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RADIO DRAMA: A “VISUAL SOUND” ANALYSIS OF *JOHN, GEORGE AND DREW BABY*

by

PASCHA WEAVER

B.S. Florida Agricultural And Mechanical University, 1997

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of Theatre
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
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2012

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ABSTRACT

Radio Plays are a form of classic American Theatre that relies on dialogue, music and sound effects to audibly enhance a story with no visual component. While these types of plays are no longer at the forefront of modern day theatrical experience, I believe these popular plays of the mid-20th century are derivative of an oral storytelling tradition and significant to American entertainment culture. This thesis will discuss the aspects of radio plays that viscerally captured audiences. While this concept can be applied to many popular America radio shows of the time, this thesis will focus on one form ; the black radio play or black situation comedy series. I will deconstruct different genres of radio shows and identify the elements of sound effect, imagery and patterns in speech. This thesis will apply these elements to programs about white family life, (*Fibber McGee and The Lone Ranger*) as well as family comedies about black cultural life, (*Amos n' Andy, The Martin Lone and Beulah Show and Aunt Jemima*). In addition, it will also reveal the business of employing white male actors to voice the parts of black characters and the physical mechanics used to create a “black sound”.

As the thesis reveals, black actors gain work and are hired to voice black characters. The focus is on the vocal challenges of staying consistent with the Uncle Remus-style dialect used by their white contemporaries. Part two of this thesis is an analysis of my role as writer in an original radio play/situation comedy set in a black community in the 1950's. Included in this process I will introduce a reflective journal documenting my writing and rehearsal process. Character research will chronicle each character’s relationship to the play, as well as the vocal choices explored.

For my parents, who inspired my love for words.

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INTRODUCTION: EVOLUTION OF THESIS

The first radio play I ever read was in 2008, during my first year of graduate school, when I borrowed a book of radio plays by Samuel Beckett from a professor. After reading *All That Fall*, I was intrigued by the way radio theatre was to be produced, using a minimalist aesthetic, and maximizing the aural and oral components of the script. I loved how it was written to be double and triple cast, allowing one person to voice more than one role. I was immediately compelled to bring each of the character's voices to life. I found it fascinating how one could repurpose their voice, almost creating for them a new vocal identity, and alter their pitch, tone and timbre to differentiate color and texture.

I was also drawn to the avant garde style of writing, the quirky sentence structure and the parenthetical notations for sound effects and was enticed to read more plays written for radio. Through my investigation, I found that radio dramas came in many forms and were just as stage plays are in that they are unique in style, structure and resolution. This investigation led me to record *All That Fall* for a final exam using a small cast and post-editing sound effects called for in the script. While the original goal for my thesis was to perform in a radio play such as *All That Fall*, analyze my performance in the role, and discuss the purpose and impact on the use of sound played on a non-present, non-visual audience; after reading several plays I soon discovered that none used African-American actors or were set in any African-American communities.

I began looking for a radio play that explored themes like daily life, hero vs. the underdog, movie stars and current pop culture, in hopes of finding a script that had some type of African-American presence. What I found was more interesting than plays with roles for African-American voices. I found radio serials with parts for African-American characters being voiced by white actors using stereotypical dialect. White actors used “blackvoice” to take on black roles.

Throughout this thesis, you will see that my process, while concrete, was also fluid; and the questioning of one ideal was provocation for another. One radio play begins the metamorphosis.

CHAPTER ONE: THEATRE OF THE MIND

The voices I heard from my first radio play experience wrapped me in a sensory blanket of sounds. Here, in this aural theatre, I could listen and imagine, rather than seeing the action of the play. The visceral connection I had with this composition, provided for me a different satisfaction than could be achieved by elements of spectacle, set and beautiful costumes. The disembodied voices washing over me were gratifying enough. I discovered that my experience was related to something called Theatre of the Mind. Theatre of the Mind refers to the listener's ability to use their imagination to create a total picture that constructs visual elements lacking from a production. One did not have to leave home to hear, see, or purchase tickets for a trip to radio theatre.

Although it sounds very theatrical, Theatre of the Mind extends beyond the realm of traditional theatre. Scientifically, the phrase has many layered meanings. In this mental picture, there is an absence of reason and logic, which is fascinating, because imagery is processed in the cognitive part of the brain. As listeners, we have to lose structured thoughts and invite ideals that cannot be explained. Henryk Skolimowski says in his book *The Theatre of the Mind: Evolution in the Sensitive Cosmos*, that human rationality always goes beyond itself, beyond its fixed parameters. The boundaries of the logical mind may at times be limited...but the logical mind is only a small part of the whole mind.

While my experience beyond the logical mind was unique, I began to question if this sensory cloak enveloped other audiences? Was it just me, or were there others? Or was it

my background from an oral storytelling tradition that influenced my connection with Theatre of the Mind? My question was answered when I read, *War of the Worlds*.

War of the Worlds

Thousands of people ran screaming into the streets, many flooded police and fire stations with frantic phone calls and others packed up their cars and fled. It was Theatre of the Mind that initiated this frenetic environment in 1938, as listeners tuned into Orson Welles' radio play, *War of the Worlds*. Instead of hearing their regularly scheduled program, *Mercury Theatre on the Air*, people were shocked to find out that Martians were invading the small town of West Windsor Township, New Jersey. Of course Martians weren't actually landing on earth, instead it was a radio play based on an adapted script of the novel, *The War of the Worlds*, by H.G. Wells.

The Orson Welles version was performed as a Halloween episode and was written as a spooky treat and a way to attract more listeners to his radio program. At the time, a more popular radio show called *Chase and Sanborn Hour*, aired at the same time as Welles' *Mercury Theatre on the Air*, but on different stations. Wells hoped that the reports of an alien invasion written as a simulated series of live news bulletins would keep audiences tuned into his show. Many who listened to *Chase and Sanborn Hour* were accustomed to switching the station to *Mercury Theatre on the Air* during the music selection. They would often listen until they thought the music portion was over. Although messages at the beginning of the program and other announcements throughout reminded listeners that the show was entirely fictional, many missed the disclaimers. The realistic nature of the interrupted broadcast proved too realistic to

dismiss. "From New York City and Washington, D.C., to St. Louis and Seattle, listeners panicked because of the sounds they heard from a commercial radio drama." (MacDonald 53)

The sounds were those of gas explosions and gun crews battling the invading Martian army. They also heard the hissing sounds of black smoke and poison gas being released in the air then dissipating into sounds of people coughing. There was also, the screeching of flight bombers soaring through the air and the cacophony of aircraft engines being attacked by Martian heat rays. Actors who read the parts of the radio operators would embellish their lines, by adding lots of pauses and falling silent after pretending to inhale billowing black smoke. One section of the show played by actor Ray Collins posing as a news reporter, has a famous ending: "...enemy now insight above the Palisades. Five--five great machines. First one is crossing river...Martian cylinders are falling all over the country...Now they're lifting their metal hands. This is the end now...Smoke comes out...black smoke, drifting over the city...People trying to run away from it but it's not use...They're falling like flies... 2X2L calling CQ...2X2L calling CQ...2X2L calling CQ...New York. Isn't there anyone on the air? Isn't there anyone on the air? Isn't there anyone...2X2L--" (sacred-texts.com/ufo/mars/wow.htm). A combination of the details in the script, the specificity of the actors and the lifelike sound effects convinced people the radio program was reality.

The mind has a unique way of turning oral information into fact or fiction. The Martian invasion reminds me of listening to stories on tape as a child. I would conjure mental images based on the elongation of vowel sounds in words like, "big," "tall," "spooky," or "scary." I could feel the energy in the air from a string of onomatopoeic consonants in, "tip-toe,"

“sneaky,” “boom,” and “crash.” I could see, smell and taste the images in the words, far, far away in a distant land, clouds as light as cotton candy, beaches as white as sugar and crackling fire places made for roasting the softest, roundest marshmallows. Theatre of the Mind was influential in my experience with radio plays so I now desired to take a closer look at its inception, by researching the radio and its roots.

CHAPTER TWO: ORIGINS OF RADIO

Have you ever stopped at a red light and gotten an earful of music blaring from the car idling next to you? Probably. At one time or another, we have all had to roll up our windows, pull forward a bit, or give in and endure the tunes wafting in. It's a sign that radio is everywhere. More specifically, radio waves are everywhere. They don't only send music over the radio, but they invisibly transmit conversations, photos and information to millions of people daily. Public radio alone is responsible for broadcasting to more than 64 million Americans each month. Radio is in our cars, in our homes, being downloaded from computers and transmitted by satellites internationally. Every commercial advertisement, talk show or radio play is being sent by radio waves. What began as a simple process of conducting a wave of energy from a radio transmitter and receiver, exploded into the technology that became the foundation of American radio.

The success of creating the first sounds of radio was an international effort. In 1892, Nathan B. Stubblefield, an American inventor, became the first person to transmit the sound of a voice without the use of wires. In 1901, an Italian engineer named Guglielmo Marconi sent a wireless telegraphy message across the Atlantic. It wasn't until more than two decades later that a bona fide radio transmission was made from the top of a six-story building in East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. On November 2, 1920, the first commercially recognized broadcast was born when an evening broadcast of the Presidential election results between Warren G. Harding and James M. Cox was sent from a 100-watt transmitter at station KDKA. The broadcast of the returns set the tone for a radio craze that spread through the nation like wildfire.

Interest in this new phenomenon piqued interest all over the nation. People called it "wireless telephone", "wireless music box", "radio telephone", or simply, "radio." No matter what people chose to call it, once the commercial potential was recognized, everyone wanted a piece of it, including the nation's top businesses. Department stores, motor companies, churches, power companies all wanted to acquire a federal license and a station. In order to broadcast on the air, corporations had to register with the Federal Communications Commission. (FCC) The FCC decided who was able to use which frequency and issued a license indicating the frequency number, call letters, usage rights and requirements. If someone was assigned KDKA 91.5 for example, it actually meant that you were listening to a station broadcasting a signal from a frequency tuned to 91.5 megahertz or millions of cycles per second. KDKA were the call letters or station identification letters. Almost anyone at that time could acquire a federal license. Many colleges and universities got into the business of owning a radio station in the 1920's and, by 1922, more than seventy higher education institutions owned stations. Newspaper companies jumped on the radio bandwagon and purchased stations to broadcast their printed news. "Two years after the KDKA inaugural broadcast, there were 1.5 million sets in the country; there were more than 550 stations; and there was at least one station in every state-ranging from California with sixty-nine, to several states with only one." (Macdonald 4).

Radio enthusiasts packed stores and tried to purchase their own receivers. Many bought kits from places like Sears Roebuck and built radios at home. One popular type was the crystal radio set, also called the "cat's whiskers", which was the simplest type of radio receiver. It was inexpensive and did not need a battery or power source. It ran on the power received from radio

waves by a long antenna. The name “crystal” came from a component called a crystal detector that was made from a crystalline mineral. Magazines like *Radio Digest Illustrated* gave people information on what type of radio sets to buy and a listing of all the radio programs on air.

Early in the 1920's, listening to the radio was something many did in isolation as a hobby. It was a time-consuming and challenging project that required patience at the controls and precision at tuning the dial before you could even listen. Since radios did not have speakers, one had to listen with headphones in order to tune in as closely as possible to the right frequency. Soon after, when audio speakers were available and affordable, listening to the radio on a nearby sofa or sprawled across the floor became a family activity.

By 1923, stores were selling ready-made vacuum tube model radios that were more powerful than crystal sets. People no longer had to put radios together and since the enthusiasts were the only ones excited about building radios, the rest of the public could now just listen to them. The physical principles of radio were not important to the average radio user. He cared little, and knew even less, about the way the vacuum tubes in the receiver actually worked. As long as they began to glow when he turned the knob and heard a familiar click. “The average listener was not really concerned with how the 'air' or the 'ether' carried sound waves, or about the way in which a station could transmit electrical impulses and have them received by a million radio sets simultaneously.” (MacDonald ix).

By now, my knowledge of where radio began overlapped with the reason for its invention- to disseminate information. Whether news, sports or entertainment programming, the radio capitalized on the only human sense needed; the ear. Could it be that Theatre of the Mind

isn't the only concept that addicts audiences? Could it be the ear, which functions as a receptor of sounds, is what needs closer investigation?

CHAPTER THREE: THEATRE OF THE “EAR”

Our aural influences create sound memories and sound memories create pictures in the mind. Before we see the image, we hear it. Theatre of the “Ear,” might explain how we create mental imagery by listening. The ear collects sound and sends signals to the brain where it is then interpreted. Hearing a song, or the clap of a hand, has a direct correlation to our visual perception. Radio allowed listeners the freedom to imagine.

The joy of the radio was in the sound amplified through the speaker. With just a turn of the wrist and a click of a knob, mid-twentieth century audiences could hear everything from current events broadcasts to current entertainment shows without leaving home. By now, just about every type of radio programming could be heard across the dials-reports from World War I, President Calvin Coolidge’s speech to congress, sports programming, dramas, comedy shows, musical entertainment, detective shows, variety shows and most importantly, radio advertising. Advertisements were the staple of on-air time that programmers tucked neatly between each broadcast. Listeners were inundated with commercials promoting various products that clever marketing executives hoped the public would remember. Radio became less about the programming and more about the ads. “Instead of being a great moral force, radio had become an aural peddler to which program content was less important than the commercial announcements.” (Macdonald 1). Some people thought stations and networks lost integrity by letting themselves be ruled by advertisers, but the radio was free to all businesses and all types of content

By just listening, it was easier to envision some programs on the radio than others. Crowds cheering in the background of a sports broadcast might create a specific picture of a baseball player rounding third or sliding into fourth, because of a listener's familiarity with a favorite baseball team. Other programs like variety shows with magicians and baton twirlers might not have had the same mental connection for listeners if they never experienced it before. In some cases people would create the visual image they thought best accompanied the sound they heard.

President Roosevelt rode that wave of mental imagery as his voice floated through the radio to the ears of constituents during his fireside chats in front of an imaginary fireplace. The speeches were extremely popular and attracted more listeners than even some of the most popular radio shows. Listeners could imagine the president's kind smile and sincere eyes, as they listened to a friendly voice resonate through the radio speakers.

Unlike live theatre, this notion of a "theatre of the mind", or maybe I should say, Theatre of the "Ear," actively engaged the listeners and gave the brain a spark on which to build upon. "It was the individual listener, too, who mentally provided the props and stage effects for the broadcast of a Shakespearian drama, and the substance that spoken words only suggested in an adventure or mystery program." (MacDonald ix). This imagery is also referred to as listening in the mind. Visualizing becomes the key component when there is no picture to stimulate the brain. According to an article in the Stanford, Encyclopedia of Philosophy, imagery experiences are understood as echoes or reconstructions of actual experiences from the past. They are also believed to be involved in creative thought and in memory. The thought of actively listening

with the mind attracted millions of listeners to radio. Songs were even written about the pastime, including one found in a radio scrapbook:

Memories-like firelit flames

Will quickly fade- so write their names

Within this book-and keep the glow-

Heart of the home-the Radio! (MacDonald 13).

Sound Effects

When I think of radio plays, I immediately think of sound effects. Sound effects round out the dialogue by creating a more potent listening atmosphere. In a radio play, there are no actors present to convey a meaning with a glance or gesture. It is not possible to see someone walk across a room, give a person a kiss, or deliver a slap across the face. The sound effect is what allows the audience to become a part of the intricate moments of the play.

When I think about sound effects I recall attending a production of *A Jingle Jangle Christmas* at Orlando Shakespeare Theatre in 2010. The play was set in a recording studio and viewers played the role of a live studio audience. There was a "sound man" who had several knick knacks and noisemakers sprawled across a table. The effects were made by a number of small instruments and found objects. A pair of shoes in a box of gravel would simulate the sound of walking, a handheld toot horn would be the honk of a car horn and a garbage can lid and a brick would create crash and boom sounds for accidents. Just watching how the sound tools were implemented in the performance was exciting. Although the audience could see the actors' physical expressions, the specific moments where sound effect was included enhanced

the story line immensely. Sound effects were an essential part for listeners. Radio producer and personality Samuel L. "Roxy" Rothafel also believed this. "Sound effects lend color and realism. A performance unaccompanied by noises that indicate actions on the part of the actors and actresses, would result in a bare and somewhat unreal presentation." (MacDonald 6).

Just imagine listening to a mystery on the radio. As the plot thickens you hear the narrator describing the villain's long walk down a corridor where he finds a heavy iron door at the end. As he opens it slowly, the sight behind the door forces a blood curdling scream to escape his lips. Listening to the narrator say those words can be exciting enough, but if each of those phrases was accompanied by a sound effect that supported the action, the scene would become magical. Have you ever muted the sound on a scary movie just as you hear spooky music or a shrill sound underscore a tense moment on screen? While the visual alone might be scary, the sound effect is what makes the scene scarier still.

Until engineers had access to sophisticated recordings of everyday sounds they found unique ways to imitate them. To simulate a forest fire, they would use a blowtorch or break matches. The sound of rain tapping on a roof was made by rolling dried peas down a paper tube. Claps of thunder were produced by waving thin sheets of metal back and forth. Sound engineers also used doorbells, alarms, telephone bells, locks and dummy doors to create some of those everyday sounds we hear. Using sound effects in a show was not a guessing game, it was a scripted and detailed process that outlined how and when the effects should be executed. What follows is an example of how sound effect was written in a script from the radio series *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*:

SOUND: Footsteps Along Hallway...Establish, Then Halt.

WATSON: (Normal Voice) What now, Holmes?

HOLMES: (Sotto Voce) Sssh!...Quiet, Watson!

WATSON: (Whispering) Oh...Sorry, old boy.

HOLMES: Careful, now.

SOUND: Doorknob Turned...Pause...Door Slowly Creaks Open

HOLMES: All clear, Watson. Light the gas jet.

WATSON: Righto.

SOUND: Striking of Match...Puff of Flame as Gas Jet is Lit (Taylor 126).

Studio Life

Studio life was the most important aspect of radio shows. Radio programming was live, just as plays are in the theatre. No room for rewinds, retakes, or post-editing cover-ups. Studios consisted of a control room where a huge double-paned window separated the actor maintained visual contact with the director. From my work as a television producer, I remember where I would sit in the control room. I was situated behind a console where there was a row of computer monitors and many knobs and switches. The hardware was attached to an audio system that connected to the anchor's ear piece and to my microphone. The director would sit at the front of the room just behind a set of large monitors. From his seat he would man the controls, give cues and listen to my feedback, while counting us in and out of stories and commercial breaks. The large monitors in front were next to a set of smaller monitors where I could watch everything from news on competing stations, reporters in the field as well as

activities in house. While the radio studio control room during the early years was not as complicated, the idea that the show was produced in these kind of confines, recalls for me, the immediacy of the words “three-two-one-live!” “...the sound-effects men, orchestra, actors and actresses were being coordinated into a single, well-oiled unit, guided by directions given over the talk-back in the control room. When the control room clock's second hand arrived 'straight up' on the hour, an 'On the Air' sign lit up in the studio and everyone onstage was like a horse at the starting gate.” (Taylor 19-20).

Along with actors and directors in the studio there was also an announcer who manned the controls, did station identification and sometimes babysat programs in case something unforeseen happened. Occasionally technical difficulties would force live events to go off the air and announcers would have to stand by with recorded music or be ready to jump in and chat. One such instance occurred when radio station KTAB in San Francisco-Oakland carried a live Sunday morning sermon from a local church.

When the remote signal was dropped, it took the announcer in the studio a few moments to recover, probably because he had been reading the comic section of the paper during the broadcast. He acted quickly, dropping his paper and clicked on the record turntable. Within seconds, he sent out an inappropriate song for church listeners. The song was Cab Calloway's *"You'll Never Get To Heaven That Way."*

Using sound effect and communication were convincing tools in laying the groundwork for America's television programs, but what were the tools writers used to entice listeners? Would my Theatre of the “Ear” concept coupled with the tenets of Theatre of the Mind be

present in the varying genres of American radio programs? I looked into the history of radio dramas to find an answer.

CHAPTER FOUR: AMERICAN RADIO GENRES

By the mid 1920's one could find just about any type of program on the radio. Radio was in the business of developing and presenting a broad range of shows in every genre from classical music, to comedies, dramas and even minstrel shows. Listeners were positioned in front of the radio and ready to take on the styles and themes established by owners, producers and writers in radio studios. Most of the shows at this time were written for the typically white and Christian audiences. Shows were extensions of their lives and lifestyles; and while there were many spin-offs later that showcased minorities and minority themes, the initial radio environment was intended for an exclusive audience.

Comedy

Comedy was one of the foremost followed styles of show that emerged during the Golden Days of radio. The comedic structure included everything from slight sarcasm and humor to outlandish slapstick. Comedy shows were becoming the norm just five years into radio's first broadcast and station owners and managers looked to find as much comedy as possible to fill their time slots. Comedy became popular because of the personalities and the characters they portrayed. The funny folks behind the scripts brought in laughs every night. Most of it was so funny because radio comedy produced a style of humor that poked fun at the comedian. Comic actors became known as the clowns of radio plays.

Many actors were recognized for the unique way they delivered their signature lines, and the interesting accents with which they spoke. Each situation garnered chuckles by those listening, especially when the characters got themselves in a pickle. The most popular comedic

actors were skilled at setting up a joke and then knowing the appropriate time to deliver the punch line. Comedy was the most revenue generating broadcast genre on the radio. It received the highest ratings and actors made money communicating with audiences they never saw. Well-known artists like Jack Benny, one of the most well-known comedians in radio, said their careers didn't flourish because of some special powers they used; they simply knew how to be simple. "No one should ever try to be funny...because when your audience knows you are trying, and see you working for a laugh, they're all tired out with your efforts by the time you come to it. For that reason, we try to make our show as off-hand, as natural, as easy as possible. Our motto is: Be nonchalant!" (MacDonald 94).

The Fibber McGee and Molly Show

One American radio family used that simplistic approach as they rolled out the virtual welcome mat every week at 79 Wistful Vista; that house number became known as one of the U.S.' most familiar residences. Audiences faithfully showed up to peer into the lives of Fibber and Molly McGee. Jim and Marian Jordan starred in *The Fibber McGee and Molly Show*, and opened their doors to greet their radio "neighbors" every Tuesday night beginning in 1935. The real-life husband and wife duo headlined one of the first situational comedy programs on air. The show was one of the first programs to feature recurring characters. Fibber McGee was the hard-working man and Molly, his patient wife. The show was composed of money-making schemes and, despite income that never managed to flow frequently, happy endings.

By the mid-1930s, themes surrounding The Depression encouraged Americans to tune in. Plots, like the McGee's winning their home in a lottery drawing, and Fibber digging for an oil-

well in his backyard, gave Americans hope. Fibber's character was designed to elicit laughter. The writers portrayed him as a compulsive liar, lazy and always devising a scheme to get out of work. Audiences also laughed when Fibber disregarded Molly's insistence that he never open the hall closet because it was filled with junk. No matter the subject, people identified with this middle class couple. In *Raised on Radio*, Gerald Nachman says, No twosome was more perfectly attuned to middle-class 1930's sensibilities than Fibber McGee & Molly.

The program was a hit with Americans. The shows vaudeville quality became a remedy for the current economic and political climate of the time. On one show, Fibber apologized for saying "china" when referring to the dishes. The punch line followed Fibber's comment that he couldn't say anything controversial anymore, referring to China and communism. This type of political humor was on the rise over the airwaves and Fibber McGee and Molly may have been the most adept at utilizing war time themes for scripts. They used phrases that went down in radio's history pages and became a part of the American vernacular, like, "Buy a bond and slap a Jap across the pond." Don Quinn, a writer for the show, took advantage of this trend by writing in story lines that reflected the social climate. "...women factory workers, war bond rallies, gas rationing, war songs, air raid wardens, and knitting clothes for soldiers." (MacDonald 109). While the topics weren't the most uplifting, the subject material got folks out of the dumps and focusing on conflict resolution.

Since commercials were needed to finance the broadcast, writers created a clever way to market products. Sponsors like Johnson Wax were mentioned in the introduction and the first section of the script. The announcer referred to the show as *The Johnson and Wax show with*

Fibber and Molly McGee. The rest of the format contained dialogue in segment one, a musical selection in segment two, more dialogue in segment three, and a final segment that included the story's resolution, the moral and the theme song.

Along with Fibber's and Molly's characters were other actors who voiced the parts of the people in the town where Fibber and Molly lived. The supporting cast included: Bill Thompson as the Old Timer and Wimple, Harold Peary as Gildersleeve, Gale Gordon as Mayor LaTrivia and Arthur Q. Bryan as Dr. Gamble. Bryan was also known for voicing the Elmer Fudd character for Looney Tunes cartoons. Other actors included Isabel Randolph as the voice for Mrs. Uppington and Marlin Hurt, who voiced the part for the McGee's black maid ,Beulah; a character that I'll discuss in the next chapter..

The *Fibber McGee and Molly Show* lasted well into the 1940s for nearly 50 million listeners. People could place themselves in Fibber's and Molly's shoes. They knew what it meant for neighbors to show up unannounced, offering unsolicited advice. Wives knew how it felt to beg their husbands to help out around the house or even get a job. "Radio situation comedies were middle-class morality tales. The American family was portrayed as a vital institution in which love, trust, and self-confidence were best developed." (Macdonald 141).

Over time, lines from the show became a part of the American vernacular, and situations became regular fodder around office water coolers. Fibber's wife Molly gained notoriety saying, "T'aint funny, McGee!" as a response to his bad jokes. Fibber never went to work, but was offered jobs he never took. The town's mayor played a big role in trying to find Fibber employment, and in one episode offers him a job "looking in on the higher-ups at City Hall." It

turned out that the job was as a window cleaner. He was offered another position as someone “undercover,” that turns out to be a stint performing as Santa Claus!

The show was not always called *The Fibber McGee and Molly Show*. The program began as *The Jordans, Marian and Jim*. The characters of Fibber and Molly, originated when real-life couple James Jordan and Marian Driscoll decided they could produce a better show than a musical act they heard performing on the radio. Jim and Marian went to radio station WIBO in Chicago, performed for studio executives and were immediately put on the air. It was 1925, and the couple earned a starting salary of \$10 per week. For two years, the couple performed as The Jordans, Marian and Jim until the show title changed to *The Smith Family* and eventually *The Fibber McGee and Molly Show*.

In 1953, the health of Marian Jordan declined and the time slot was reduced from 30 minutes to 15. The program took its final bow in 1956, and was inducted into the Radio Hall of Fame in 1989.

Drama

While radio comedy shows drew crowds with their creatively written lines, nail-biting schemes and family life situations that mirrored the lives of their audiences and came with a cost. Radio drama shows were cheaper to produce. Producers liked detective stories, westerns and soap operas because they were the cheapest kind of radio shows to create. There were no big names that had to be brought in, and the absence of big names meant no big paychecks to cut.

The Lone Ranger

When I recall watching westerns as a child, my mind goes to the landscape of a desert, with mountains and blowing tumbleweed. I will never forget how the gun-twirling cowboys who whipped their pearl-plated pistols from their holsters nor how they stole the show with their heroic efforts.

Writers of *The Lone Ranger* looked for a concept that would entice young audiences. They thought of how young boys spent their playtime as Cowboys and Indians and parlayed this childhood pastime into *The Lone Ranger*, one of the most memorable programs of the radio era.

LONE RANGER: Tonto, I'm going to try a saddle on him.

TONTO: Uhh, no horse like that take saddle.

LONE RANGER: There was never a horse like that! Just look at him!

TONTO: Him shine in the sun...like silver.

LONE RANGER: Silver. That would be a name for him. *Here, Silver!* (Harmon 158).

The show's premise followed Tonto and Lone Ranger on the lookout for outlaws and the bandit who killed Lone Ranger's brother. Tonto and Lone Ranger first became friends in boyhood and after years of separation were reunited during the gunfight that took the life of Lone Ranger's brother. The phrase "Kemo Sabay," underscored the friendship that was sustained for the life of the program.

The masked and mysterious Lone Ranger is what attracted audiences. He wore a black mask and both the Lone Ranger and Tonto vowed to conceal his identify as they fought for honor and justice. As the two rode across the plains, Tonto on his horse, Scout, and The Lone

Ranger atop his prized white stallion, Silver, you could hear the famous words "Hi-Yo, Silver, Away."

The show was appealing because its setting rekindled the thought of the early American heroes forging a life in the far West. Young boys could relate with those heroes. The writers of the show worked hard to create a perfect character; one who spoke correctly, behaved correctly and who upheld good moral values. One of the show's first scripts painted Lone Ranger as a high spirited man with a good sense of humor. He was written as a type of masked pirate who would ride off chuckling as he caught the bad guys. After several revisions, the writers decided to adjust the lead character to be more composed and more formal. The result was a Ranger who spoke with a more formal flair and did away with his goodie-two-shoes smile and pretentious chuckle. At the opening of the show the announcer spoke with a sense of nostalgia:

"Wild, Wild West.

"Gun law ruled in the early West, but here and there, determined men rose up against the gunslingers and outlaws. Foremost among these was the masked champion of justice whose name has come to us in legend. Across seven states, the fame of the Lone Ranger and his Indian friend Tonto was spread. Back to those days when the West was young. Hear the galloping hooves of the great white stallion, Silver! The Lone Ranger rides again!" (Harmon 162-163).

Adding to the triumphant opening of the show, the music enhanced the overall heroic theme and the "William Tell Overture" by Gioachino Rossini was chosen as the defining music. "William Tell" was the last of Rossini's 39 operas and was known for the finale that had a

cavalry-like charge complete with trumpet sounds. The formal nature of the music complemented the program's stoic characteristics and established it as a serious piece of radio writing.

The first show aired in either January or February, 1933, the exact date is not known. Due to a large audience following, subsequent shows broadcast every Monday, Wednesday and Friday night at 7:30 p.m. The first ranger was played by George Stenius, also known as George Seaton. Earle W. Graser became the next ranger and was later replaced by Bruce Beeman. As the show became more popular, so did the desire for promotion, and Bruce Beeman went on the road making appearances with a mask and a live horse.

In initial stages The Lone Ranger was designed to be written as a one character show. "In more adult programs, the hero might talk directly to the audience in a kind of stream-of-consciousness narration, but stories for children never had a first-person hero-for one thing, he would sound too immodest recounting his daring deeds." (Harmon 164) Since he was to be alone, the challenge was creating the dialogue. With whom would the ranger talk? Writers decided to have The Lone Ranger speak to his horse and to himself. "Another down! Took my bullet in his shoulder...Come on, Silver! We're needed at the Tomahawk Ranch!" (Harmon 164). While this writing device was sufficient and even crossed over from radio into film, it created limitations because it allowed only for the hero to speak in monologues and asides. If this drama was to maintain interest with its listeners, dialogue had to be established, so writers created Tonto, the Lone Ranger's Native American sidekick. In addition to the Lone Ranger, Silver and Tonto, there were other roles. The show was known for good guys, outlaws, ranchers and the

Lone Ranger's arch nemesis, Butch Cavendish. All of these parts were played by a group of repertory actors that earned an average of \$12.50 a week for performing three live shows a day—one for the Eastern and Central time zones and a combined show for Mountain and Pacific Time zones.

Despite all the care taken to make the Lone Ranger a perfect character, for some families, he was just too dramatic. Many mothers complained about the graphic nature of the storyline, referring to the shooting, robbing and capturing. They commented that the script was terrifying and it taught their children about guns and breaking rules. Regardless of the complaints, the show maintained that western drama was a symbol of national pride. During World War II *The Lone Ranger* used war themes that related to western life. The show partnered with advertisers, like "Kix" cereal, which offered prizes like the Lone Ranger Blackout Safety Belt for its customers.

The show enjoyed many successful years on the air and later in television and film as well as in comic books. The last episode aired on September 3, 1954 and continued with re-runs until 1955.

Soap Operas

Just as western dramas appealed to children, soap operas were written to appeal to women. The two words stand on their own, as a definition of entertainment time for women. Thinking back to my childhood when there was no cable and television offered only a few standard channels, soap operas dominated day-time programming. At my house, it was *All My Children*, *One Life to Live* and *General Hospital*. My mother was a school teacher, so in the

summer she and her friends would set their clocks and their schedules around their favorite programs. They could recall entire story lines character by character and would get excited when there was a need to “fill-in” a girlfriend on an episode they’d missed.

It must have been the same in the 1930s when women tuned in to their favorite "soap." The daily serials or what became known as soap operas, got their name from commercials that advertised soap products during breaks. Like any type of good theatre the situations of others help us cope with our own realities.

Fantasy

One of the reasons for the popularity of the soap opera or “soap” as it was affectionately called, was its ability to create fantasy. Housewives could pull out their mops and dust cloths and wipe away the cares of the day, as their minds drifted off to the land of the moderately rich and famous. Although themes of dripping romance and immense money seemed slightly skewed from the average house wife's daily situation, many couldn't resist tuning in for a new round of adventures each day. “...the soap operas proffered a world of action where a wide range of human and social developments-murder, marriage, birth, death, love affairs, accidents, divorces, and disease-could be vicariously experienced through regular listening.” (MacDonald 234). Some could share emotions with the characters and literally sink themselves into the story. One soap opera heroine mentioned that the shows were so fantastical because they were blown out of proportion. “It mirrored the regular, everyday problems that any marriage goes through-but it exaggerated them.” (MacDonald 234).

In the mid '30's many story lines followed the marriage of a poor young woman or woman of average means, to a wealthy man. One such example was on an episode of *Our Gal Sunday*, where the announcer extended this fantasy world to the audience by asking, “Can this girl from a little mining town in the West find happiness as the wife of a wealthy and titled Englishman?” (MacDonald 235). In 1937, another soap opera called *Linda's First Love*, offered watches to the viewer who wrote the best letter explaining why the title character should either marry the rich boy or the poor boy.

Happiness

In addition to the fantasy-land qualities, many liked the joyful nature of the shows. The titles and themes steered women toward thinking happy thoughts about their position in life. On *Woman of Courage*, the opening lines became a sort of women's anthem. “...the moving story of a wife and mother who is unafraid because she knows if you believe, you can win-nothing in life can defeat you-and that what is right will be.” (Macdonald 236). In today's terms the happiness of these shows was similar to a Cinderella-like world that women hoped to be a part of; at least the version where Cinderella marries Prince Charming.

A perfect path for happiness was laid out on many of the soaps plots. Stories rejoiced in marriages, births, recoveries and many happy endings. Listeners were sucked into the happy bubble and for a short time each day were able to live out these happy moments. Like in 1943 on *When a Girl Marries*, a woman character commented on the arrival of her new baby, “It feels simply super colossal! As if you'd accomplished the most important thing in the world!” (MacDonald 238). People identified with these characters and made them as much a part of their

lives as any other family member or close friend. Listeners were said to have sent cards and gifts when their favorite characters were married or gave birth. In a show called *Second Husband*, one actress received a sewing machine when her character relocated to another state to set up a new sewing shop.

Women's Roles

Of course during this time in America, the soap opera was one of the biggest employers of women. Where else would scores of women be, except at home? It didn't matter if home was the imaginary circumstances of the actors, or the real-life situation of those listening to them, they all felt they experienced life the same. They had the same emotions, similar triumphs and failures and felt validated in their feelings by sharing these good and bad times with others. The titles of many of the daytime serials even suggested the nature of female casting: *Aunt Jenny's True Life Stories*, *The Romance of Helen Trent*, *Stella Dallas* and *Valiant Lady*. Tainted or not, this collective consciousness drew the women of the 30's, 40's and 50's together.

It was no surprise that women would be particularly drawn to them. The soaps were in fact created for the purpose of weaving its way into women's hearts and capitalizing on their emotions. Writers knew that simple characters in similar situations filled with a cast of mostly women, was certain to be a big hit. Because the pace was always slow, it could take a week or more to complete a small time frame or even small tasks. Characters were known to take a week to complete haircuts, take trips up a few floors in an elevator and take a bath. The elongated stories kept women biting their nails, holding their breath and waiting to flip the radio switch on the following day.

It was also important to show women doing things that women do; like cooking, cleaning and taking care of children. Despite these domestic roles, the women were still the central characters of each script. It wasn't until the 1940's when men were cast in leading roles as doctors and lawyers. Women definitely dominated this realm, sometimes pushing their husbands around, and making all the decisions. The soap opera was a woman's world and they deserved to lavish in it.

Whether it was Theatre of the "Ear" or Theatre of the Mind that explained the way audiences were able to experience invisible shows, the concepts didn't explain why I wasn't fulfilled with my findings. Where were the shows that reflected the voices of its listeners? This melting pot or mixing bowl nation was not just for the ears of white American men, women and children. Were there radio shows that did the same for black audiences or with black actors? I now wanted to take another look at radio programs but in the black community. Was this emotional experience a culturally shared exhilaration in radio's Golden Age?

CHAPTER FIVE: A DISTORTED SOUND

When I think about radio programming in the black communities of mid-20th century America, my mind drifts to the stories my mother would tell about their family's little black radio. It served the needs of the whole house. Her mother listened in the morning to her favorite programs, her father listened at night to the baseball games and she and her sisters bopped around to the big bands and *The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy* whenever their schoolwork was complete. She often spoke of her Uncle Bubba in Louisiana, who sent the radio to their home in the Florida panhandle.

I decided to listen to an episode of *The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy*, also known as *Amos 'n' Andy*, which going forward is how I will refer to this show. As soon as I listened, my Theatre of the Ear experience became distorted. I did not hear what I thought was an authentic representation of the way black people spoke at that time. Instead I heard unclear language that was jumbled and extremely stereotypical. I questioned why scripts for black actors were written in this exaggerated dialect and why the characters didn't possess qualities like those of the white characters?

I discovered that the voices behind the characters were of two white men altering their voices to sound like black men. The more I listened, the more frustrated I became. The voice didn't sound the same as if a man pitched his voice higher to sound like a child, or like a woman who pitched her voice lower to sound like a man. The tension not only lay in the language and

pronunciation of words, but also in the racial jokes and cultural jeering. Instead of the black community sharing endearing “black jokes,” they had now become a slur.

Did people know the voices of Amos and Andy were not black men’s voices? I asked around to those who listened to the program at that time and found that the ear was deceiving. My father said he thought Amos and Andy were two black men from the country, who were silly and lazy and didn’t know how to speak correctly. Others I spoke with dittoed this sentiment. What black people knew was the general consensus for many from my parent's generation. They knew that Amos and Andy were funny. They knew they were adventurous and always up to the next get- rich- quick scheme. They figured their dialect must have been different from people they knew, even though they sounded similar to the way slaves were portrayed as speaking in the 18th and 19th centuries. Many white audiences thought the voices were authentic, until the men started making appearances in black face.

I had to find out what happened to the authenticity of the character when there was an actor of a different ethnicity voicing the role? Was this kind of casting for the amusement of white audiences and a continuation of blackface minstrelsy? I looked into the background of the two actors Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden, famous for their ethnic reversal portrayals.

CHAPTER SIX: LEARNING DIALECT

Charles Correll

It's hard to imagine that someone who grew up with little to no contact with black people would venture to portray them. In fact, in Peoria, Illinois where Charles Correll grew up, there was only one black person to every ten whites. As the son of a brick-layer he spent time learning many trades. He spent his teen years as an usher in the local vaudeville theater, as a stenographer, which may have helped him record transcripts later on in life, and was adept at dancing and playing the piano. During this time, he displayed his passion for showbiz by entering local dance contests and talent shows and eventually performed in an amateur version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The play was a racially charged production with negative perceptions of blacks. In the production, white actors called "Tommers", would perform in blackface. Correll sought to learn more than just the negative aspects of minstrelsy and looked to the work of Bert Williams and George Walker. The two were black entertainers who performed in blackface and worked to create minstrel shows that exhibited integrity in the characters.

Correll used his other talents to make a living. In 1912 he began working with his father in the construction business. When business was slow he would make money playing the piano to silent movie pictures. He also played for a blackface group called the Metropolitan Minstrels Quartet that performed in minstrel shows and sometimes sang in dialect. He eventually took the place of one of the singers and formed his own trio. That job opened the window for another gig

in 1917 when Correll's trio performed as part of a minstrel-style show headed by a famous performance troupe in Chicago called The Jon Bren Company. Following a performance, the director approached Correll and asked him to direct amateur shows for Jon Bren. In 1918, he went on the road with them saying it was, "... the turning point in my life, as I had then gotten into something I really wanted to do." (Ely 36).

Freeman Gosden

Freeman Gosden was born in the southern state of Richmond, Virginia. In contrast to Charles Correll, his future business partner, he was raised in a city with a large black population. He was born almost ten years after Correll in 1899, when minstrel shows and blackface were even more prevalent. He grew up in several of Richmond's neighborhoods and at one point lived very close to Jackson Ward a black community where most of the city's black residents lived. His love for acting was sparked at the Bijou Theatre where his mother says after visiting, "he never wanted to do anything but act in those shows." (Ely 15).

Gosden grew up in an area that was separate for blacks and whites. During his childhood, an initiative was led banning blacks from living in certain parts of the city, so that forced many to travel great distances across town to jobs they held in the white part of town. Black children even found work doing odd jobs for white families. One such young boy named Garrett Brown was employed by Gosden's family and lived with them during his employment. One of Gosden's

family members says that Brown and Gosden, "carried on extemporaneous, skit-like dialogues and performed two-man, minstrel-style shows for Freeman's ailing father." (Ely 23). Brown would later become the model for "Sylvester," a character on *Amos n' Andy*.

After a stint in the navy, Gosden took a job as a director for the Jon Bren Company, performing with amateur minstrel shows. It turned out to be the same time that Charles Correll was employed there.

Gosden and Correll were born during a time when the word politically correct had no meaning and making fun of a group of people; black, foreign or otherwise, was not uncommon and not frowned upon. The acts of white supremacy were more condoned at this time than since slavery and Correll and Gosden were products of that collective consciousness. The images they gathered during their work as minstrel actors would be what they took with them and what they put into practice.

Vocal Collaboration

Around 1924, the two men had been working together with The Bren Company and were mainly working out of the Chicago office; Gosden working with a circus group and Correll with the company's amateur shows. The two began rooming together and after a few years, following some financial hardship at the company, the circus division went out of business. The Bren Company decided to put together some new acts, so both Correll and Gosden pooled their talents

and created a duo-singing, dancing and playing their instruments. This led to an opportunity singing on Chicago radio program.

They were offered more gigs and in 1925 they shopped around their talents to Chicago radio stations, sometimes offering their services for free. Their main interest was getting performance time on the air. “The new medium of radio interested them mainly as a means to make themselves better known so they could break into vaudeville.” (Ely 48). The two men resigned from The Bren Company and started looking for more work. Billed as a duo on the area stages, they got their big break when Chicago Tribune station WGN called.

They worked two one hour blocks, five days a week at WGN and were called the “Harmony Kings” and later, “Two Song Birds.” “They continued with their usual style of ‘happy banter and jesting,’ using black dialect as they had been doing for many years.” (Ely 53). Through this banter and “blackvoice” the two vocal artists established a vocal empire.

Correll and Gosden weren't the only ones to implement race reversal acting and in some cases, race and gender reversal. Many white actors launched great careers posing as black people. I thought back to my love of words, and sounds and was curious to find out how these actors sounded. How did they follow this exaggerated dialect so closely without slipping and revealing their true identity? What was the premise of these shows and did most of them show blacks in subservient roles as mammies, maids and lazy people? I wanted to know how these shows began, who was doing the voicing and what writing and speech patterns did they follow?

CHAPTER SEVEN: WHITE ACTORS, BLACK VOICES

"We chose black characters because blackface could tell funnier stories than whiteface comics."

- Freeman Gosden (Ely 54)

Radio in black America was less accommodating to black actors than to their white counterparts. Based on the segregated history of the United States, it wasn't a simple task to begin hiring blacks and whites to perform alongside each other on stage. Just as minstrel shows were originally done by white actors in black face, the radio industry followed suit, hiring white actors in black voice.

Sam 'n' Henry

One of the first radio serials to capture the attention of both black and white America was done through the antics of *Sam 'n' Henry*. *Sam 'n' Henry*, by Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden was an interesting change from the sounds normally heard on the radio. Unlike the other shows that told stories primarily about white characters and white family life, *Sam 'n' Henry* focused on black characters and life about black folks. The voice-over wasn't done by a group of black actors though, it was the writers, Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden that brought to life the voices of Sam and Henry.

The script was done entirely in what they called a southern black dialect, or what has also been called Uncle Remus dialect, or Gullah dialect. The Gullah dialect is based on the book character Uncle Remus, a fictional southern black man who told stories like *Brer Rabbit* and

Brer Fox. A white man named Joel Chandler Harris created the Uncle Remus tales from the stories told to him by slaves during his childhood. \

Correll and Gosden, who had performed this dialect during their minstrel show days, used it as a formatting board for Sam and Henry's characters. The dialect was said to be exaggerated with many broken words and abbreviated phrases that did not portray how southern black people of the time spoke.

Sam: Um-um, dish heah water certainly is warm and nice, yo' know it? I goin' staht taken' mo' baths, -dat's what I goin' do.

Henry: You fixin' to ketch pneumonia-yo' know dat-anybody git used to taken' a bath on Sat'day and den take one some other, day goin' ketch a cold-dat's what dye goin' do. (Ely 81).

Despite the overdone dialect, the show was a hit. Both black and white audiences tuned in for the show and unlike many other radio serials of the time, Correll and Gosden did not find it necessary to write in references to color. "The slapstick elements of the scene-which skillfully aroused the listener's visual imagination without the use of pictures-did not depend on Sam's color for their effect."(Ely 81) In many cases the script refrained from referencing color at all. Correll and Gosden hoped their voices would help audiences define the ethnicity of the characters. They also hoped listeners would focus more on the comedy in the script than the color of the characters speaking.

Sam 'n Henry got its start when radio executive, Ben McCanna at WGN in Chicago approached Correll and Gosden about developing a radio series based on the comic-strip, *The*

Gumps. McCanna was looking for a new kind of radio programming, “A ‘serial radio’ theatre with a regular cast of characters offering ‘bits of drama and musically pictured incident’...”(Ely 54)., one that followed the same format as newspaper comic strips and would entice followers to come back daily. Correll and Gosden suggested instead to write a comedy about two black men because they thought it would be funnier than a comedy about two white men.

Sam ‘n’ Henry hit the airwaves on January 12, 1926, six days a week. It was the first broadcast to create a continuous storyline using the same characters. The comic-strip style radio show told the story of Sam Smith, a hard-working black man with a deep booming voice and Henry Johnson his friend, a quiet, soft-spoken black man with a high-pitched voice. The serial began with an episode of the two men boarding a train from their home in Birmingham, Alabama, on their way to Chicago, Illinois, in hopes of a new life with better opportunities. "...the listener could almost see the two men approaching the station with their plodding mule, arriving among the crowd of friends gathered to see them off, buying the tickets, bidding farewell to the well-wishers, boarding the train and settling down for the long ride northward."(Ely 36).

Mr. Johnson--What are you boys doing going to Chicago?

Sam--We goin' up dere to wuk fo' a contractor, Mr. Johnson.

Henry---W'y don't you show de man de lethah we go---show de man de lettah.

Sam---Heah's de lettah I got Mr. Johnson---I'll read you part of it.

Henry---Read de man de whole lettah - don't read him no part of it-- read de man de whole lettah. (Ely 36).

Subsequent episodes followed Sam and Henry's new adventures in the big city as they opened their own junk-hauling business and devised plans to earn extra money.

All the vocal work for Sam and Henry's characters, were done by Correll and Gosden. They also voiced the parts for any new characters they wrote in, by modifying their vocal pitch, timbre and style. Despite the grotesquely overdone "negro" dialect, they were masters at creating the visual imagery needed to metaphorically transport their audiences to a listening theatre. "The dialogue between Sam and Henry prompted each listener to supplement the sounds on the radio with rich visual images of his or her own creation." (Ely 2).

The show became so popular that Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden began making appearances as Sam and Henry in blackface. They made nearly \$2,000 a week for those appearances; however they were only making \$100 for doing the actual radio program. When the two approached WGN about expanding their show, execs did not see the potential of a storyline about the lives of two black men in Chicago having national appeal. After being rejected, Correll and Gosden moved to another network and began broadcasting their radio serial from WMAQ. The station believed in the show's cross-over ability, but the show quickly ended because WMAQ could not run the serial under the name *Sam 'n' Henry* because the rights were owned by WGN.

Amos 'n' Andy

Not more than a year after the inception of *Sam 'n' Henry*, *Amos 'n' Andy* got its start in March, 1928. By this time in their career, Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden had changed companies, changed their characters' names and got their wish of expanding the broadcast of the

radio serial from the East Coast to the West Coast. The market expansion actually invented the concept of broadcast syndication. Now with a new station, the storyline started over from the beginning, and this time Amos and Andy hailed from Georgia, instead of Alabama where Sam and Henry were from.

Amos---I was sittin' here dreamin' 'bout Chicago an' 'stead o' putting de milk in de bucket, I put half of it on de ground.

Andy---Dat's what yo' git fo' not tendon' to you' bigness. If I'd been milkin' dat cow, son, I wouldn't -a wasted a drop o' milk.” (McLeod 40).

The material was meticulously prepared. Since Correll and Gosden wrote their own material, they could be in control of the speech. The scripts were written phonetically, spelling out each vocal sound. By transcribing the precise sounds, they made sure that each character had a distinct sound and each word was pronounced with specificity. Phonetic writing was mostly important when the characters differed in social class. The status of the character would change the dialect and the way the words were pronounced. There also inserted dashes in the script to indicate pauses and the men used different vocal shadings for the characters, notating the use for them in parenthesis after each line.

The formal name of the type of speech used in the scripts is referred to by some linguists as African American Vernacular English, (AAVE) Black English Vernacular, (BEV) or Black English (BE). This vernacular has also been referred to as Ebonics which was a term coined in 1973 in an effort to dissuade linguists from using negative terms like, Non Standard Negro English. For the purposes of this paper however, I will mostly refer to black American speech as

Black English or Black English Vernacular. Some linguists believe that BEV is the most elementary version of Black English, and was invented by blackface comedians as a version of garbled white southern English and is not an actual style of speech belonging to anyone of African descent.

Freeman Gosden's dialect writing may have been influenced by a young black boy named Garrett Brown, who he knew during his childhood.

Growing up in Richmond, Virginia, Gosden lived near a primarily black community. Playing with and listening to Garrett Brown, Gosden probably picked up many of the structural speech distinctions from Standard American English and Black English Vernacular making it natural for Gosden to learn the basic structure of both forms of speech and to be able to switch between the two dialects at will. (McLeod 89).

The dialect changes are evidenced when a few characters switch back and forth between BE and Standard American English (SAE). I'll talk more about code switching in the chapter on "Defining Dialect." Subsequently, Gosden did a lot of script dictating to Correll using characteristics of BEV, to create a guide. "...the specific structure of the lines may be examined for recurring grammatical traits, indicating the author's degree of awareness of AAVE grammar and phonology." (McLeod 89). The nature of the vocal patterns had a lot to do with the type of characters that were a part of *Amos 'n' Andy's* world.

As Correll and Gosden worked to differentiate their radio serial from a regular blackface minstrel show, they tried to create a new point of reference in which to frame their radio show around. The idea was to base *Amos 'n' Andy's* characters on realistic events in the black

community: The Great Migration of southern blacks to northern cities and the already established blacks in Chicago that were upper and middle class.

The Great Migration was no uncommon event. Any person living in northern cities at the time could see the exodus of southern black families infusing their way into northern life. When I first heard about The Great Migration, I was living and working in Chicago and noticed that a lot of the black people that I met had family in the south. Of course that wasn't so odd, with me being from Florida, and realizing that the deposit of most black folks in the U.S. was initially in the south. However, when I started questioning exactly where in the south these families were, I discovered that many of the extended family of those in Chicago, were in Mississippi.

The Great Migration explains the northward journey of many of those families in Chicago, and thousands of other black people who live in the north. Their families are originally from southern states blacks and left to find new lives in larger, and usually friendlier industrial cities, where they could find work and escape the harsh segregated rules of the south. Many times, men would leave their families behind and come north first looking for work and then either sending back for them, or sending them money. Most of the journeys were made on the Pullman Porter cars trains traveling from the south to the north. Blacks would find relatives or friends and connect with them, creating large communities in what were called the ghettos of the city. Correll and Gosden gave a nod to this ongoing exodus and incorporated Kingfish, or King for short into the script.

"King---I is gonna give my peoples de pleasure o' chippin' in an' buying' me de high silk hat, which will be de emblem of me.

Andy---Yo' want ev'ybody to chip in an buy yo' a hat?

King---So dat my peoples will fell dat dye is doin' sumpin' fo dey're great ruler---now, comes de most reportant thing of de WHOLE thing."

Amos---What is dat?

King---De presentation of de silk ha to de dictator."

Notice the speaking pattern that is very similar to Amos and Andy's. There are a lot of substitutions for consonants changing the pronunciation of some words.

While lower class, minstrel black speech was initially the primary focus for *Amos 'n' Andy*, they also based characters on black people who had established themselves as some of Chicago's black elite. In most instances that person not only had a different accent, but a different way of speaking. The first evidence of this is with William Taylor a prosperous black businessman. Gosden wrote Taylor's character to strictly speak Standard American English, using an authoritative resonant vocal quality, without the use of dialect. His daughter Ruby, who eventually became the love interest of Amos, had a similar speech pattern. There was also a wealthy philanthropist by the name of Roland Weber, billed as "one of the richest colored men in America." He struck rich in the Texas oil fields. Weber's widow Annie was a professional dancer who became independently wealthy following the tragic death of her husband. There were also Mr. and Mrs. Charles Francis Van DeTweezer and Mr. and Mrs. George Washington connected to influential social groups, as well as attorneys Lawyer Collins and Lawyer Henry Lucas. Lawyer Collins was of course well-educated and used an educated speech pattern: "Collins--Well now, Andy, I want you to do me a favor. Otherwise we're not going to get

anywhere. I want you to stop talking bout this thing and hereafter if anybody wants any information if you'll send them over to me I'll be glad to give them everything that we should give out at this time." (McLeod 93).

There was also Hotchkiss, an executive at the Harlem bank and Miss Elizabeth F. Sanders, a bank auditor and classically trained violinist and Dr. W.L. Dickinson head of an all-black hospital in Richmond. Another character named Henry Van Porter also embodied financial status. His career as a real estate and insurance salesman worked to highlight his affiliation with success. His allegiance to friends could range anywhere from an ally to an enemy. His speech was very distinct and almost sounded white. It approached the SE vernacular and gave a more realistic portrayal of someone with his social status. " Van---But the point of this whole thing that I'm trying to make clear to you, and which is not my idea, but based on actual figures of the past, regardless of what anyone tells you... we are bound to come out of any depression that may exist at this time." (McLeod 93). Notice how the sentence structure is more phrase-like and more complex than that of someone who was a product of The Great Migration.

In *Amos 'n' Andy*, the range of speech styles can be identified using a sociolinguist term called acrolect and basilect. Acrolect is defined as the most prestigious standard form of speech, while basilect is the lowest form of speech. It became more identifiable in Amos' speech patterns as the serial continued. When they first arrived, Amos would mimic the way Andy spoke, although Amos was written to sound his final consonants and Andy would drop his. As time progressed, Amos began sounding final consonants, removed elisions and the grammatical structure of his speech approached SAE. While most of these characters did not fully develop

until the show evolved into the working name of *Amos 'n' Andy*, the concept was initiated very early into the series.

The use of dialect as well as substitutions for sounds and some identifiable slang, resulted in an amalgamation of words, which created many catch phrases. Both the words “regusted” and “propolition” were very common. There was usually a frequent substitution for the letter s, changing it to the letter l in Andy’s speech, turning proposition into “propolition.” “Regusted” may have come from eliding the word “disgusted” into “gusted” and then over correcting the word into “regusted,” which was often stated as “I’se regusted.” In addition to these words other phrases that were common in the African American community were used like: “check and double check,” “that’s dog,” and “cold turkey.” In the dialect changes there is also evidence that Gosden understood the practice of code switching, when he gave a few characters the opportunity to switch back and forth between Black English and Standard American English. I’ll talk more about code switching in the chapter on “Defining Dialect.”

The comedic styling’s of *Amos 'n' Andy*, with their episodic tales and cliffhanger endings prevailed as one of the funniest shows of its time. People could close their eyes and "believe" they were taking a peek at two colored men who were just plain funny. For white audiences, it provided comic relief in the way minstrel shows had, as well as a look at how black people might live. For black audiences, it provided the ability to envision the duo as a picture of success and listen to the heartwarming tales of a people who shared the same cultural experience. Most listeners did not know that Amos 'n Andy were not performed by black actors and, despite the racial divide, temperature of the time, and broadcaster's views that it would not be funny,

Correll and Gosden attempted to portray blacks in a more favorable light. As the show progressed Gosden says they found it their responsibility to modify their writing to show the characters with integrity and depth. In an interview, Gosden said "...that as early as 1929 they got away from making the 'two boys' (as they were referred to) footloose and unemployed, responsible for making them employed and responsible for their own business, a funny business, since it was a comedy." (Harmon 210). This new kind of comedy prevailed as one of the funniest shows of the radio era and lasted until 1943 when it became a weekly situation television comedy.

Aunt Jemima

One of the most long-running radio series featuring a white person voicing a black role was in the show *Aunt Jemima*. In this particular serial, a white actress played a black woman. The original Aunt Jemima character was created by the Quaker Oats company as a symbol for its pancake flour mix. Tess Gardella was the woman that voiced the mammy type figure for the radio series in the 1920's. The series was based on her portrayal of Aunt Jemima in a 1920's stage review. Gardella played a mammy in the 1928 Broadway musical *Showboat*, which may have been what launched her radio career as well. The show ran on the NBC Red network in 1929, every morning at 8:00 for recipe tips and household hints for and housewives. The show began with announcer Marvin Miller introducing Aunt Jemima. Tess Gardella's voice is then heard greeting the audience in a southern-style speaking voice with some use of a dialect. The show ran about 15 minutes long. The setup was something like an interview session with Marvin Miller asking Aunt Jemima questions and her responding with cooking tips and always

ending with a happy thought for the day along with her famous phrase. “You can't buy happiness, it has to be earned. But you can buy pancakes, and they make you happy.”

(myoldradio.com/oldradio-shows/auntjemima). A choir named the Jemima Chorus would then sing southern anthems like Dixieland intermittently between conversations with Aunt Jemima and at the top and bottom of the program.

If someone was not listening for the differences in the vocal styles between black and white voices, it would be difficult to tell that Aunt Jemima's voice on this radio program was not that of a black woman. Tess Gardella uses a great deal of a southern twang, but it's mostly her dialect use and the darker heavier attention she gives to her vocal timbre. There were several popular terms coined from the show, which was mostly done in dialect. Words like; “Lawsee” for “Lord-y” and the phrase; “Folks sho’ cheer for fluffy energizin’ Aunt Jemima pancakes.”

The program continued through the 1930’s with a plantation style program that ran in a longer form than the show in the 1920’s and was voiced by another white woman named Harriette Widmer, who also did a voice on the *Amos ‘n’ Andy* show voicing the role of Aunt Jemima in 1935. By the time the 40’s rolled around, Vera Lane another white woman, voiced Aunt Jemima. The program was condensed from its longer form into a five minute broadcast. By the end of the run, producers finally agreed to hire a black woman to do the voice of Aunt Jemima and hired Edith Wilson in 1947. Prior to that time, special appearances were done by white women in blackface. The Aunt Jemima show survived until the 1950's.

The Martin Lone and Beulah Show

Beulah was another black woman voiced by a white man on the airwaves. Marlin Hurt, a radio comedian introduced Beulah in 1939 on the radio program "Hometown Incorporated". A year later he voiced the part for Beulah on *Show Boat*, a radio series for NBC. In 1943, Hurt moved Beulah to *The Fibber McGee and Molly Show* as the jovial mammy figure. In the studio-audience setting, Hurt would surprise the audience with Beulah's entrance. When Fibber McGee called for the maid, Hurt would have his back to the audience and spin around saying, "Somebody bawl fo' Beulah?" That phrase, as well as "Love dat man" were popular sayings from the show. In 1945 Hurt began his own radio show and did a spinoff with *The Marlin Hurt and Beulah Show*; Hurt played both himself and Beulah. Hurt based Beulah on the woman who cooked for his family when he was growing up as a child. The character was written to take care of the Henderson family, add light comedy to the sketch and keep the Henderson's out of trouble.

The show opened with Beulah speaking in regular dialect format. "Got de world in a jug, Lawd, got de stopper in my hand." It would usually end with another popular phrase like, "Yes' um, it's all my fault Mr. Henderson," when Beulah took the blame for any household situation that was foiled during the day. Depending on the character, the dialect may or may not have been comprehensible. When Beulah's boyfriend was introduced to the show, he and Beulah used distinctly different speech patterns; most likely used as a way to give speech lessons to any African Americans listening.

Beulah: Who's came knockin' at my door, three hours late?

Bill: It's Bill, baby. No pain, no strain. I rode in here on the crest of a heatwave.

Ooowee, it's hot out there.

Beulah: Well, shut the door. I'm keeping the place closed up here so it stays cool.

Bill: Lemme sit down here. I'm steamin' like a uphill freight train.

Beulah: Where you been? You told me on de phone you'd be over here in three shakes.

Bill: That's what I did. Come right over her in three shakes- two Pineapple and one vanilla.(tvparty.com/beulah).

A year after the show was on the air Hurt had a heart attack and another white actor, Bob Corley took on the role. Audiences did not respond well to the new voice of Beulah and directors decided to hire a black woman in the role. In 1947, the show brought in Hattie McDaniel to play the part of Beulah. McDaniel was known for her role in *Gone with the Wind* and became the first black actress to star in a radio sitcom series. McDaniel earned \$1,000 a week for the first season and made the show very successful by doubling the ratings. Hattie was very adamant about making changes to the dialect written in the script. She refused to play Beulah if she had to read the over-exaggerated dialect that Marlin Hurt and Bob Corley had used.

As the show gained popularity, producers hired other black actors as supporting cast. Beulah's friend Oriole, was played by Ruby Dandridge, mother of famed actress Dorothy Dandridge. Dorothy Dandridge also had a supporting role along with her sister Vivian Dandridge. Louise Beavers who was also known for her film role in *Imitation of Life*, was a cast member and is said to have also played Beulah at one point. The show also hired Butterfly McQueen, known for her role as Prissy, Scarlet O'Hara's maid in *Gone with the Wind*.

Hattie McDaniel continued voicing the role for Beulah until the end of its radio days. She also filmed a short run on the television program when the radio show upgraded to the small screen. McDaniel worked until she became sick in 1952 and was replaced by actress Lillian Randolph, who was also replaced by her younger sister Amanda in 1953.

No matter the color of the actors, the shows were popular among whites and blacks alike. I remember, my mother speaking of black people on the radio that sounded more astute, more intellectual. Did that mean the white actor/black voice roles were only being heard on certain kinds of programs? Where were the programs of which my mother spoke ? Were they on stations difficult to tune? Who did the writing for these shows and why wasn't there a greater presence of it on the air? I wanted to find out about how black radio actors were being employed and look at the differences, if any, in the language they spoke, and the language spoken by white actors in "blackvoice."

CHAPTER EIGHT: SOUND IN BLACK AND WHITE

Of all the entertainment outlets of the arts, radio was the most divisive among racial lines. Radio did not begin as an equal opportunity employer. Although one might hear a lot of blacks on the radio, they were not hired initially to fill speaking roles as announcers or as actors in plays.

In the 1920's, blacks were hired to work as musicians in jazz ensembles or singing in religious choirs. There were famous broadcasters like vaudeville entertainer Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles in 1922. There were black musical performers like Noble Sissle, Fess Williams, and the Pace Jubilee Negro Singers heard on the air.

In the 1930's, black people were heard more regularly on the air. Celebrities like Paul Robeson were featured singers and actors on programs, as were entertainers like Ethel Water, Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, Arts Tatum and Cab Calloway. Blacks were also offered roles as comedians, but the roles drew inspiration from minstrel shows and were demeaning in a stereotypical way. If black people accepted the roles, they had to speak with dialects used in minstrel shows, like Hattie McDaniel acting as a mammy in the "Optimistic Doughnut Hour", Lillian Randolph in "Lulu and Leander" and Johnny Lee in an all- black series "Slick and Slim". "These were not necessarily facile assignments for the black actors. Several complained of the difficulty they encountered trying to affect the accents of minstrel show end men." (Macdonald 331). Actress Lillian Randolph had to study for three months with a voice coach before perfecting her dialect, and Johnny Lee said he had to learn how to talk the way white people believed that Negroes talked. An inability develop a minstrel accent could end a career for a

black actor; as was the case for comedian Wonderful Smith. Smith was dropped from the Red Skelton Show because he couldn't take on the stereotypical Negro dialect asked for by the shows' producers. These difficulties for black actors resulted in more whites monopolizing black roles. "Because listeners could not see the racial identity of the actor speaking into a live microphone, and because most white Americans had preconceived notions of how a black voice sounded, it was possible to employ white actors to portray blacks." (Macdonald 329). Since whites had mastered the minstrel accent, it was difficult for black actors to gain any of the few roles that existed.

It would seem that Black English has evolved significantly since the early 20th century, but a look at written transcripts reveals that modern Black English has not deviated much from the past. Most of the changes in the language are found when it is altered by non-native speakers. Notice the difference in the English language when blacks play blacks and when whites play blacks.

Blacks as Blacks

In the 1920's, Jack Cooper performed in the vaudeville duo "Black Diamonds" on radio show *The All-Negro Hour*:

We're two Black Diamonds direct from Dixie
Where the corn and cotton bask in the sun,
We hate to leave you, we hope we've pleased you
And you've really enjoyed our fun.
We aim to chase your blues, and kill old gloom

And fill your life with glee

When we appear on WSBC

The two Black Diamonds direct from Dixie. (Barlow 53).

In the 1930's, Paul Robeson performed as an African chief on the radio show *Shell Chateau*:

Silence, the drums lie! There will be no war for the Balus!

For fifty moons have we had peace, and peace we will keep.

We want no war. And on this side of the river there will be no war.

We have all we need. We have our homes: our crops are good:

We have water from the great river. We do not need war... (Macdonald 338).

In the 1940's, Richard Durham performed on an all-black radio show *Destination Freedom*:

Announcer: In cooperation with the Chicago Defender, WMAQ brings you Destination Freedom- a new radio series dramatizing the great democratic heritage of the Negro people-a part of the pageant of American history.

Announcer: The men who blazed the way toward the New World were men of all races and all creeds. Today in this chapter entitled "Dark Explorers," *Destination Freedom* tells the story of some of the Negro explorers who helped open the New World. (Macdonald, *Richard Durham's Destination Freedom* 15).

In the 1950's, Drew's character speaks as a narrator in *John, George and Drew Baby*:

The day we got ready to move to Florida, two of my Mama's brothers drove up from Orlando to help drive us down. We packed down tight in Johnny's car and in my uncle's truck. (closing doors) We took everything we could; clothes, tools, food. There were a

lot of us; my five brothers, two sisters and me, plus Lois and Johnny and a couple of my uncles.

In the 1920's example from *The All-Negro Hour* there is no use of a dialect. Although the content references Dixie, corn, cotton and chasing blues away, it does not contain elisions of words, or word substitutions. The content conveys a light-heartedness that suggests the speakers are comedic rather than bafoonish. There is also a rhyming sentence structure that begins with four beats to the measure on the first three lines and follows with three beats to the measure on the following line. The second half of the song establishes another pattern, giving five beats to the fifth line, then three, five again and four beats to the final line.

In the 1930's example using actor Paul Robeson, notice how the language contains no grammatical changes suggesting a Black English dialect. The only discrepancy might be found in the fragmented sentence: "And on this side of the river there will be no war." The sentences are declarative and exhibit a rational, strong leader, who crafts his words to convey a specific meaning.

The 1950's example of John, George and Drew Baby is the language of a child living in the South. The sentences contain no malapropisms, and only one word substitution for the word me instead of I in the sentence: "...my five brothers, two sisters and me..." The sentence structure does not suggest a dialect of Black English, but could or could not contain a regional accent associated with that of Southern America because the play takes place in Georgia.

Whites as Blacks

In the 1920's, Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden voice black characters in *Sam 'n' Henry*:

Sam--We goin' up dere to wuk fo' a contractor, Mr. Johnson.

Henry---Why don't you show de man de lettah we go---show de man de lettah.

Sam---Heah's de lettah I got Mr. Johnson---I'll read you part of it.

Henry---Read de man de whole lettah - don't read him no part of it-- read de man de whole lettah. (Ely 86).

In the 1930's, Jimmy Scribner voices multiple black characters in *The Johnson Family*:

Professor Pot Ash: Now I don' wanna get in no bobble a hobble dobbble crobble on the dobbble robble about trouble. I mean I don't wanna get in no trouble, and neiva does Mista Johnson I don't think, even though he used to it. Does he Mista Johnson?

Papa Johnson: I ain't used to, ain't nobody used to trouble. I done had my share well I admit dat but I don't wanna get in no mo' dan' I can help and Mista Peewee understand dat don't you Mista Peewee?

Peewee: Mista Johnson da only thang dat I can understan' is dat well dese plates b'long to me I bought em' atcho place. You run da place where dey sell second hand stuff. I comes in dere an bought 'em sight unseen in a package.

Papa Johnson: Well the reason dey was sight unseen Mista Peewee, we ,we does that occasionally you know somebody come dere and dey sell sometin' all wrapped up an everythin' and dey won't tell us what it is and well we buys it and sells it to somebody and we don't tell dem what it is. One of dem kinda grab bag things...

(otrcat.com/johnson-family-p-1468.html).

In the 1940's, Characters Kingfish and his wife Sapphire on radio show- *Amos 'n' Andy*:

Sapphire: George Stevens, I done made up my mind that I'm gonna have a husband that dresses good, knows nice people, and is got a steady job.

Kingfish: Sapphire, you mean to say that you is gonna leave me?

Sapphire: George, I know why you're a no-good bum. It's on account of your association with Andy Brown. Why don't you try a nicer class of men?

Kingfish: Well, I ain't got da opportunity to meet' em, they's all workin'.

Sapphire: Well, that Andy Brown is the cause of it all. What has he ever accomplished?

Kingfish: Well, yesterday he had a run of thirteen balls in da side pocket without leanin' on da table.

Sapphire: Now, that's exactly what I mean: Andy hangin' around a pool table all day.

Why don't he go to a cultured place like a public library?

Kingfish: They ain't got no pool table there. (Macdonald 343).

In the 1920's example from Sam and Henry, the language is written in heavy dialect. Notice that final consonants are dropped, the letter d replaces the beginning sound of TH, pronunciations are altered and extra negatives are added. The style of the dialogue suggests that the speakers are poor, from the south and uneducated.

In the 1940's example from Amos n' Andy, notice the presence of dialect. In Sapphire's first sentence, the verb "done" is substituted for "have" in the phrase: "I done made up my mind..." The verb "is" also replaces the words "has" and "are:" "...you mean to say that you is gonna leave me?" Kingfish also replaces words that begin with TH with the D as in da and

pluralizes the word “they” by adding an s instead of “they are” or “they’re”. The style of the dialogue also shows a carefree attitude, but suggests that Andy likes to play all day instead of work.

Although I observed written differences in most of the scripts, I listened to the excerpts and, in some cases, I could not identify the racial identity of the person speaking. While some speakers revealed subtle clues identifying their ethnic origin, like a more pronounced diphthong in words with the vowel blend o u as in “house” and “about”; differentiating all the sounds was challenging. My search for answers in radio plays, and theories about the oral, aural and mental impact on listeners came to a halt. All I was interested in now was reading a play that showed black people in a more genuine way. I didn't mind if they spoke with a bit of dialect, because many do, but I wanted to veer away from the instances where there were so many changes in the language that it was difficult to comprehend what was being said. I decided to write my own play, one that sounded like people I knew who lived during the same time as radio's Golden Age. A summer trip to a family reunion in Huntsville, Alabama put the voices in my ear and the story in my mind.

CHAPTER NINE: INSPIRATION FOR A PLAY

The writing of the radio play, *John, George and Drew Baby*, was inspired by a trip I took a couple of summer's ago, to my great, great aunt's funeral in Cuthbert, Georgia. My parents, my two sisters and I made the six or seven hour drive from Florida to a part of Georgia I had not visited since my childhood. Along the way, we rode through very small towns, some with traffic lights and some only with stop signs. I saw small homes made of wood with tin roofs and sagging porches sitting on land that stretched for miles. I saw cotton fields with buds waiting to burst forth and corn stalks ripe and ready for harvesting.

When we arrived at a relative's home, I was warmed by the great sense of family that was present. Many people had traveled long distances to be here for the home-going service for my great great aunt, known as Aunt Darling, but pronounced "Dahlin'." She was the matriarch of the family, and had just passed away at 101 years old. The stories in my mind did not come alive until after the funeral, when we made our way through the cemetery. My father gave me a tour of our family plot. Aunt Darling's husband, Uncle Bill was buried there just a year before. Other family members were also laid there to rest. The most intriguing thing was the dates on the tombstones, some of which dated back to 1851. As we drove away, my uncle took us to the spot where he and his brothers grew up. He pointed to a small oak tree that must have seemed massive when he was a boy. Green land surrounded the tree as far as the eye could see. "Way over there is where our house stood," my uncle George said. "We lived right there until I was five or six, just one tree stump down when I was like eight or nine and then down that road on another piece of land until I was 13 or 14." I pictured this house they lived in. My uncle John

said it was made of wood and was hot in the summer and cold in the winter. The walls were hollow and you dare not leave a piece of meat on the counter overnight lest a small critter come and carry it away. I had to ask questions, even though I'd heard many stories growing up. The stories seemed more alive in this space, where I could smell the grass and see the color of the sky.

My questions led to an overlapping conversation between my two uncles and my father; some of them unbelievable stories and some old country sayings, as I like to call them. A big serving of their memories evolved into John, George and Drew Baby. I wanted to write about how I saw my family as they were growing up- how their lives were in many ways the same as every family's but different in other ways; how things were different because of their locale, and the times in which they lived. They were black, and living in rural Georgia in the 40's and 50's. I wanted people to feel the way I did when I listened to their stories and get goose bumps and chills simply by hearing their adventures. I connected to the way the stories were told and felt that this was such a great extension of my family and many African-American families' tradition of oral storytelling.

CHAPTER TEN: JOHN, GEORGE AND DREW BABY

Notes: *John, George and Drew Baby* is written to reflect the way that African-Americans speak to each other when in a relaxed environment. Many of the words reflect the use of dropped endings, (indicated by the use of an apostrophe at the ends of words,) and consonant replacement, (shown with the use of d's or t's for words ending in TH). While there is not much verb substitution like *is* for *are*, as in "We is going to the store," actors should pay attention to the way words are said. The dialogue should have a relaxed feel and is not meant to be over-articulated except in the case of John's character, who sometimes over-enunciates. Johnny's and Lois' characters should be the less articulate when speaking and may choose to have a more Georgia accent. Words mostly should remain intact as they are written and be comprehensible by everyone.

Episode I

Introduction Music A Capella: *Hambone, Hambone*

Drew: My Grandpa Nick, (or Pa Nick as we called him), was a special man. You wouldn't know it by just seeing him. He wasn't very tall man. In fact, I think my Grandma was taller, but what he lacked in height he sure made up for in strength. I never knew him to work a lot, but when he did, boy, could he work...and by that I mean pick some cotton. He could run that cotton down and, believe me, there was a lot to be picked where we lived in Cuthbert. I wasn't too bad myself. I could pick at least 15 pounds in a day- and that was pretty good for a boy my age. I always knew it was time to pick cotton when I saw the little white tufts peek out from between the brown and green leaves on the plant. From my house you could see cotton growing

for miles. There were rows and rows of it, neatly lined and partitioned off, like a clean part down the center of my little sister's hair. The green grass was a deep, rich color, somewhere between pea green and evergreen. It was hearty and thick, and the sharp blades of grass were cut down real low. Before picking season, the little cotton bud sat nestled down inside the leaf. When it was time to pick, that dry little cotton head squirmed its way up so the hot Georgia sun could beam down on it. During the summer my brothers and I went to the field almost every day with Mamma,(who we called Lois), Daddy (who we called Johnny), Grandma, (who was Ma Dump) and sometimes Pa Nick. During the school year, we went only on the weekends. The best part was that we got to keep whatever money we made. The worst part was we had to get up early and the days were long. I'm not sure what time we got up...I just know that work began at sunup.

(blinds flap open)

John: George, Drew, the sun'll be peepin' out in a little bit. Y'all better get up, 'fo Johnny gets you up.

(yawning)

George: I wish we didn't have to go to the field today. I'd rather stay home and read.

Drew: Or sleep.

George: Or do nothin'. Wouldn't it be good if we could ride our bikes over to Aunt Dahlin's and see what she's cookin'.

Drew: Yeah...I bet she's makin' turnips, with some good ole hot cornbread, with the little corn kernels mixed up inside.

George: Un hunh, or some collards-- with no stems, just the way I like it, with some hot pepper sauce and a little pickle juice from the jar for me to pour on top.

Drew: Mmmm, or a ...

John: ...Or a hot leather belt, fried, died and ready to whip yo' behind! (laughs) Y'all better come on and quit playin' 'round. It's time to go.

(sighs, huffs and puffs) (Feet shuffle along the wood floor)

Drew: John must like pickin' cotton. He's always the first one up and ready to go.

George: Naw, John just knows Johnny'll be all over him, if he lets us oversleep.

(water pump) Ooh! This water's cold.

Drew: I like it cold. It wakes me up.

(door creaks open)

Mamma: (voice heard from inside the house) Drew, George, If y'all want somethin' to eat...you better come on.

George/Drew: Yes Lois.

(feet running, door swings open, footsteps along wooden floor, chairs pulled out, bodies thump down)

Mamma: Y'all don't have much time to eat today. Here's some biscuits and fried pork. (plates land on the table) You can pour yourselves some syrup if you wanna. Yo' daddy already got his bag and he's walkin' over to the field.

George: Yeah, we figured Johnny would already be on his way.

Mamma: Y'all better be on your way too. Where is little John?

Drew: He got out before me and George. He's probably right behind Johnny.

George: (chair slides back) All done. Hey Drew, grab your sack and let's go. I'll race you.

Drew: (chair slides back) Race me? George, who you gon' beat with those skinny lizard legs?

George: (footsteps running, yells over shoulder, screen door squeaks open)

You, that's who! (screen door slams)

(second set of footsteps, screen door opens and slams)

(two sets of footsteps running, huffing and puffing)

George: Woo... I gotta rest. Ok Drew, I'm gonna stop. You win.

Drew: (footsteps fade) Aww George, why you always stop runnin' when I catch up to you?

George: I don't stop runnin' when you catch up to me, it's just that you always catch up to me when I'm ready to stop runnin'.

(laugh)

(slower footsteps continue)

George: Drew, I can't wait till the end of cropping season, cause then it'll almost be time for my birthday.

Drew: I heard when you turn twelve; you'll have good luck for the whole year, if you can hit twelve cars in a row with a rock, coming across the old bridge.

George: Who told you that?

Drew: I can't tell. I'm tryin' to have good luck for the whole year, by keeping that a secret.

George: Well there ain't no secret to pickin' cotton in this blazing hot sun. See if you have good luck bendin' down and droppin' it in yo' sack.

(laugh)

Drew: Hey! Look! We almost caught up to John and Johnny.

George: Well I'm gonna run on up and ask Johnny if he'll finish puttin' up the Flyin' Ginny tomorrow. (runs ahead)

Drew: The Flyin' Ginny?

George: Yeah, I can't wait to ride it. (feet running)

(starts singing)

Drew: Flyin' Ginny makes you whirl...it might even make you hurl...

If you spend around too fast...you might fall and break yo'....

(steps on stick, it cracks, sounds of tripping and falling down)

Drew: Ooh! Ow! Ow...ooh...Ohhh. This day is not startin' off very lucky...

(feet running)

(Hums Flyin' Ginny)

Episode II

Drew: I never knew how Mamma cooked vegetables so fast! I tell you that's one thing she and Ma Dump believed in--cooking some vegetables. I thought about what she might be makin' for lunch today as John and I worked down that row of cotton. By this time my toes were already feeling a little pinched inside my right shoe and my shoulder was startin' to feel the weight of my sack as it got heavier. When I wasn't lookin' down at that cotton, I was watchin' the sun climb its way up to mid-air. I was glad when it finally slipped behind a cloud, 'cause it was startin' to beat down on the top of my head and that sun was hot. I could feel sweat trickling down the

center of my back like a little stream of water heading downhill to the river and droplets of sweat were even popping out around my forehead. But not for much longer, 'cause once that sun reached the middle of the sky, it would be time for lunch.

(someone whistles loud)

(footsteps rustling through the grass.)

George: Hey Drew, I asked Johnny and he said he'll put up the Flying Ginny tomorrow.

Drew: Yeah?

George: Yeah, and I'm gonna be the first one to ride it.

Drew: Forget about that Flyin' Ginny; that was the lunch whistle and all I can think about right now is my stomach.

(footsteps-walking)

John: Hey you two...did you see Pa Nick's sack? He already sent his bag over to the truck to be dumped, and it's only noon.

George: Pa Nick sure can pick some cotton. Why do you think he's so fast?

Drew: I heard its cause his Mamma was pickin' cotton when it was time for him to be born, so she had him right in the middle of the cotton field!

John: Drew you always hearin' somethin'.

Drew: Well that's what I heard. I also heard that Lois is cookin' okra and black-eyed peas for lunch.

John: And you know if cousin Clarence gets there before us it's gonna be gone.

George: Yeah, right down his hatch. That is the greediest boy I ever saw.

Ya'll remember that time when Johnny was prayin' over supper and everyone had their eyes closed? And just as Johnny said amen, Clarence was pullin' the cornbread off the platter.

Drew: Yeah, and if I was Johnny... he would have been pullin' back a nub.

(laugh)

John: I wonder how much money I'll make after I get my cotton weighed today.

Drew: I don't know how much you and George are gonna make, but I bet I'll make more.

George: Make more doin' what?

Drew: The same thing the two of you'll be doin'.

John: We'll be pickin, not daydreaming! (John and George laugh)

Drew: Laugh...I'll be laughin' when I cash in my crop.

John: Let's see if you'll laugh when Clarence puts down your lunch! Come on let's hurry. I'm sure lunch will be served up by the time we get there.

(feet running)

(screen door opens and slams shut)

Johnny: Boys, ya'll are just in time. Find a spot at the table and bow your heads.

(feet shuffle, chairs pull out and in)

Johnny: Good Lord, good meat, let's eat!

Everyone: Amen!

(low chatter begins and fades)

Episode III

Drew: Well I didn't pick the most cotton yesterday, but I certainly got enough to make 25 cents after everything was weighed. My back was still sore this morning from bending over, and I could already here my brothers stirring around in the house, looking for something to get into. After lunch yesterday, we'd gone back out to the fields until nearly close to sunset. There was no clock, and no real quittin' time. We just knew the day was finished when the sun was startin' to set in the west, right down close to where the sky meets the earth. Johnny always said you knew it was quittin' time when the sky looked like an orange crayon had melted across the sky. I think my brother George was more anxious than me for that quittin' bell to ring yesterday, 'cause as soon as it did, he was runnin' and talkin' about when Johnny would put up that Flyin' Ginny. My cousin Clarence had a Flyin' Ginny once. Johnny said he would make ours even bigger and better. I didn't see what the big deal was though. It was just a big metal contraption with a piece of wood nailed to each end for a seat. It was kind of like a see-saw, but it would also spin. One person sat on one end and the other person sat on the other. If someone real heavy got on with someone really light, the lighter one would fly up in the air. You had to grip on to the handle bars to keep from flyin' off. I guess that's where The Flying Ginny got its name.

(Rooster crows, hammering, nailing, stacking wood)

Johnny: (huffing and puffing)

Almost got it...there! That should do it.

Johnny: Put that piece over here George.

(pieces of wood drop)

George: ok Johnny.

Johnny: Now stand back while I test it out.

(Squeaking and churning as the Flyin' Ginny spins around)

(Clapping and hooting)

George: It's working!

Drew: Man...

John: George look how fast it goes.

George: John...Clarence's old Ginny didn't even spin around like that!

Johnny: Ok now, ya'll be careful out here. Hold onto the handle bars and sit square on that seat when it's your turn. Don't ya'll be horsin' around out here either. Your mama is already fussin' about The Flyin' Ginny.

John, George, Drew: No sir Johnny.

George: No horsin' around.

John: I'll watch 'em Johnny.

(Footsteps as Johnny walks away)

George: Drew get on with me.

Drew: I don't wanna ride that stupid Ginny.

George: (huffs, sighs) Ok John you get on.

John: Alright (foot shuffles, grunts getting on)

Make sure you sit square on that seat.

George: (a little far off) Yea, I'm on. Give us a push Drew

Drew: Alright. Hold on...

George, John: Wee, woوو, hahahaha (laughing, fun sounds etc)

George: Drew you're sure missin' the fun.

Drew: Ok, ok, let me try.

John: I thought you didn't want to ride the stupid Ginny.

Drew: Just let me on...

John: Alright come over here, you can have my seat so George can ride again.

(foot shuffles, grunts getting on)

Drew: Ok I'm on... give it a push John.

George: Drew you better hold on. (from a little far off)

John: (grunts as he pushes)

George, Drew: wee, woوو, hahahah (laughing, fun sounds etc.)

John: Ok it's Drew's and my turn. George you give us a push.

George: Alright, but then it's my turn again.

(sounds of climbing down- grunting sounds etc.)

George: Ok here you go. (grunts as he pushes)

John, Drew: wee, woوو, hahhahah (laughing sounds etc.)

George: Alright. That's enough...It's my turn again.

John: Ok I'll push...get on George.

(grunting sounds etc.)

George: Hurry John... push John!

John: Hold on. You have to hold onto the handle bars George.

George: I am holding... go ahead and push.

John: (grunts as he pushes)

George, Drew: Wee, wooo, hahhahah...

George: Ok... one more time...

John: Alright, just one more time... (grunts as he pushes)

George, Drew: Wee, wooo....

John: (yelling) George, you're not sitting square on the...

George: (wood cracks, sound of metal and wood ripping)

(screams) Aaaah!

(thud of George hitting the ground... crying, screaming)

Drew: George!

John: George! Drew, run and get Johnny.

(footsteps- running)

John: Hold on George, Drew went to get Johnny.

George: (whimpering sounds, crying)

John: Oh no George....I was tryin' to tell you to sit square on the seat.

(feet running approaching)

Johnny: Good Lord! What happened? George can you hear me?

(more feet approaching, running...)

Lois: Lord, George! George! (cloth ripping) Put this on him Johnny.

You got to tie the cloth tight to stop the bleeding)

Johnny: Can you move son?

Lois: No Johnny, the child can't move, don't move him.

Johnny: I ain't gon' move him...I just wanna know if he can move.

Johnny: Can you move son?

Lois: Son can you move?

Johnny: I'm gon' have to move him to carry him to the doctor.

(grunts, puffs, etc)

Lois: The skin is barely hangin' on....

Johnny: Here Lois, put some pressure right there... (intermittent sounds/ Lois & Johnny) No right here...yes, now hold it while I get under him.

(George reacts with sounds of pain)

Johnny: Got him steady. John, Drew. Ya'll run up ahead and let the doctor know we're coming.

Drew: My daddy had to carry George to the doctor that day. It all happened so fast. It was just moments before that I remember watching The Flyin' Ginny sail into the air. And I sure remember seeing George and that seat fly with it. We figured out later that a nail got caught on George's pants, and as he went up that nail ripped George's britches clean off...and took with it a piece of his backside. George was hurt real bad that day. As soon as Johnny and Lois found out that he'd be ok, Johnny was back home and workin' on The Flyin' Ginny again. (sawing sounds under) But when I looked out to see the repairs Johnny made, all I saw was a heap of

scraps. That's 'cause the same day The Flyin' Ginny went up, was the same day it came down.

(sawing sounds up full then fade)

Episode IV

Introduction Music A Capella: *Do You Got Good 'Ligion*

Do you got good 'ligion

Certainly Lord

Did you cook good dinner

Certainly Lord

Did you ask me over

Certainly Lord

Did you make pot liquor

Certainly Lord

Certainly, certainly, certainly Lord.

(Music fades)

Drew: My Ma Mae sure could tell a joke. I mean she could spit one out just as good as a man, maybe even better. I guess she learned joke-telling, which we called storyin' from Pa Nick.

Sunday evening after supper, was usually when storyin' got started; and anyone who'd spent any amount of time there knew when it was 'bout to begin. First the floor started creakin' (creaking chair), then pillows started fluffin' (pillow fluffing) as Ma settled down in her favorite chair. Ma Mae had many stories to tell, but my favorite was about a boy named Little Lenny. Of course us kids couldn't wasn't allowed to listen. Storyin' was only for grown folks' ears. So when Ma Mae

got to the pillow fluffin' part, I'd leave out of the back room with the other kids, crouch down on the floor and scoot as close to the edge of the door so I could get an earful. I loved to hear Ma Mae talk about Lenny. The way she told it, I thought he was sure 'nough 'bout to get himself into some real trouble. But after every story he got off scott free and all the folks sittin' around would hoop and holla, and slap their legs-- and sometimes each other.

Ma: Ya'll know Little Lenny right?

Everyone: Right... (snickering)

Ma: Well today I was gon' tell ya'll 'bout the time Little Lenny went to the outhouse.

Uncle J: Aww Ma we heard that one...

Aunt J: Shhh. No we didn't, let her tell it.

(overlapping)

Ma: (shifting in chair, chair squeaks) Well alright if you don't wanna hear it...

Everyone: Yes we do...yes we do... (trickling off)

Uncle J: Gon' and tell the story Ma.

Ma: Well if you insist, cause I don't wanna ...

Someone: (yelling out) Yes we insist...

Ma: Well alright..... (clears throat) Ya'll know Little Lenny right?

Everyone: Right... (snickering)

Uncle J: (groans)

Ma: Well... one day at school Little Lenny had to go to the outhouse. So he yelled out, "Miss Moore, Miss Moore, I need to go pee." Well Miss Moore shook her finger at Little Lenny and

said, “Now Little Lenny, you know that’s not the correct way to ask to go the outhouse, the proper way is to say, Miss Moore, I have to urinate. Now if you can use the word urinate in a sentence, you may go.” Well Little Lenny scrunched up his face, thought about it and a few minutes later raised his hand. When Miss Moore called on him he said, “Miss Moore I can use urinate in a sentence now.” Miss Moore smiled and nodded at Little Lenny to proceed. Beaming from ear to ear, Little Lenny stood and said, “Miss Moore, you’re an eight, but if you let me go pee, you’d be a ten!”

Everyone: (wild laughter)

Ma: (laughter) Get it, urinate, you’re an eight! Ha-ha ha-ha

(adlib- everyone)

(over the laughter)

Ma: Ya’ll wanna hear another one...?

(overlapping)

Uncle J: noo.... (grumbling sound)

Everyone: Yes

Ma: Alright if you insist Uncle J...

Everyone: laughter

Ma: (clears throat) Ok ya’ll know Little Lenny right?

Everyone: (laughter) Right....

Uncle J: For heaven’s sake Ma.

Aunt J.: Hush J...

Ma: Well one day Little Lenny's daddy got into some trouble.

Uncle J: Aww Ma we heard that one...

Everyone: Shhh

Ma: Well if you don't want to hear it...

Someone: Gon' and tell the story Ma...

Uncle J: Yea Ma. Gon' and tell it.

Ma: Well if you insist.... (clears throat) Well you see one day Little Lenny's mama Lula, went to visit her friend Clara. It was right around supper time and she needed a little sugar to finish her cake. Any other time Lula would have sent Lenny to run her errands, but today he was out fishin' with his daddy, so she walked over by herself. When she got to door, she knocked, announced her name and let herself in like usual. Just as she stepped foot in the door, she saw her husband wrapped in Clara's arms. Well Lula ran right over to her husband, and grabbed him by the shirt collar....and would you believe he ran right out of that shirt and straight out the front door. Lula ran as fast as she could all the way home. By the time Lula got there, her husband was sittin' at the kitchen table wit his feet propped up. Lula came in, still holding that shirt, huffin' and puffin' and gasping' for breath. When Lula shook that shirt in her husband's face, he said: 'Where you been? Fishin' was great. Dinner ready?'

Everyone: (laughter)

Ma: You get it! Where you been? Fishin... great! Dinner!!

Everyone: (more laughter)

Music Full

Episode V

Introduction Music: *Bye Bye Blackbird*/Nina Simone

Drew: The day we got ready to move to Florida, two of my Mama's brothers drove up from Orlando to help drive us down. We packed down tight in Johnny's car and in my uncle's truck. (closing doors) We took everything we could; clothes, tools, food... There were a lot of us. My five brothers, two sisters and me, plus Lois and Johnny and a couple of my uncles. Some of us was squeezed into Johnny's car, and I was sittin' on the long seat, in my uncle's truck. Johnny who you know by now is my dad, started up the engine (engine sound) and started pulling away. As we rolled off, I looked out the window at the cotton fields (crunching sounds of car wheel rolling over grass) with the sun beaming down on those straight rows of brownish green; neat as the corn rows on my sister's head. I peeked back at the house and at the big tree in the yard, right next to the burial ground of our beloved Flying Ginny. I gazed at the front porch where we'd sit and laugh on break from the fields, waiting' for mama and Ma Mae to serve up lunch. As we rolled along, (car tire sounds) I looked down the dirt road that led to Ma Mae's house and an evening of knee-slapping and gut-punching. Further down the road is where John, George and I would ride our bikes to school and then on the way home-hide up on that big hill, so we could throw rocks at the cars passing by. As my mind drifted back inside the car, I didn't know what danger or what fun lay ahead of us in our new home, but I sure was hopin' for some more adventures ahead. By now we were pulling into the filling station for gasoline and Johnny went inside for a minute. As he came back, the service man had just finished pumping and another man was approaching the window. But it wasn't just any man. It was a police man. The white

police? I climbed up on my knees to turn around on the seat of that truck, so I could see what was going on. My sweaty palms left a wet mark on the back of the seat and I could feel a nervous lump growing in my throat. I know I said more adventures...but maybe I spoke to soon.

Police: Let me see your driver's license boy.

Johnny: My license sir?

Police: Yea, your license boy. You got a license to drive this thing don't you?

Johnny: Of course I do sir. Yes sir I do. (rustling sounds) Here it is.

Police: Alright Johnny. Ya'll lookin' mighty packed down in here. Like a can of stinkin' sardines.

Johnny: Yes sir, we packed down pretty tight.

Police: I can see that. Where you think you headin'?

Johnny: Headin'?

Police: Yea, headin'? From what I hear, you got your nose pointed to to Florida. Isn't that right

Johnny? Down to Florida, right Johnny?

Johnny: Well we thought, my family and I thought that we'd see about things down there. My wife, her ma and pop is relocated down there and...

Police: ---and you'd thought you'd uh.... relocate too.

Johnny: yes sir.

Police: Well... that's all well and good and everything, but you can't expect to make a home in a new town when you've got unresolved issues in your old town? Now can you Johnny?

Johnny: Issues?

Police: Yes. Issues.

Johnny: What kind of issues sir?

Police: Financial issues. I think that you might owe some money in taxes on that piece of land you was livin' on.

Johnny: No, no, I don't owe nobody nothin'.

Police: Well, suit yourself. But, if you don't know what you owin'? Then I think you ain't goin'. (laughs) Yea... I don't think you goin'.

Johnny: How much?

Police: Well, I'm gonna need to collect twenty five dollars.

I sho' hope you got it, cause I'd hate to have to turn you round and send you back up the road for twenty five dollars Johnny. .

Johnny: No sir, I don't got it.

Police: You what, you don't? I think I'm gonna let you sit here a minute and think about that real good. I'll be waitin' inside. I'm gon' get me something to drink and cool off. It's hot out here. Now you know you shouldn't have brought your family out here to stew in that hot car, while you tryin' to take care of your business. (laughs) Aahh yea, I'll be inside. (walks off)

Lois: Johnny, how'd he know we was leavin' town? What'd you say inside that filling station?

Johnny: I don't owe no money.

Lois: I know you don't owe, but unless you give the law some money, he ain't lettin' us leave town.

Johnny: Just let me think a minute.

(Lois starts to hum a tune: Bridge over troubled water)

Johnny: Let me take a walk and think.

Lois: (More hummin)

Drew: We didn't get to leave till late that night. Eventually Johnny scraped up enough money for us to leave Georgia and make our way down to Florida. I never knew I'd be so glad to get in that truck again, squished between my uncles and all of our stuff. All I knew is that there'd be no more cotton pickin', and no more quittin' bell. I just wanted to see the new city, move to a new house and have some new adven(starting to say adventures)...well... some more fun.

(Music up full) *Here Comes the Sun*/ Nina Simone

CHAPTER ELEVEN: DEFINING DIALECT

While there is not overwhelming evidence of a defining dialect in John, George and Drew Baby, there are several instances that might have revealed the ethnicity of the characters speaking. There is no one answer, but there are traceable patterns that differentiate how English is spoken.

Mechanics of Black English

The distinction between dialects is found in three aspects of language: vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Vocabulary refers to words that are used by a community of people. The word “pancake,” for example, is “hot cake” in some dialects and “Johnny cake” in others. Likewise, “frying pan” in one region is “skillet” elsewhere. Dialects are unique to specific geographic regions and can give clues as to where a person learned to speak.

Grammar describes how words are organized into a phrase or sentence. In some instances, there can be quite a bit of grammatical distinction between Standard American English and Black English: “I don't have any” becomes “I don't have none” or “I ain't got none;” “They were coming” becomes “They was coming,” and “He doesn't want to go” becomes “He don't wanna go.”

Pronunciation refers to the accepted sound of a word or words. It is often pronunciation that reveals whether a person is a native speaker of a particular language, and can be characterized by word variability, sound variability and contrast variability. One distinction of Black English is word variability. Word variability refers to the differences in the way words are pronounced. There are many word pronunciations considered exclusive to Black English, and

some that are also found in speakers of Black English and white southern speakers of Standard American English: “street”/ “skreet,” “threw”/ “thew,” “business”/ “bidness,” “ask”/ “axe.”

Word variability also describes how words change, when the emphasis is placed on different syllables. In SAE, the words “police” and “Detroit” are pronounced with the stress at the end of the word. In BEV the stress in the words, “police” and “Detroit” “police” and “Detroit” is moved to the first syllable of the word.

Another distinction is sound variability. Sound variability refers to changes in the vowel sounds of words by virtue of changes in the way the speaker's mouth is positioned. Words like “head,” “led,” and “met” sound different in Black English due to a different tongue position from SAE on the vowel. Words like “good,” “should” and “would” generally involve less puckering of the lips among Black English than in SAE.

A third distinction is contrast variability, or replacing one vowel sound with another. In SAE, the long “I” vowel sound in the word “pride” becomes a short “O” vowel sound, changing the pronunciation to “prod.” The same vowel change happens in the word *find*, relaxing it into the word “fond.” It can also be heard in words like “oil”/“all,” “boil”/ “ball,” “think”/ “thank,” “drink”/ “drank.”

The loss or change of final and beginning consonants is also significant in distinguishing Black English from standard American English. The change in final consonants can occur in words that end with “TH,” where the final letter becomes “F” or “V.” “With” becomes “wif” and “wiv.” Similarly the word “both” becomes “boaf” or “boav.” In words ending in “R” and “S,” the final consonant is dropped and changes “poor” to “poe,” “sure” to “show” and “four” to

“foe.” Words like “comes” and “goes,” change to “come” and “go,” creating sentences that change from, “Here he comes” to “Here he come” and “There he goes,” “There he go.” Changes in beginning consonant sounds occur in words starting with “TH” and are replaced with the “D.” “This” becomes “dis,” “that” becomes “dat,” “those” become “dose” and “these” become “dese.”

In addition to the aforementioned variables, there are six root words found in Black English, that are also found in Standard English, but are used differently: “be,” “been,” “do,” “done,” “go,” and “going to.” “Be” refers to existence, “do” refers to action, and “go” refers to movement. When the letter “N” is added, the meanings change. “I been know your name.” “Been,” means that the person already knew the information. “You already done had your turn.” When “N” is added to “do,” it means the event recently happened. “You know someone gon’ take that.” The letter “N” added to go signifies that “gon’” takes place in the future.

One final recognizable form of BE is in the way sentences are negated. This sentence structure differs from SAE in the substitution of the word “ain’t” for “isn’t”. Some speakers of BEV also use “ain’t” in place of “don’t,” “doesn’t” or “isn’t.” “She ain’t gonna go,” “This ain’t mine.”

Black English

Black English (BE) or Black English Vernacular (BEV) is the term that describes the speech of many black people of African descent in the U.S. . Black English has been referred to as slang or “street talk,” however, it is a recognized dialect of the English language. The word “dialect” describes a set of language codes that is unique to a specific geographic region or community of people. "Black English is the indigenous language of many working class Black

people in the United States. Its history can be traced to the colonization of Africa and the opening of the slave trade." (Chambers preface).

There is no single form of black dialect, but there are common features of speech found in the American black community. While there are certain characteristic features of dialects heard in many black communities, that does not mean all black people speak with a dialect, nor do they necessarily use it in any part of it in their speech or conversation. The discussion of Black English in Chapter Four includes the terms Black English Vernacular and Standard Black English (SBE). BEV usually refers to the grammar spoken by children growing up in a black community and by adults in an all-black informal setting. SBE refers to speech used by educated black speakers in formal settings or public situations.

Switching between the two styles of speech is referred called code switching. People code switch when they feel the need to adapt to a changing environment or "fit in" with a group of people. Code switching is not limited to dialects. People code switch with babies when using baby talk to communicate with infants or over the phone when using a "professional" voice. People tend to use code switching as an informal or formal expression.

In the script *John, George and Drew Baby*, code switching is found most often when Johnny speaks to the white police officer. He loses the relaxed speech he uses with his family and replaces colloquial terms like "Ya'll", with more formal words, like "Yes sir and no sir."

There has been much research and analysis about the origin of BE. Some linguists and dialecticians say BE has roots based in the languages of West Africa. Others say BE is a direct

correlate of Southern American English. M.C. Alleyne, author of the book, *Comparative Afro-American*, says it is an amalgamation of both.

1. The surrender of the native African language is more rapid than is usually the case. The plurality of native language in the New World, the inability of any one of them to assert dominance over the others, and the extreme differences in control of power between two communities in contact are the factors which led to the rapid surrender of the native language.
2. Learning conditions are generally inadequate for the effective adoption of the new language e.g., no formal institutions, such as schools, exist for a long time, and even when they do come into existence, they remain inadequate...
3. A large group (the majority) is virtually excluded from any close contact with the new language and has virtually no motivation to make a complete adoption due to the absence of social and economic mobility...
4. Subjected to the most extreme form of oppression and having no significant social interaction outside their own group, these persons develop a strong ethnic identity....Cultural maroonage, in places like Jamaica and the United States, leads to the preservation of different degrees of approximation to the norm of the new language...(Chambers x).

Black English has been and remains a controversial and embarrassing topic for many in the black community. For some in the black community, it is still not a legitimate form of

speech. Others who validate BEV have adapted code switching and use BE only in black social settings.

Vocal Pitch/Timbre

I have often found myself trying to identify the racial background of a person by listening to clues in his/her voice over the phone or on the radio. Often, people assume that members of different races can be identified by the timbre of their voice. Timbre is the vocal color and the quality of tone that distinguishes one sound from another. Vocal pitch and timbre often play a significant role in defining a person's racial background. While it is difficult to pinpoint a direct relationship between vocal timbre and ethnicity, an audience's perception of the ethnic background of a person corresponds to how high, how low, how resonant or flat a person sounds when speaking or singing. Connections between vocal timbre and racial background are frequently discussed among musicians analyzing solo and choral music.

Using Other Dialects

When trying to imitate another dialect, speakers usually adopt the vocal timbre or pitch of that group of speakers and combine it with the changes in the dialect. If the speaker is using sounds that are also characteristic of his/her native dialect, it can be relatively easy to mimic sounds of another dialect. In radio serials, white actors were able to establish sounds of the black southern dialect because the vowel sounds already existed in the English language. Linguists believe skillful actors can mimic other dialects using sound variability rules. For example, an American English speaker using a British English accent would need to learn a new vowel sound

to pronounce the British version of the word *soap*. After the speaker has properly learned the new vowel sound, the speaker can predict vowel changes in words that use the same vowel cluster, as in the words: *rope*, *hope*, *boat* and *float*.

CHAPTER TWELVE: CHARACTER/VOCAL ANALYSIS

Characters

Drew

Physical Qualities

Who am I?

Drew Weaver

Who am I named after? Do I like my name?

I am named after Charles Drew, the famous black physician.

I love my name. Girls love it too. It's short and easy to say but it is not short for Andrew.

What is my sex? What do I think of my sex?

I am a male. I think boys are fine. I'd rather be a boy than a girl, even though boys have to work harder in the field.

How old am I? What do I think of my age?

I am 11 years old and looking forward to my next birthday.

I like it that I'm not old yet. Old people have to do too much work. I just want to be old enough to drive a car-legally.

How does my posture express my age, health, inner feelings?

I stand straight and tall. I'm not really tall yet, but I'm taller than my oldest brother John. I'm young and healthy. My long legs and arms help me carry water buckets and heavy bags. I'm looking forward to summer so I can practice riding my bicycle all day long. My legs are long,

but not long enough to stop myself when I'm riding my bike.

What is the pitch, volume, tempo, resonance or quality of my voice? What do I think of it?

I speak in a medium pitch. I wish my voice was deeper, right now it doesn't have enough bass. I try not to speak too loud. No one in my house talks loud except Johnny when he's angry. I guess I talk faster than John and slower than George. Right now my voice is kind of pinched. My sister said when I get excited it sounds like a mouse. I think my voice is nice, except when I'm sad or crying, it gets low. Girls like the sound of my voice too. They smile when I'm talking to them.

Is my articulation careless or precise? Is my articulation standard or colloquial? Do I have a dialect or an accent?

My articulation sounds good to me. The way I hear it is the way I say it. My speech is very relaxed. I tend to drop the ing/ η (International Phonetic Alphabet) at the ends of words and blend a mixture of t and d at the beginnings of words that start with a th. I guess you could say I have a southern accent, but I don't have a drawl. Mostly I speak with a form of regional dialect

Social Qualities

What do I do when I wake up each morning?

I hit the pump as soon as I wake up in the morning to wash my face and brush my teeth. Then I head back in to see what my mama cooked for breakfast and try to beat my brothers to the table. After I get dressed, I'm out to the chicken coop to help clean it out before school. After the coop is clean, I go wash up again, then it's off to school.

What is my relationship to my environment? Do I like it?

Where I live is big and wide. The land is green and there is always something growing. The town isn't that big and my house sits on a small hill at the top of a big cotton field. I was born in this town right in my grandma's house. We're not too far from town and only 30 minutes walk to my grandma's house. Whenever we finish harvesting the crop where we're livin', we move to a new piece of land. So far we've moved three times. I like it where we live now but it's too hot in the summer and cold in the winter. I hear that we might move to the city one day. We're not too far from town and only 30 minutes' walk to my grandma's house.

What is my educational background? How much discipline was I subjected to? How intelligent am I?

I go to public school for colored children and I'm in the fourth grade. I like school especially math and science. My teachers whip you when you don't pay attention, or misbehave.

Sometimes you get the stick if you miss your multiplication problems. My teacher says I got a good head on my shoulders so I suppose that means I'm smart.

What was my childhood like? What are my strongest memories?

I'm still growing up. My parents have always been good to us. My mama has a beautiful garden of vegetables that she pulls from every day. Everyone in my house is happy with each other. I just wish we had more space 'cause I have a lot of brothers and sisters. My strongest memory is when daddy built us a flying see saw. I remember how bad it was when my brother got hurt. I also remember when I smash my little sister's middle finger with a hammer. She stuck her hand up on the tree stump when I was chopping wood. I don't think that finger is ever gonna grow

back.

How much money do I have? How much do I want?

Right now I have 42 cents. I been saving up after picking cotton since my daddy lets us keep what we make on the weekends and in the summers. I'm gonna save enough to buy me a car one day. I don't know which one, but a fast one to drive me out of here and take me to the city.

What is my nationality? What do I think of it?

I am colored. Some people say negro. Either way I have brown skin and I can't go everywhere that people with white skin go. I can't go that picture show they have in town, well not unless I sit in the balcony. I can't drink water from the same fountain and I can't go to the same bathroom. I don't think it's fair, but my mama say I got to follow the rules.

What is my occupation? Do I like it? What other jobs have I had? When and why did I choose this one?

I don't have a job yet, but I make money when I pick cotton and if I do other handy jobs around town. If I had my choice I wouldn't ever decide to pick cotton, but that's what my daddy does and his daddy before him. My daddy's also real good with fixin' cars, so I might learn how to do that to.

What are my political attitudes?

I don't know much about politics, but I know that my uncle told me once that when it was time to vote, the boss in town came by the fields with a pickup truck and made everybody get in. He took them to town and told them who to vote for.

Am I religious?

I go to church every Sunday with my family. Unless we're bringing in a big crop or there's bad weather or something.

Whom would I chose to be if I could be anyone else?

I would be Jackie Robinson because everybody loves him and he can run fast.

Did I have childhood heroes? What did I like about them?

Do I like members of the opposite sex? What do I like about them?

I like girls. I didn't tell my mama cause I might get in trouble. I like how they smile when I'm talking. I guess they like how I smile too.

Who were my parents? What do I like and/or dislike about them?

Johnny Weaver and Lois Walker Weaver are my parents. I like them when they let us stay up late or miss school. I don't like them when I get a spanking.

Do I like my family? What do I like? What do I dislike?

I like my family but sometimes I wish there weren't so many of us, we'd have more food to eat. I'm glad though sometimes, because there are a lot of people to help out with the chores and I don't have to do so much.

How has my mother influenced me? How has my father influenced me?

My mother taught me to always look my best. Even if I didn't have expensive clothes to wear, she said that I should always look like I'm going somewhere expensive.

My father told me to always do my best. If I'm a street sweeper, he said to be the best street sweeper people have ever seen.

Do I have brothers and sisters? What do I think about them?

I have five brothers and two sisters, with me it makes eight and Lois and Johnny makes ten. I like everybody but my brother Bill can be a pain sometimes.

Who are my friends? Who are my enemies? How can I tell if someone is a friend or an enemy?

Chester is my friend even though he's my cousin. Mostly my brothers are my friends. I have one enemy, his name is Paul. He's a grade ahead of me and says he won a marble off of me in a marble game. I didn't give him my big marble, so I guess he wants to be my enemy. I can tell if someone is my friend if they smile at me and don't do something bad to me when I turn around. I know someone is my enemy when they frown at me and say they're gonna get me when my brothers aren't looking.

What ideas do I like? What ideas do I dislike?

I like that the sky and the ground have so many colors in them. I want to travel one day and see what other places have colorful skies and beautiful ground.

I don't like that I have to follow so many rules. I want to grow up and make my own rules.

What hobbies or interest do I have?

I like playing marbles and riding bikes. I don't know how to bring my bike to a stop yet, but I'm working on it. I also like throwing rocks at the cars as they pass over the old stone bridge.

How does the locale of the play make me feel?

I know all there is to know about Cuthbert and Sherman Georgia. I'm comfortable in my

surroundings, cause I move around in them every day.

Psychological Qualities

What choices do I make?

I choose to sneak and listen to my Ma Mae when she tells jokes at her house. I choose to hide so no one can see me and I can hear everything the grown folks are saying.

What makes me angry? What relaxes me?

I am angry when people lie on me. I get in trouble even if I haven't done something wrong. I am relaxed when we go to the swimming hole and I can jump in from the side and swim out the middle of the water by myself.

What are my driving ambitions, my goals?

I want to play baseball one day and buy my mama her own house.

Do I have instincts?

Yes. I can tell when there is a happy mood in my house and when there isn't.

I know when the kids need to be quiet and get out of the way.

Do I do things impulsively?

Yes. I guess that's why I'm always in trouble. Sometimes I just wanna try something to see if it will work.

What do I worry about?

I worry sometimes if my daddy can get the crop harvested and if he'll have enough money to pay the rent on this house and the farm.

What do I like about myself? Dislike about myself?

I think I'm handsome. People call me Drew Baby 'cause they say I have a sweet baby face. I don't like that I have really skinny legs. I want to run and play baseball so my legs can get stronger.

What do I need?

I need for people to listen to me when I talk. I need for them to pay attention when I have something good to say and understand that it's important.

Do other people like me? Why?

Everybody likes me except Paul Williams and the red-headed devil, but he lives in the ground.

Moral Qualities

Are the choices I will make based upon expediency or upon some ethical standard?

Most of the choices I make are right when I think about them. I don't live by any standards yet, other than right and wrong.

Will the pursuit of my needs lead to a moral choice?

I don't need much other than what my mama and my daddy give me right now. I wouldn't ever think about stealing anything though... but I might skip someone in line

What is my attitude toward the choice I make?

It doesn't really bother me if I do something like skip someone in line. It's their fault if they weren't paying attention enough to let me skip them.

How do I express this attitude vocally and physically?

I laugh a lot when I want people to hear me and stand straight and tall when I want them to see me. I slump when I don't get my way and almost whisper when I'm upset.

Play Qualities

Why am I included in the play? How do I contribute to the overall idea the playwright wishes to express?

In this play I represent carefree youthfulness. I have no inhibitions and only feel bound to rules some of the time. The playwright wants to show me as an inquisitive boy who likes to play games, tell jokes and bring liveliness to the life of the play. I am in the play to be the voice of the action of the play.

George

Physical Qualities

Who am I?

George Weaver

Who am I named after? Do I like my name?

I'm named after an uncle of mine named George. I like my name. It sounds important.

What is my sex? What do I think of my sex?

I am a male. Boys have more opportunities in life. I want to be someone important so I'm glad I'm a boy.

How old am I? What do I think of my age?

I am 12 years old and very mature for my age.

Other boys my age play around too much. I think 12 is a good age, so I can have time to relax and read and not work all day.

How does my posture express my age, health, inner feelings?

I'm tall for my age. I'm the tallest next to my dad. I look like I'm a 13 year old. I have very strong bones and feel happy about being the tallest person in my class.

What is the pitch, volume, tempo, resonance or quality of my voice? What do I think of it?

I have a high-pitched voice. I speak at a normal vocal level and kind of fast. My brain moves very quickly so I talk very quickly. Usually people I might need to slow down a little, because when I'm an important person I want people to hear and understand what I'm saying.

Is my articulation careless or precise? Is my articulation standard or colloquial? Do I have a dialect or an accent?

I form my words very carefully. I don't talk like a snail but I articulate the words that I'm saying. I speak in a regional dialect of the community that I live in. We say things that I've heard only people who live here say, like: "What in tarnation?" And, "I ain't got enough money to buy a coachwhip a headrag."

Social Qualities

What do I do when I wake up each morning?

Every morning when I wake up, I try to see what mama cooked for breakfast. I like it when she

makes eggs and bacon or a piece of pork. After I get a peek, I go start on my morning chores before John comes telling me what to do. After I do my chores, I get washed up for breakfast and then get ready for school.

What is my relationship to my environment? Do I like it?

My environment is filled with people who are always around and don't ever give you any privacy. Where we live is hot and can be aggravating when the mosquitoes are swarming all over the place. My daddy has to light wood and smoke them out, so sometimes we smell smoky. I like where I live, but I would rather live in a house like the boss downtown Sherman, Georgia. He has a big front porch with a swing right in the front.

What is my educational background? How much discipline was I subjected to? How intelligent am I?

I am in the fifth grade and very smart. My mama says I'm gong to be important one day. I do good in all my subjects at school. I don't get disciplined too much. Maybe 'cause I'm tall, or maybe cause I'm really smart. I only get whippins' from my grandma and my mama.

What was my childhood like? What are my strongest memories?

My childhood can be lots of fun sometimes and sometimes it's a lot of work. My strongest memory was when I hurt myself trying to ride our seesaw the Flying Ginny. I will never forget how bad that hurt. I also remember the day that I won the school spelling bee. I spelled the word aviation to win.

How much money do I have? How much do I want?

I have about 50 cents. Right now, that's a lot of money to a 12 year old.

What is my nationality? What do I think of it?

I am colored. I think it's what you make it. I don't care what color I am, I just wanna be important.

What is my occupation? Do I like it? What other jobs have I had? When and why did I choose this one?

Picking cotton is kind of like my job. I don't do it enough to make a lot of money, but I get to keep the change I make when I work on the weekends. I have also gotten paid for helping my uncle haul things to the junkyard. I didn't choose this job and I would choose another kind of job if I had the chance. I would pick flying airplanes or something fun.

What is my relationship to my environment? Do I like it?

My environment is an interesting place to be. I like looking outside and seeing the big trees, but sometimes I'm not excited about looking at those cotton fields, knowing how much work I have to do in them. There isn't a lot to do here but we always find something to keep us busy. I have a big, big yard. It stretches from the front door all the way to the big oak tree and that takes at least 30 seconds to run to. I do a lot of work in my environment. I clean the chicken coops, rake the yard, fill up the water buckets, chop wood and sometimes I help my mama do planting in the garden.

What is my educational background? How much discipline was I subjected to? How intelligent am I?

Right now I'm in the fifth grade. I'm very smart. I'm very interested in airplanes and I hope I can get a model airplane one day to build. My teachers don't play when it comes to discipline.

You either get your work, or you get a switch.

What was my childhood like? What are my strongest memories?

A childhood like mine is all I know. I'm sure there are some people who have it easier than we do. Some people like my cousin Chester. He's an only child so he gets everything he wants. He gets all kinds of sandwiches in his lunch. His mom makes them and of course he won't share, cause he's greedy. I'll never forget the day we got on the Flyin' Ginny and my pants got caught on a nail. That nail ripped my pants and my skin clean off. I thought I might die from all the blood, but my daddy got me to the doctor in time to save my life.

How much money do I have? How much do I want?

I thought I had about a dollar, but I think someone has been sticking their hand in my piggy bank. I keep it wrapped up in a cloth inside of a tin can I found under the bridge on the way to school. I think I'll have to find a new spot to hide my money. I hope to make a lot of money one day. Not a lot of money like a professional athlete, I want to make money like the President or the Attorney General of the United States.

What is my nationality? What do I think of it?

I am colored. Sometimes people say Negro. I don't mind being colored. There are a lot of colored people and colored people do a lot of great things. People call me a light-skinned colored. My mother is very fair-skinned and my father is dark skinned so sometimes colored people get one of the other colors, or get a mix of both.

What is my occupation? Do I like it? What other jobs have I had? When and why did I choose this one?

I don't have a real job.

What are my political attitudes?

I believe in the Democratic party.

Am I religious?

My family is Baptist. We are not Southern Baptist, we're Missionary Baptist. We go to church mostly every Sunday. Whom would I chose to be if I could be anyone else?

I would want to be the man in charge of all the Armed Forces in the United States.

Do I like members of the opposite sex? What do I like about them?

I like girls, but I don't have time to mess with them. They get me into trouble, cause I don't have enough time to think about doing my work.

Who were my parents? What do I like and/or dislike about them?

My parents are Johnny and Lois Weaver. I don't think I'm allowed to talk about what I don't like about them, but if I had to say one thing, I don't like when we get woken up in the middle of the night if we forgot to do something we were supposed to do during the day.

Do I like my family? What do I like or dislike?

Yes. I have a good family. It's a lot of us, so we look out for each other. I have 12 aunts and uncles. My mother is one child of 13 and then I have 7 brothers and sisters, so we help each other.

How has my mother influenced me? How has my father influenced me?

My mother taught me everything I know. She is very quiet and doesn't have a lot to say, but when she talks she means business. Most boys don't know how to wash clothes but my mama

taught me how to use the rub board. My father showed me how to work hard. He showed me the difference between a lot of things on a farm, how to run a farm and how to interact with a white man.

Do I have brothers and sisters? What do I think about them?

I have five brothers and two sisters. I like them. I like that my family is big, it would be lonely if I was like Chester with no brothers or sisters.

Who are my friends? Who are my enemies? How can I tell if someone is a friend or an enemy?

My friends are my brothers John and Drew. I also have another friend named Walter Higgins. He's in the same grade as me and wants to fly planes too. I don't think I have any enemies, I haven't done anything to make anyone mad. I know my brother has an enemy but I mostly have friends. Friends like to hang out and have fun together and don't get mad for no reason.

What ideas do I like? What ideas do I dislike?

I like that people grow up and make their own decisions. I like that I can decide to be whatever I want to be and do whatever I want to do. I don't like that it will take me a long time before I'm a grownup. That means that I have to do chores in the meantime. I don't like the idea of doing chores.

What hobbies or interests do I have?

I like to build things. I have wood pieces that I made into a city. I also like to read. My teacher has a lot of books that we get to check out each week. She usually lets me take out one more than the other students.

How does the locale of the play make me feel?

I don't feel anything special about Cuthbert Georgia. It's just a place, like other places.

Psychological Qualities

What choices do I make?

I choose to ask my daddy to build that Flyin' Ginny. I did not choose to get stuck on a nail and fall off.

What are my driving ambitions, my goals?

I want to go to college and get a very important degree. One day I will be in charge of other people and wear a business suit or a uniform. I would like to be a professor at a university or be in the Army.

Do I have instincts?

Yes. You have to have instincts where I live. For a small town, things can change quickly here. You have to be ready to think quickly.

Do I do things impulsively?

Yes. I do things impulsively when I'm with my brother Drew than when I'm by myself. Like that time when we threw rocks at the cars passing by under the bridge.

What do I worry about?

Sometimes I worry if I will have enough money to pay for college.

What do I like about myself? Dislike about myself?

I like that I am smart. I like that I read more books than everyone in my class and that I'm not a nerd. I don't like that I have freckles. I haven't seen a lot of black people with freckles.

What do I need?

I need a scholarship to college.

Do other people like me? Why?

Yes. I get along with everyone. Sometimes I'm good at making people laugh.

Moral Qualities

Are the choices I will make based on expediency or upon some ethical standard?

I think people should think about what they do before they do it. I think my mama taught me how to make good choices in life even though I don't always do them.

Will the pursuit of my needs lead to a moral choice?

Yes. I plan on being an upstanding citizen of my country.

What is my attitude toward the choice I make?

It makes me proud to contribute to my country and help save other people's lives. I want to be someone remembered for how I helped other people.

How do I express this attitude vocally and physically?

I always have an upbeat attitude. I think I'm a happy person and like to take long strides when I'm feeling good. I go up on the ends of my words sometimes, almost like I'm asking a question.

Play Qualities

Why am I included in the play? How do I contribute to the overall idea the playwright wishes to express?

In this play I represent hope and dreams. I am always looking toward the future and have very forward thinking. My purpose is to show that I am a product of my community which is layered with morals, and a drive for better things in life.

John

Physical Qualities

Who am I?

John Weaver

Who am I named after? Do I like my name?

I'm named after my daddy Johnny, who is named after John the Baptist in the bible.

Yes. It's a holy name and so is my middle name Jacob.

What is my sex? What do I think of my sex?

I am a male. I am strong and proud. Boys have a lot of responsibility and I have the most because I'm the oldest.

How old am I? What do I think of my age?

I am 13 years old. I'll be a teenager soon and after that a grown man. I think I'll be old enough to marry. My mama got married when she was 14, but I have no plans to do that.

How does my posture express my age, health, inner feelings?

People always think I'm the youngest because I'm shorter than my two brothers. Sometimes I slouch which doesn't make me look any taller.

What is the pitch, volume, tempo, resonance or quality of my voice? What do I think of it?

I have a low-pitched voice. I speak at a rate slower than most because I like to enunciate my words. My teacher told me once that knowledge is in the words you learn and how you say them. I can sing really well, and I'm working on using my low register. I want to sing deep-voiced Nat King Cole.

Is my articulation careless or precise? Is my articulation standard or colloquial? Do I have a dialect or an accent?

I speak pretty precisely. I sound colloquial because I use phrases that my parents say, which sound southern. I know how to sound like I'm from southern Georgia or from New York. I listened to a recording once that taught me how to sound like people from different places.

Social Qualities

What do I do when I wake up each morning?

Since I'm the oldest, I have to make sure my brothers are awake on time. Usually I'm the one to start churning the butter. I hate churning it, because it takes the milk so long to turn into heavy cream. That sticks seems like lead after dunking it in the barrel a few times. After churning the

butter, I skim the heavy the cream off the top for my mama to make biscuits for breakfast.

Sunday mornings we always had a lot of food, anything you want to eat.

What is my relationship to my environment? Do I like it?

I know my environment very well. I know all the nooks and crannies where I live. I know the back woods better than anyone else around here. I know how to take shortcuts from school to avoid whippings when my brothers and I are late or when we were playing hooky. We have lots of trees and lots of small animals. My daddy taught me how to hunt. Sometimes I go with him to hunt squirrels. My mama cooks the squirrels for dinner.

What is my educational background? How much discipline was I subjected to? How intelligent am I?

I am in the eighth grade. My brothers and I were so rotten, so the switch for us was like a strong gust of wind; you never knew when it would hit you and it was mighty and swift.

I am very bright and one day hope to be a musician and travel the world like Louis Armstrong blowing on my horn.

What was my childhood like? What are my strongest memories?

My childhood was always fun. My brothers and I are considered holy terrors. We tend to get into a lot of trouble doing things that we think are just plain fun. My strongest memories are family meals, especially when my daddy's cousin would say the prayer: "Lord make us truly able, to eat all the food on this table. I know we can do it, if we just stick to it."

How much money do I have? How much do I want?

I have 75 cents from what I saved picking cotton.

What is my nationality? What do I think of it?

I am an American. I don't think much about it, other than when I hear bad things happen in other places.

What is my occupation? Do I like it? What other jobs have I had? When and why did I choose this one?

I have no occupation, but I guess my chores and picking cotton are my job. I have also learned how to hunt and know how to get a good shot on an opossum if I hold the gun steady.

What are my political attitudes?

My parents are Democrats.

Am I religious?

I love going to church. We get to dress up and when we get home, we have a huge meal! Everything I can think of that's good to eat is on that table.

Do I like members of the opposite sex? What do I like about them?

Yes. Girls. I like that I have a girlfriend.

Who were my parents? What do I like and/or dislike about them?

My parents are Johnny and Lois Weaver. I like mostly everything about them.

Do I like my family? What do I like or dislike?

I love my family. Family is very important to me. I like that we have reunions because I miss seeing my uncles. They are actually like cousins to me cause we are close to the same age. The moved to Florida and we don't get to see them as often.

How has my mother influenced me? How has my father influenced me?

My mother is kind and caring. She is very soft spoken and taught me not to speak too loud all the time. My mother and my father say that it's important for me to pursue my dreams of being a musician.

Do I have brothers and sisters? What do I think about them?

I have five brothers and two sisters. I love family.

Who are my friends? Who are my enemies? How can I tell if someone is a friend or an enemy?

My friends are my brothers John and Drew. I don't have any enemies because I'm a very nice person. If you have to fuss and fight with someone all the time, they are not your friend, they are your enemy.

What ideas do I like? What ideas do I dislike?

I like that there is a lot of change going on in this world. I like to listen to the news and find out what is happening all over. I don't like to hear about wars or killing or dying.

What hobbies or interests do I have?

I like learning how to play the piano and I want to play the trumpet really well. I plan on writing

my own music one day and recording it. I hope it can play on the radio so my friends and family will hear how talented I am.

How does the locale of the play make me feel?

I feel warm and secure.

Psychological Qualities

What choices do I make?

I choose to misbehave sometimes even though I know it's not right, but I get bored with being good all the time.

What are my driving ambitions, my goals?

I'm going to go to college and major in music and be a famous musician. I'd like to move to California and study music there.

Do I have instincts?

Yes. My instincts tell me that this world is large and wide and that I have to experience as much of it as possible.

Do I do things impulsively?

We do a lot of things impulsively here. My mama says that's what keeps us in trouble.

What do I worry about?

I try not to worry. Worrying never did anybody, any good.

What do I like about myself? Dislike about myself?

I like that I am unique. There is no one else like me. I don't even think the girls that I know are as musically inclined as I am.

What do I need?

I need to learn how to read music.

Do other people like me? Why?

Yes. I'm pretty easy going.

Moral Qualities

Are the choices I will make based on expediency or upon some ethical standard?

I like to get things done, so usually they are based on expediency. My thoughts are most of the time spur of the moment.

Will the pursuit of my needs lead to a moral choice?

I hope so. There isn't much bad about learning to play music, unless I'm in a bad club playing music.

What is my attitude toward the choice I make?

I believe that I can make smart choices. I know that my connection to home and family will always guide me to stay on a good path.

How do I express this attitude vocally and physically?

I like to sing, so when I am happy, you will hear me singing or clapping my hands to a beat in my head.

Play Qualities

Why am I included in the play? How do I contribute to the overall idea the playwright wishes to express?

In this play I represent ambition. I have a driving force that will hopefully propel me to keep my eye on the prize. I am one part of the cohesive fabric that creates a family, how it is built and how it functions.

Vocal

Drew

Rate of Speech

Drew speaks using a normal rate of speech. He does not talk too fast or too slow. He is a spontaneous thinker and sometimes has bursts of words that drive his conversation. Drew is the narrator for each segment of the play and maintains a casual, conversational pace. The rate of speech is comparable to that of a metronome and keeps time with the rhythm of the play. Drew's rate increases when he is excited about something or has an accident:

"...oh, oh, ow"

It slows when he resumes normal conversation:

"This is not turning out to be a good day."

Pause

Drew uses several pauses throughout the play to convey that he is heavy in thought or that he is dissatisfied. The pauses allow air between words and help to stretch out phrasing when necessary.

"I wanted to...."

Drew uses pause to make a specific point or draw attention to a word or event.

Inflection

Drew has a lot of musicality to his voice. He is animated in nature and his voice reflects the excitement in his life. There is a lot of rise and fall to Drew's voice much like an ocean tide that washes in and out of shore.

Drew tends to give a natural rise on words that have more importance.

Pitch

Drew generally speaks using the mid-note in his voice. Since he is a boy he automatically has a higher pitched voice because he has not gone through puberty. His voice is very resonant with great tonal quality which might reflect his ability to sing well.

"Flyin' Ginny makes you whirl...

It might even make you hurl...

If you spin around too fast...

You might fall and brake your...."

Volume

Drew's volume is average. His volume tends to lower when he is angered or sad. His vocal volume is between that of his two brothers. The volume of Drew's voice is very apparent in the opening of each episode in which he narrates.

George

Rate of speech

George tends to speak quickly. His word endings are sometimes clipped because he speaks fast. When George is excited his rate of speech increases. His rate of speech may be an example of the urgency he has in life. He is excited about life and wants to seize the day. He is smart and has big thoughts and dreams. He is not complacent which is evident in how quickly words roll off his tongue. His speech mostly gushes out and trails off toward the end. He thinks quickly and therefore speaks quickly.

Pause

George does not give much pause to specific words or in phrasing sentences. George speaks as if his mind never takes a break from thinking. He is always processing and therefore does not pause to elongate words or give emphasis.

Inflection

George speaks with a slight lilt in his voice. He usually has an upward swing towards the end of his sentences which create a type of rhythm to his sentences. George's sentences have a singsong effect that tends to rise at the end of the sentence and have less inflection at the beginning of the sentence.

Pitch

George speaks with a high pitched sound. His voice rests in the high note portion of his voice. George's high pitch might also make him sound nasally or that he has a pinched nasal quality.

Volume

George generally speaks using an average volume. He does not speak too loud or too soft. He rarely raises his voice, even when he is angered or upset. While George does have a constant volume, this does not mean that he speaks in monotone or that the volume of his voice never has rise and fall.

John

Rate of speech

John speaks slowly. He tends to slow his pace as he nears the end of a sentence. He takes time to enunciate his words. John tends to over articulate his words, which may be a result of his need to show that he is the eldest and that he is smarter than his brothers and sisters.

Pause

John takes many liberties with phrasing and uses pause a great deal. As a speaker, John finds interesting words in books and uses them in his own conversations. John is very witty and likes to make jokes. He uses pause to create emphasis on punch lines and finesse words that he finds comical in a sentence. John uses the air between sentences to recharge for the next sentence. There is sometimes an awkward pause between sentences.

Inflection

John speaks with a downward inflection. He tends to drive his conversation to the end of the sentence, plummeting the voice downward at the period.

Pitch

John speaks in the lower register of his voice. Like Drew, John likes to sing and is very aware of his good singing voice. His vocal register might equate to a baritone and eventually a bass as he grows older. John's voice has a very resonant quality and can have a booming effect if he chooses to lower his pitch for vocal effect. John's pitch tends to lower when he is angry or upset. His pitch rises when he is sad or lonely.

Volume

John speaks using an average volume. He does not speak too loud or too soft. It is very easy to hear John and not easy to mistake what he is saying.

John's volume lowers if he is sad, but rises when he is angry.

Pace of Dialogue

The overall pace of the dialogue is quick. While the characters have individual rates of speaking, the energy of the line is andante or a walking pace. The vocal work should be witty and spontaneous without reservation. The pace remains constant for normal conversations and gains momentum when there are short lines, shared lines and heightened situations which then moves the piece to an allegro tempo. In normal conversation, mono-syllabic words mark a staccato, or short but stressed feel. In heightened conversation mono-syllabic words take on a marcato or a short, but more forcefully accented feel. The dialogue uses ellipses to indicate pause or where sentences trail off and are picked up by the next speaker. Overlapping in conversation attributes to the upbeat pace and the ebb and flow of the piece.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: REHEARSAL JOURNAL

Rehearsal One

We first met to read the script and discuss my vision for the characters. I was still developing how I wanted each of the characters to speak but knew about what pitch I wanted them to speak in and that I wanted Drew's character to sound as a narrator and paint the picture of the scene at the top of each episode. I listened as Harrison, Terrance Jackson and David Tate read a small portion of each character so I could get a sense of how they would sound in that role. I gave them all some history on how the script was developed and discussed a few anecdotal details before delving into the script. We read it through together and I decided that Harrison would read the part of George, Terrance read for John and David read for Drew. I read the part for Lois. Since there are more characters than just John, George and Drew, we divided up the ancillary roles and Harrison, Terrance and David read for an additional role. I found that during this read, the voices were sometimes similar to that of their original character and sometimes reverted to sounding like John, George or Drew.

Discoveries

With the help of the cast, I discovered that I wanted Drew to sound older while he was reading the narration and younger during the actual scene so that the piece would be more reflective in nature. I decided that David would read for Drew because he had an older sounding voice for a mature man and could alter it to sound a bit younger for the dialogue.

Challenges

I would like to see each of the actors play with the range of their voices so that they have a more youthful sound. It might help for them to play around and have a good time laughing to release some inhibitions and anxiety that come with reading a script aloud for the first time.

Successes: I enjoyed everyone's enthusiasm. They all commented on how they liked reading the script and how much fun and easy to read the text was.

Rehearsal Two

At the second rehearsal I wanted to record the actors reading the script. I let them make mistakes as we were taping because I was more focused on how their voices sounded individually and cooperatively than with the technical execution of the lines. Harrison, Terrance, David and I read through the script again, with me reading the part for Lois. Harrison read for cousin the white police officer, Terrance read for Ma Mae and Johnny, David read for Drew old and young and for cousin's wife.

In this rehearsal I tried the similar approach of white males voicing the parts for black women and had Terrance read the part of Ma Mae. We laughed at Terrance's version of a woman. It sounded similar to how men disguising their voice as women. Terrance placed his pitch into his upper register, then added age to the character's vocal quality and accompanied it with a southern twang. The result was a cross between Ricky Smiley, "Madea" and Paula Dean.

The actors were more consistent this time with maintaining one vocal style per character. Terrance's Ma Mae sometimes reverted back to John during some of his longer monologues. We reviewed a couple of the sections a few times to grasp the rhythm needed when overlapping.

Discoveries

I think we are struggling to relax the text and still maintain the integrity of the dialogue. The actors are taking more liberties with their words and trying not to over-articulate but some of it remains stiff in many instances.

Challenges

Some of the actors still struggle with relaxing their speech and I have challenged them to move away from our professional actor presentational speech.

Successes: The play comes alive when the voices are adding. The cast is gelling as a unit and cultivating their roles by giving themselves little characteristics and behaviors.

Rehearsal Three

At the final rehearsal I encouraged the cast to relax and interact as kids would. In this taping I asked them to go back and correct lines that were misread and did not convey the right meaning. After going through the play, we sat and discussed what were the challenges and successes of the process. The cast gave me their feedback for each of their characters and for the development of the script:

Terrance/*John*-I love working with a script that discusses black lives in the South. I'm used to working with black characters from up North, but I feel more relaxed when they're from the South. I'd like to find out more about how their lives were devastated by racism.

Harrison/*George*-It would be great to find out more about the relationship between John and Lois, leading up to their move to Florida. I'm interested in why they decided to go. I also want to see more of the camaraderie the brothers had while picking cotton.

David/*Drew*-I'd be interested to know more about Drew and how he is away from his brothers.

Maybe he could have a love interest.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: TO BE CONCLUDED

The initial steps of this thesis were inspired by the words of Samuel Beckett, which sent me on a pursuit to find the visceral connection between audiences and radio plays. The writing, the notations for sound effect and the imagery in the text of my first radio play, subsequently sparked a list of questions that called for answers, and answers that led to more questions. I recall the tingling sensation I had when I read *All That Fall* for the first time, and now notice the sensation again as I think about how my understanding of Theatre of the Mind and the "ear" has influenced me on this quest.

As a writer, I feel responsible for invoking an emotional connection with audiences by using words. The words engage one sense, namely hearing, and stimulate "mental vision", a sort of "other" sense, and so on. Directorially, I discovered that there are many challenges in the quest to be authentic. I realize that sometimes authenticity depends on perception. Depending on one's point of reference, the mind can fashion what is *not* reality into something that *is*.

In the instance of white actors using their voices to "sound black", the listener decided what was real. Whether the listener was black or white, as long as the voices they heard were established as black men and women, the people *were* black men and women. The problem occurred when racial lines were crossed and overstepped racial rules and cultural guidelines. White listeners who had no interactions with black people and no reference by which to compare the sound of a black person's voice created stereotypical images of black people in their minds.

Blacks who also assumed that black actors were speaking, but in an exaggerated dialect, may have visualized the worst qualities in the characters. While all of this may have seemed harmless, it placed black America as the brunt of white America's jokes.

When I cast male black actors to play the parts of white men, black men and black women, my goal was for them to sound as authentic as possible. The same gender/same race actors, sounded as they should have-genuine; however my use of reverse gender and reverse race roles did not translate as genuine. My research led me to understand the radio industry's practice of race and gender reversal. I believe it was not just to avoid giving black actors roles, but possibly an exploration of the "other", creating "fresh" sitcoms that were on the cutting edge of radio shows.

Research for the second part of this thesis was initiated by my desire to correct and implement the casting of ethnically appropriate roles in radio plays. The quest resulted in the script, *John, George and Drew Baby*, as well as a yearning to learn more about the vocal differences between ethnically diverse people. The "theatre of the mind" concept I used in the first half of this thesis to explain the emotional bond between the mind and the material it hears also applied to how my characters were defined. In fact, that's how they were created. While the characters were based on real people, it was my connection with mental imagery that birthed their characteristics.

If I further this research, I will initiate a developmental study on Black English and its place in the current American society. The existence of what is called African American Vernacular, Black English Vernacular and Black English is an ongoing and debatable study that has yet to be fully understood. I have only skimmed the surface of this research, and I am intrigued by the evidence of a "language" that is unique to black people who have little or no tradition to claim.

I also hope to be a catalyst for the rebirth of the radio play. I recognize that some might call it an outdated format, but I would love for serials and soaps to be a part of the broadcasting world again – one that challenges us to walk away from some contemporary contrivances like televisions and cell phones that overload our senses.

I was humbled by this process that at times was conclusive and at other times, inconclusive. The voice, the mind, the ear and sound have all overlapped in this thesis, and created a dazzling process for me to decipher. My hope is that this new "sense" will become more finite, as I embark on a journey to discern a visual sound.

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