even though her economic situation restricted her, her lighter skin and almost straight hair still afforded her opportunities she otherwise would not have gotten. In other words, light skin is an asset. She sums up this notion in chapter eleven as she writes of herself in the third person, "She and the other children want to understand Race but no one explains it. They learn without understanding that the world is more a home for white folks than it is for anyone else, that black people who most resemble white folks will live better in that world (31). The children come to learn that life is easier, better in lighter skin through their own naive yet incredibly perceptive observations and logic.

As Hooks grows a little older and wiser, she resubmits her more educated analysis of white or light skinned black people. We notice the difference and yet can acknowledge the similarity between a more adult analysis and a child's logic. With ease, she makes the comparison and acknowledges the problem between light and dark-skinned individuals.
[Miss Rhobert] comes from a long line of folks who look white. When we were small children we thought they were the colour of pigs in storybooks. We know now that they are the black landowners, business people. We know now that they stand between white folks and real black folks. Like gossip, white folks spread their messages to us through them. They hate both white folks and dark black people. They hate white folks for having what they want. They hate dark black folks for reminding the world that they are coloured and thus keeping them from really getting what they want. (103)

While summarizing the root of the hostility and animosity that can be manifested even today between light and dark skinned people, hooks also acknowledges the three tier hierarchy that was created in the South before the Civil War.

Hooks chooses to affirm her faith and love of black beauty with one of the same tropes Morrison uses: a baby doll. Hooks' affirmation, however is much less violent, yet equally insistent. After describing her favorite "brown like light milk chocolate" baby doll Baby, she explains why it was necessary to demand a doll that looked like her.

Deep within myself I had begun to worry that all this loving care we gave to the pink and white flesh-coloured dolls meant that somewhere left high on the shelves were boxes of unwanted, unloved brown dolls covered in dust. I thought that they would remain there forever, orphaned and alone, unless someone began to want them, to want to give them love and care, to want them more than anything. (24)

As with Morrison, this is a metaphor for little black girls and their lack of love, acknowledgement of beauty, and acknowledgement of their existence in general by others because the standard of beauty is white skin.

Hooks makes a very direct commentary on the standards of beauty in the African American (female) community. Accompanying colour in the field of aesthetics are facial features and hair. Hooks uses hair to acknowledge that the African American standards of beauty were not constructed by African Americans, and yet they are necessary and important in the African American community to achieve. Hooks writes,

Good hair is hair that is not kinky, hair that does not feel like balls of steel wool, hair that does not take hours to comb, hair that does not need tons of grease to untangle, hair that is long. Real good hair is straight hair, hair like white folks' hair. Yet no one says so. No one says your hair is so nice, so beautiful because it is like white folks' hair. We pretend that the standards we measure our beauty by are our own invention - that it is questions of time and money that lead us to make distinctions between good hair and bad hair. (91)

It is these standards that plague and penetrate the pages of African American women's literature studied in the present analysis and in African American female life in general. And like the other authors, hooks' authorial voice goes against that norm, goes against that expectation, and in its stead embraces the overlooked beauty of the African American culture. After hooks gets her hair straightened and pressed for the first time, she expresses her disappointment with her decision. She writes, "secretly I had hoped that the hot comb would
transform me, turn the thin good hair into thick nappy hair, the kind of hair I like and long for, the kind you can do anything with, wear in all kinds of styles" (93). She proudly claims the heritage, the "wrongness" of African American beauty. As with the brown dolls, she is willing to realize and recognize the beauty of her own skin and features despite the standards set in a white dominated society.

J. California Cooper on the other hand seems to avoid colour as much as possible in her collection of short stories, Some Soul to Keep. This avoidance also seems a conscious effort, for even in her mere physical descriptions of individuals, colour and complexion rarely are mentioned. While in many cases African American authors in describing their characters - and African American people when describing themselves (or others) - tend to refer to colour or complexion early in the description, Cooper rarely addresses it. In one short story, "The Life You Live (May Not Be Your Own)" the narrator Molly describes herself without using colour, saying, "I looked, by accident, in the mirror one day . . . and I cried! I was a fat, sloppy-dressed, house-shoe wearin', gray-haired, old-lookin' woman!" (48). Even when Molly describes her husband's mistress in contrast to herself, she does not include complexion: "She was slim. Wasn't no potatoes, biscuits and pork chops sittin' on her hips! Shc had plcnty makc-up on. I'd say a whole servin'! Black hair without one spot of gray in it! High-heeled shoes and a dress that kept bouncing up so you could see that pretty underwear she had on" (49). As with Molly's description of herself, she totally avoids complexion and any facial features for that matter. It's almost as if she avoids the entire face in order to avoid the issue of complexion.

This approach seems a conscious effort to avoid distinctions between colour as well as race as she alludes to in one of her short stories, "About Love and Money or Love's Lore and Money's Myth." The narrator, Bessy, talks directly to the reader as if having a conversation. Through Bessy and the telling of one of her stories, Cooper explains the virtual absence of colour in her stories: "I told you about my neighbors on each side of me. Black on one side, white on the other. Not going to tell you which was which cause I don't blive it makes no difference noway" (132). Cooper uses Bessy to describe the true feelings and motives and opinions of the author. The ambiguity of the character's voice and author's voice being in a sense one and the same and yet somehow different allows the author to use her characters as a mouthpiece for her own personal beliefs. We know these beliefs are really Cooper's because they permeate many of her stories. Several of her works address the colour line in much the same fashion.

Although Cooper doesn't seem to have a preoccupation with colour, she doesn't completely ignore it in all her narratives. In her short story, "Red-Winged Blackbirds," Cooper describes two of the main characters using colour and hair, but she totally defies the stereotypes. This is how she describes the two girls Reva and Jewel who happen to be twins: "The twins were about fifteen years old. They did not look alike. Reva was thin, light-skinned, with kinky hair. Jewel was plump, brown-skinned, with long curly hair. Jewel was snotty, spoiled, selfish and lazy. Reva was reserved, shy, always ducking from some slap, fearful, but very sweet" (78). Because she is describing the physical differences between individuals who would typically look the same, it is plausible for her to use colour in this case. However, she is still careful not to perpetuate any stereotypes here. Typically, the light-skinned character would have the fine or curly hair courtesy of the white bloodline. In this case, the light-skinned girl has kinky hair and the darker of the two has the long, fine "good" hair. Likewise, the history of organizations such as Blue Veins Society shows that the lighter-skinned population (along with others of the African American population) view themselves as a privileged elite and both better and better off than Blacks darker than them. One would then probably look to Reva, the light-skinned twin to be snotty, spoiled
and selfish, while the darker twin's inferior disposition would have left her reserved, shy and fearful. However, Cooper totally switches these expectations around in order to say colour is just what they look like, not a symptom of a characterization or generalization I am trying to make here.

Toni Morrison explores colour and complexion as one of the strongest themes in The Bluest Eye. Like Naylor, Morrison uses her writing to show us - and the world - how we African Americans compare our beauty to someone else's standards. She shows us how we should react or think of the situation in characters like Claudia, and shows us how we actually are in our own consciousness through characters like Pecola. She also demonstrates how we actually respond to each other's "blackness" in situations like the ones Pecola is constantly placed in.

Morrison freely comments on the issue of colour and the African American experience with standards of beauty and manifestations of self-loathing. Early in the book, Morrison makes a preliminary, almost foreshadowing, comment on the very typical opinions and/or standards of what people - African Americans in particular - have come to consider beauty and how it is the antithesis of all that is generally part of African American community and culture. In the same instance, she comments on her sheer disbelief and disgust with such a notion through the voice of one of her narrators, Claudia. Claudia who continues to receive white baby dolls as gifts admits her hatred of them as well as the idea that everyone else considered them most beautiful. She mocked the adults who gave the dolls, "'Here,' they said, 'this is beautiful, and if you are on this day 'worthy' you may have it.' I fingered the face, wondering at the single-stroke eyebrows, picked at the pearly teeth stuck like two piano keys between red bowline lips. Traced the turned-up nose, poked the glassy blue eyeballs, twisted the yellow hair. I could not love it" (21).

Claudia, bewildered by everyone's admiration for such a thing she loathed wanted only one thing of the doll: "...to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me" (20). She could not understand what people saw so beautiful about the white baby dolls so she dismembers them to find the secret. Claudia's hatred was extended onto little white girls. "...The dismembering of dolls was not the true horror. The truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulses to little white girls..." If I pinched them, their eyes - unlike the crazed glint of the baby doll's eyes - would fold in pain and their cry would not be the sound of an icebox door, but a fascinating cry of pain" (22-3). But what we soon discover is what Claudia - and Morrison - truly hated: "What made people look at [little white girls] and say, 'Awwww' but not for me? The eye slide of black women as they approached [little white girls] on the street, and the possessive gentleness of their touch as they handled them" (22-3, italics mine). What the reader finds is that Claudia's hatred of the little white girls is a symptom of what she truly hates: the rejection of her colour, her race by others, the lack of being perceived as beautiful even in the eyes of her own people. This is an early attempt by Morrison to assert her own pain and/or disgust for our treatment of each other. She uses a child as a mouthpiece, most appropriate since Claudia's mind's "programming" is not complete at this stage. She is still learning from the people in her environment so her inquiry is genuine and believable. And though that conditioning of Claudia's mind to finally understand the "politics" was absent at the time of her questioning, Morrison completes the section with Claudia's eventual understanding of everyone else's conformity to what I believe is an accurate commentary on the African American community's condition: how instead of truly coping with such inquiries, thoughts and questions, it eventually becomes a matter of conforming to the popular opinion after time and experience have revealed the
reality. Claudia, no doubt a little older and wiser and in a mode of reflection, says, "Thus the conversion from pristine sadism to fabricated hatred, to fraudulent love . . . I learned much later to worship her [Shirley Temple] just as I learned to delight in cleanliness, knowing, even as I learned, that the change was adjustment without improvement" (23). Claudia realizes that she must adjust her own wanderings, questions and opinions rather than expect change from those and that which she questioned. This eventual acceptance seems Morrison's partial explanation for the perpetuation of contradictory aesthetic standards kept alive in the African American community.

Claudia extends her animosity elsewhere as well. Claudia holds the same disdain that she has for white girls for a girl from her school named Maureen Peal. Morrison describes Maureen as "a high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back. She was rich, at least by our standards, as rich as the richest of the white girls, swaddled in comfort and care" (62). Right off the bat, we're clued in to several factors that resonate in other African American works. Morrison makes an apparent connection between Maureen's light skin and her financial wealth when she first describes her skin complexion and the fine texture of her hair. Morrison then takes the financial wealth and connects or compares it to that of the rich, well-off white girls. In the next paragraph, we are let in once again on the "secret magic" of perceived beauty as we are told how Maureen is treated by the school community. Morrison writes, "She enchanted the entire school. When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls; white boys didn't stone her; white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls' toilet, and their eyes genuflected under sliding lids" (62, emphasis mine). White students did not necessarily think of Maureen as an ordinary black girl. She was less threatening because she was more like them with her light skin, green eyes, expensive clothes and nice house. She was better than what is represented as blackness (poverty and ugliness) with other black students.

These scenes are an open comparison between African Americans' (and even whites') regard for light-skinned Blacks and whites, which would explain the light-skinned population's regard for themselves as superior to other African Americans and their passive approval from whites. Maureen embodies, however, the double-consciousness of the light-skinned (mulatto) Black individual. She is accepted and even revered in the African American community until she herself draws and commits to the line of physical distinction, a fact to be traced back to 'house' slaves and post-Civil war elite clubs. Maureen draws that line when she gets into an argument with Claudia, Claudia's sister Freida, and Pecola. The argument could be considered rather typical among kids until Maureen brings colour into the dispute:

"What do I care about her old black daddy?" asked Maureen.  
"Black? Who you calling black?"  
"You think you so cute!" . . . Safe on the other side [of the street], she screamed at us, "I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos [sic]. I am cute!" (73)

Maureen at that moment disassociates herself from the Black (capital B) experience by drawing the line between light and dark Blacks. It is an example of the initial acceptance by Blacks of the mulatto or mixed heritage until the line is drawn by that mulatto or mixed heritage individual, which opens an option to them that
darker skinned Blacks do not have. In addition, this scene simultaneously illustrates the definition of black as synonymous with ugly. We get this impression throughout the book, but when Maureen attacks with colour, Claudia immediately references Maureen's perceived beauty as a counter. It demonstrates the idea that even subconsciously, "cute" is the opposite of black and black is synonymous with ugliness, which is a main theme throughout the novel.

That line of distinction shows up later in Morrison's novel when the character Soaphead Church is introduced. Soaphead's family was so proud of its mixed blood that they were willing to marry within their own family in order to keep the bloodline as "pure" as possible. His wife, Velma, was said to learn from her husband "to separate herself in body, mind, and spirit from all that suggested Africa" (167). Morrison implies that this thinking, this obsession, was mentally "sick" as she refers to the obsession as "Anglophilia," a word sounding so clinical, like a diagnosis for a mental illness. We also find out that Soaphead is guilty of pedophilia as well. Between incest and pedophilia, Morrison suggests that Soaphead and his mind's programming, the things he's been taught or has learned, are twisted and sick, and thus his obsession with lighter complexion and thinner features is also a product of his sick thinking.

The notion of inferiority and ugliness due to being black (lowercase b) that permeates this novel is most apparent in a little girl, Pecola Breedlove. Pecola believes that if she were beautiful, it would change her life: "If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly [her father] would be different and Mrs. Breedlove [her mother], too. Maybe they'd say, "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes" (46). It is not, however, the child's logic that beauty will solve all her problems that is so unsettling for Morrison or the reader. The bigger message here is the young child's definition of beauty: "Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes" (46). Blue-eyes found on blond-haired little white girls that, according to Claudia got the gentle touches and smiles and general admiration of adults. She did not love her skin, embrace her blackness because others had not. They loathed her skin, even those who were also black (lowercase and capital b). Morrison comments on the power of colour and complexion, and its power as an insult, with a scene where Pecola is being teased by a circle of boys. The commentary comes through Claudia's narration,

"Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnekked. Black e mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo . . ."

They had extemporized a verse made up of two insults about matters over which the victim had no control: the colour of her skin and speculations on the sleeping habits of an adult, wildly fitting in its incoherence. That they themselves were black, or that their own father had similarly relaxed habits was irrelevant. It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth. (65)

What followed was a beautifully written sequence of completely accurate, analytical monologue that was certainly a direct commentary from Morrison's own consciousness:

They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a
fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds - cooled - and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was in its path. (65)

Morrison is no longer speaking of the taunting boys; she is speaking of this "condition" in the African American community where we look at ourselves and hate what we see, a condition that she asserts has been "learned" and therefore passed down through the generations. This condition is explained through a metaphor reminiscent of an active volcano, which can lie dormant, "burning for ages" and eventually erupt, spilling over after smoldering in, as Claudia said "adjustment without improvement."

Morrison's final words in the novel make a final analysis of this condition. She utilizes a metaphor that speaks to a cycle, a routine of learned thoughts and behaviors that although diagnosed as needing to change, seems to be never-ending. She speaks in terms of planting flowers but is actually addressing the African American position in America as a minority, and by interpretation, inferior race. If in your community, if in your country, the authenticity of your racial identification is measured through physical attributes, and your racial identity is perceived by those outside as well as inside that race as inferior, then the less physically identifiable that race is within an individual, the less inferior that individual is perceived. This is the climate that African Americans live in and this is Morrison's final acknowledgement of it:

I talk about how I did not plant the seeds too deeply, how it was the fault of the earth, the land, of our town. I even think now that the land of this entire country was hostile to marigolds that year. This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live. We are wrong, of course, but it doesn't matter. It's too late. (206)

Madhu Dubey, author of Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic understands that novels such as The Bluest Eye reveal the black community as being "committed to white middle class values, and is divided by colour-bias and sexism" (33). Dubey cites Ruby Dee's review of the novel which charged that "Morrison performed the crucial task of showing the black community the problems it must work through before it can truly believe Black is Beautiful" (qtd. in Dubey 34). Dubey also cites Dellita Martin who believed "The Rarest Eye helped propel Afro-American literature towards total liberation from the constraints of the Western aesthetic by exposing its damaging psychological effects" (qtd. in Dubey 34). Other authors follow Morrison's lead to expose damaging attitudes that prevail in the African American community.

Maya Angelou seems to share the same major sentiments of Morrison. However, in Angelou's I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings, instead of exhibiting two distinct voices to illustrate two points of view, the two perceptions are embodied in one little girl, young Maya herself. At the beginning, it is Easter, a holiday when Maya would get the opportunity to dress up extra special for the occasion. Angelou exhibits her own perception of beauty at a young age while, like Morrison, illustrating a bit of the typical thinking of those around her as well. Angelou writes, "I was going to look like one of the sweet little white girls who were everybody's dream of what was right with the world" (1). Understanding this general (everybody's) common perception, she herself falls also into the "dream" of becoming "right" (white). "Wouldn't they be surprised when one day I woke out of my black ugly dream, and my real hair, which was long and blond, would take the place of the kinky mess that
Momma wouldn't let me straighten? My light-blue eyes were going to hypnotize them" (2). Once again we are faced with black and ugly as synonyms, depending on each other to help define a helpless, hopeless, and undesired existence. Again, as with Morrison, we get an emphasis on blue eyes as a catalyst for this big change. Angelou would merely possess long hair, but her blue eyes would hypnotize people, stop them in their tracks and end their disappointment with the little black ugly girl.

Despite that Angelou at an early age despised her ova skin and considered herself "black" and "ugly," she thought her family to possess beauty. Interestingly enough, she considers her brother, father and mother to be incredibly beautiful and handsome people while she, along with other members of her family don't consider her pretty. What is most interesting to find is that even though she sees colour as an indication for beauty and acceptance, she handles it very differently for certain individuals. Research asserts that colour/complexion is a bigger concern for women because we have always had to concern ourselves with physical appearance and attractiveness (Veal 323). This notion is perpetuated as Angelou introduces and describes her parents for the first time.

Angelou describes her father in chapter nine, "His bigness shocked me. His shoulders were so wide, I thought he'd have trouble getting in the door. He was taller than anyone I had seen, and if he wasn't fat, which I knew he wasn't, then he was fat-like . . . And he was blindingly handsome" (44-5). Angelou doesn't mention his complexion until four pages later when she calls him "the only brown-skinned white man in the world" (48). Angelou immediately acknowledges what speaks to a man's attractiveness: his masculinity, i.e. his size and stature. When she describes her mother, I assume she does the same for her: acknowledge what obviously speaks to a woman's attractiveness, i.e. her facial features and, of course, her complexion. "Her red lips . . . split to show even white teeth and her fresh-butter colour looked see-through clean. Her smile widened her mouth beyond her cheeks beyond her ears and seemingly through the walls to the street outside" (50). She calls them both physically beautiful, though their physical attributes are measured quite differently.

Angelou goes further up the family tree when she describes her maternal grandmother as a white "quadroon or an octroon" and "having no features that could even loosely be called Negroid" (50). She then goes on to mention the kind of prestige her grandmother has in the community which Angelou mostly attributes to her colour. "Her white skin and the pince-nez that she dramatically took from her nose and let hang free on a chain pinned to her dress were factors that brought her a great deal of respect" (51). In that description, colour comes first, which suggests it is a primary factor for her grandmother's level of respect in that town. Everything else is secondary.

Zora Neale Hurston's one-act play, Colourstruck, is a direct comment on the implied significance of colour in the African American community. The play was published in several periodicals including Fire!! in November 1926. The play itself sends a powerful message and acts as a mirror for the African American community, a most extreme example of colourism used to expose its ridiculous nature. Two of the most powerful statements are phrases that show up even before we are introduced to the cast of the play. Hurston gives the time of the play as "twenty years ago and present." There is no particular year set for the play, which gives the impression that this situation, this issue is timeless. It can't be dated because it is not one separate occasion or event to be separated from any other time frame. Times and dates are irrelevant.
The second phrase is the place given. The place is simply "a southern city," which gives significance to the geography of the current situation. This play, on colourism that is about to be addressed in one act can and will occur in any southern city. Thus, Hurston is implying that colourism is based on southern culture, mentality and (psychological) programming. The south, of course, is where such ideas of colour originate, beginning with slavery. So it gives way to the significance of geography, any southern location in the origins and perpetuating of colourist ideas.

In the play, Emmaline, a black woman, consistently accuses her boyfriend of lusting after other women, but not just any women, only lighter-skinned women. This play demonstrates the insecurity a dark-skinned woman feels when posed against a lighter-skinned woman. This insecurity shows up as jealousy in the first scene of the play. John, Emmaline's boyfriend, asks her, "What makes you always picking a fuss with me over some yaller girl? What makes you so jealous nohow?" (83). The question haunts the remaining scenes. John continues to try to convince Emmaline that he loves her and doesn't want any other woman, "Ah keep on tellin' you Ah don't love nobody but you. Ah knows heaps uh half white girls Ah could git ef Ah wanted to. But . . . Ah jus' wants you! You know what they say! De darker de berry, de sweeter de taste!" (85). His last statement is an ancestor to the more recent modified version, "the blacker the berry the sweeter the juice." It is a saying to help darker - black - individuals be proud in their dark skin and not be ashamed of their colour. The saying, however, is usually attributed to dark women. Emmaline continues to be jealous no matter what is said or done. "Naw, youse just hog-wile ovah [Effie] cause she's half-white! No matter, what Ah say, you keep carryin' on wid her" (86).

As the play goes on, readers get a deeper look into the core of the issue, not just the surface difference of colour and/or the alleged lust of a boyfriend. Emmaline asks John to leave with her from the social event they have traveled to, a cake\walk b/w two competing towns. They are the best and everyone up to that point has been counting on them to bring the town a victory. Emmaline doesn't care about any of that anymore; she just tries to get John to go home with her. She pleads, "Come on John. I can't, I just can't go in there and see all them girls . . . oh - them yaller wenches! How I hate 'em! They gets everything they wants" (87). Emmaline is referring to the status given to lighter-skinned blacks - their perceived beauty, intelligence, and all-around superiority to darker blacks, this perception being held by blacks as well as whites. This perception gives them opportunities not offered to darker blacks. This fact is Emmaline's true jealousy: "Oh, them half whites, they gets everything, they gets everything everybody else wants! The men, the jobs - everything! The whole world is got a sign on it. Wanted: Light coloured. Us blacks was made for cobble stones" (88). For Emmaline, John symbolized the only thing she wanted in the world that she was able to obtain in spite of her dark skin and she could not bear to have him taken away, losing him to a lighter-skinned woman.

But this is the logical, rational portion of the play. We find out later that Emmaline is so colour struck herself that she can't trust anyone to honestly like or love her because she is so dark. The insecurities of the black black woman are shown in their most extreme form in the final scene of the play. Twenty years after the social event, John comes back to find Emmaline because although he left her that night, he wants to marry her now. Emmaline tries to hide her daughter from him because she is very white. She even hesitates to go get a doctor because she would have to leave him alone with her. When she finally leaves to find the doctor, she comes back to "catch" John placins a cold cloth on the girl's head. Hysterical, Emmaline hits him, "I knowed it! A half white skin" (94). She accuses him of being so colour struck that he would advance on her daughter, a
young girl that moments before he insisted was his daughter, their child. It is at this moment that the play comes to its crashing climax and the question that loomed over the production is finally answered. John declares, "So this is the woman I've been wearing over my heart like a rose for twenty years! She so despises her own skin that she can't believe anyone else could love it" (94). With that, he leaves Emmaline again, this time for good realizing that it is she who is colour struck and unable and unwilling to see past complexion.

Even in her most extreme reactions, the symbolic language in one scene in particular justifies Emmaline's insecurities. John, who loves her so much and loves her dark skin referred to Emmaline in scene four as a "handsome girl" while when he looks at Emmaline's daughter, a white-skinned girl, he describes her as "pretty." Pretty is an affirmation of beauty and femininity while handsome is an adjective reserved for men. By calling her handsome, he strips her of her femininity as a dark woman though he feels he is paying her a compliment. The same can be said for those individuals who even today make statements such as "She's pretty for a dark girl" which suggests that typically dark girls aren't pretty. It is as if Hurston wants to show readers that as much as we can appreciate and love our skins, we still to some extent, buy into the conditioning and programming of colourist notions in our environment.

Alice Walker addresses this exact phenomenon in a letter that preceeds an essay in a piece called "If the Present Looks Like the Past, What Does the Future Look Like" from her book In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens. She writes to a light-skinned friend, bringing her attention to a previous conversation they had had,

You may recall that we were speaking of the hostility many black black women feel toward light-skinned black women, and you said, "Well, I'm light. It's not my fault. And I'm not going to apologize for it." I said, apology for one's colour is not what anyone is asking. What black black women would be interested in, I think, is a consciously heightened awareness on the part of light black women that they are capable, often quite unconsciously, of inflicting pain upon them; and that unless the question of Colourism - in my definition, prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their colour - is addressed in our communities and definitely in our black "sisterhoods" we cannot, as a people, progress. For colourism, like colonialism, sexism, and racism, impedes us. (291)

Walker goes on to introduce a different perspective on the idea of authentic blackness originally spawned from the "Black is Beautiful" movement of the 1960s seeing it as just as colourist as disassociating one's self from "black black" individuals. Walker's use of black to describe African Americans in the beginning of the letter seems to affirm authentic blackness in its repetition - black black - as opposed to light black, light-skinned black or whiter black which suggests a disrupt in blackness when it comes to lighter skin. At any rate, she sees the black black woman as authentic, writing, "To me, the black black woman is our essential mother – the blacker she is the more us she is" (291).

"Still," she continues in the letter, "I think there is probably as much difference between the life of a black black woman and a 'high yellow' black woman as between a 'high yellow' woman and a white woman. And I am worried, constantly, about the hatred the black black woman encounters within black society" (291). Though Walker recognizes the programming of the past, she acknowledges that such programming can go
either way, the "entreaties of parents or grandparents standing behind [women] whispering 'lighten up' or 'darken up' the race" (294). She acknowledges the double-edged sword of colourism with the same vehemence as racism and reverse-racism: it doesn't matter who or how it originated, neither can be justified.

Walker summarizes the disease, the absolute root of colourism, and its need to abandon authentic blackness, writing, "And yet, what have we been escaping to? Freedom used to be the only answer to that question. But for some of our parents it is as if freedom and whiteness were the same destination, and that presents a problem for any person of colour who doesn't wish to disappear" (291). This mentality has trickled down through the generations as suggested by Walker's references to our parents and grandparents, those before us. And it shows itself even still in today's generations, sometimes filtered down, sometimes acknowledged but consciously abandoned and sometimes totally intact.

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Dr. Deepkumar J. Trivedi
Assistant Professor of English
Government Arts College
Sector-15
Gandhinagar