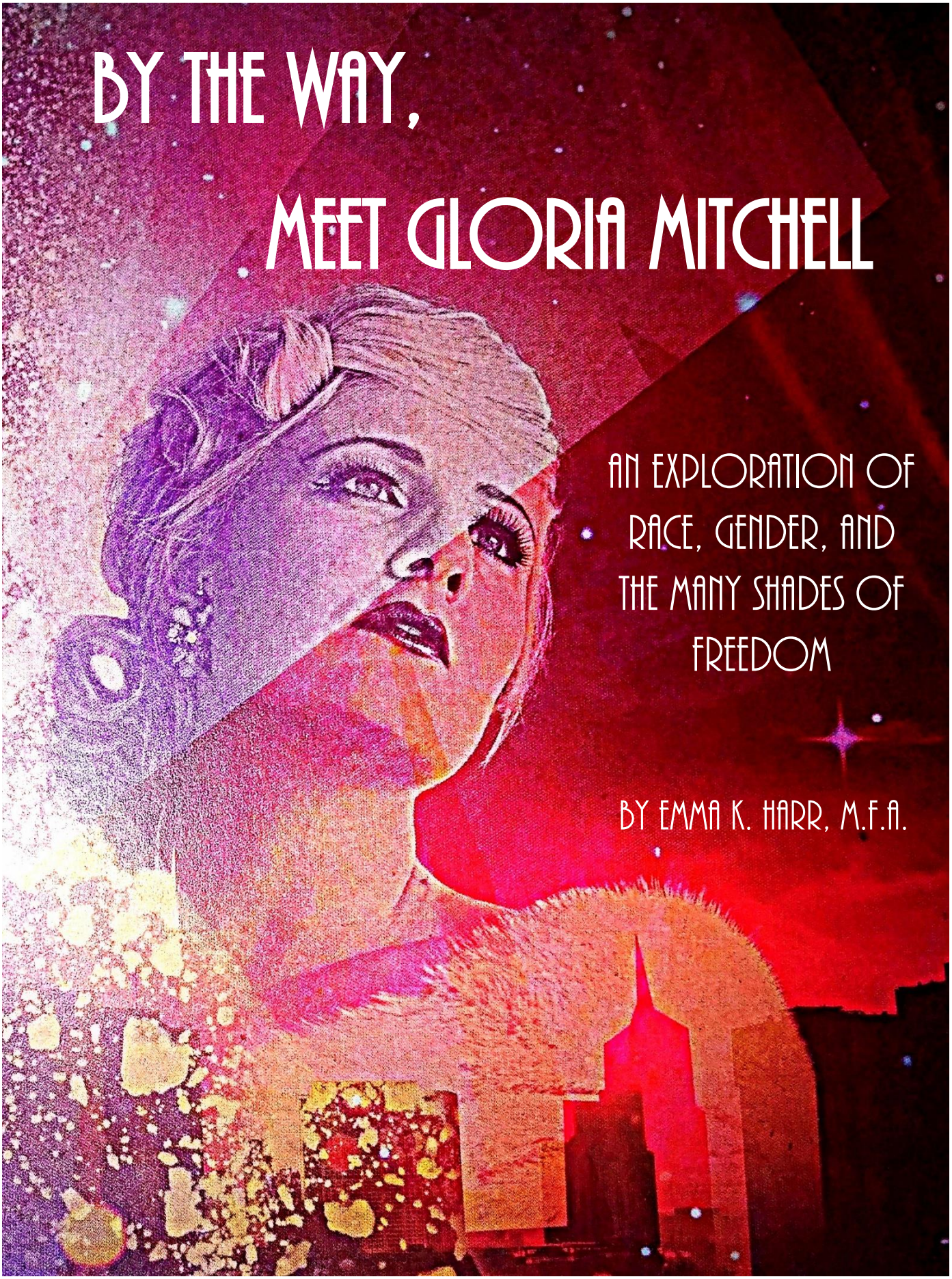

BY THE WAY,
MEET GLORIA MITCHELL
AN EXPLORATION OF RACE, GENDER, AND THE MANY SHADES OF FREEDOM
BY EMMA K. HARR, M.F.A.

BY THE WAY,

MEET GLORIA MITCHELL:

AN EXPLORATION OF RACE, GENDER, AND THE MANY SHADES OF FREEDOM

AN ACTOR'S CREATIVE PROJECT

BY EMMA K. HARR

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN THEATRE PERFORMANCE

_____ SEAN BOYD – COMMITTEE CHAIR

_____ ROBIN ARONSON

_____ MONICA HAYES

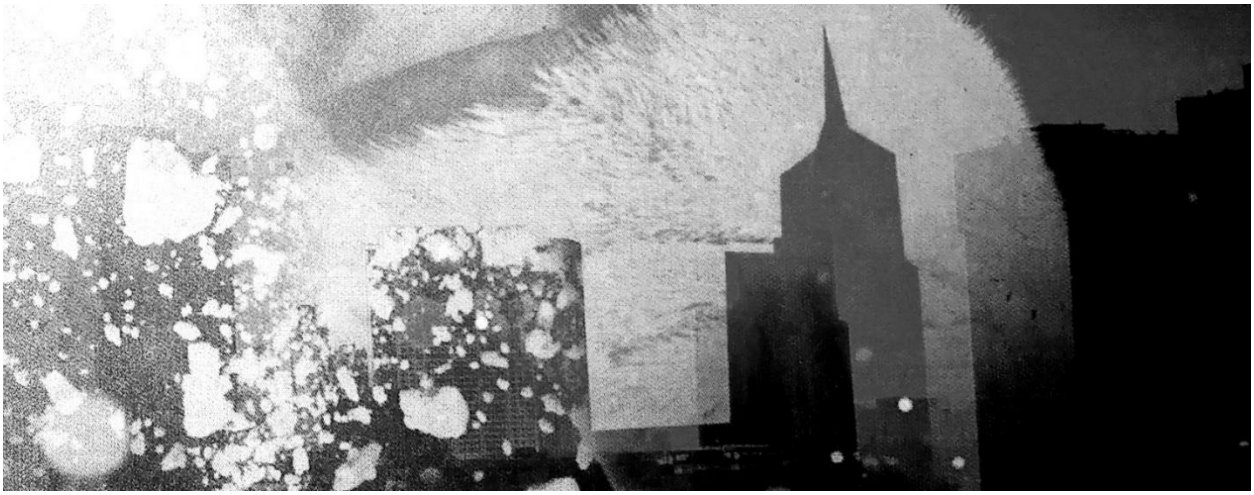
The following pages document the creative process in its entirety of an actor before, throughout, and after the full realization of a mainstage production in the University of Southern Mississippi's Department of Theatre.

With the support and guidance of my graduate committee, I was given the task of taking on the life of Gloria Mitchell, one of the leading characters in Lynn Nottage's brilliant play, *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark*.

This thesis work, also known as a Creative Project, chronicles the in-depth research, script analysis, rehearsal, and performance process of this production. The information herein was gathered and accumulated over the course of a calendar year, and brought to fruition in my third and final year of graduate study at USM.

This document was signed and approved by my graduate committee in May of 2015.

Cover image from theatrical production poster provided by the USM Department of Theatre.



PRELUDE: HAIKU

THIS IS MY BODY

DISTORTED AND RECOLORED

BIRTHING THE NATION

Janelle Hobson, *Body as Evidence: Mediating Race, Globalizing Gende*

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AN INTRODUCTION

It has always been clear to me that any pursuit of mine, artistic or theatrical in nature, must be attended to with passion and ferocity of spirit. This personal mission statement of sorts has served me well thus far in life, in terms of what I have been able to create and discover. Working on and pouring life into something that, in some special way, *matters* just a little bit more than anything else—that's when true progress is made. It transcends the banal and mundane, and becomes ablaze with color and depth and ubiquity. Would that everything I touched burn with such fervor as I hope this document reveals to you.

The study and creation of Gloria Mitchell, as imagined by the ever illustrious Lynn Nottage, is a feat that surpasses the initial superficial impression of sleek satin gowns and carefully coifed curls; here is a character with whom I have wrestled and loved into being, whose depth goes far beyond the bottom of the page, and whose history is vitally important to not only myself as the actor, but to the audiences I share her with. Lynn Nottage, arguably one of the most important artists currently writing for the stage, has made something beautiful and culturally crucial through the characters and story of *"By The Way, Meet Vera Stark."* By taking on the task of giving breath and fire to Gloria Mitchell for my Creative Project, I have been submerged in a world of magic, fame, and lost glory. I hereby invite you, the reader, to travel with me through time as I examine the world of *Vera Stark*: beginning in glitzy 1930s Hollywood, up through funky 1970s talk shows, into the sober circles of scholastic criticism of the early 2000s. My research delves into subjects with long and storied pasts, and rightly so: I

explore and discuss mediations of race and exploitations of gender, examining how these issues evolve along the timeline of our play, and what this means for current audiences being exposed to this information now.

The work I am doing and have done in order to bring myself up to the high level of excellence of this piece of art has shaken me psychologically and spiritually. My activist's heart is passionate about social change, and has humbly gained so much from the knowledge *Vera* has required me to amass. I gladly and enthusiastically share with you my findings on the following pages, regarding the long history of women being used as media fodder, particularly women of color, and the exploitations of the female form in all its diverse iterations, a practice that is still feverishly engaged the modern world over. What follows in the pages beyond is an impassioned and care-filled discussion of the historical contexts of race and gender which make up the identity of Gloria Mitchell and greater microcosm of *Vera Stark* as a whole. These historical contexts grow quite large and vast, as they come with centuries' worth of data, so I have done my best to collate this research into a comprehensive and meaningful dialogue for you, the reader, to engage in.

I invite you now to be transported through space and time to a place where stars are made, dreams are fabricated, and gin runs thicker than blood. Oh, and by the way—meet Gloria Mitchell.

A WORD ON LANGUAGE / AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF PRIVILEGE

One of the incredible facets of art is that there are an infinite number of ways to create, share, and discuss it. Because of how plugged in the modern age is, the internet and social media make this process of creation, sharing, and discussion even easier, and puts it on an even wider stage. The language that we use in these processes is vitally important to the product itself and the community that supports it. Words, whether spoken, signed, or implied through symbols, are magnificently powerful: as I explore my research and share with you the images and passages that I have collected along the way, I aim to speak as clearly and objectively as possible. This Creative Project is not just about following an actor's journey through the rehearsal process of a show—it is also about the content of preparation. Much of what I am living and breathing in this voyage is the deconstruction of social and historical constructs of race and gender, two topics that I care a great deal about, and therefore seek to portray accurately and fairly with depth and nuance. I understand that my language choices, while they might make perfect sense to me, may not hold the same meaning for someone else. I have worked hard to ensure that my language captured here is inclusive and intersectional. The vocabulary of this document was chosen very carefully, so that it hopefully honors this incredible play and the art it carries, while also *adding to* rather than *detracting from* the greater conversation of racial and gender-based cultural systems in our society.

I would like to take this moment to acknowledge my unearned privilege. At the time of writing this, I am aware that I am a young woman in her twenties, bred from a middle-class American family, who has always had access to food, shelter, and education, whose skin is white, whose hair is blonde, and whose lineage comprises mostly Eastern European ancestry. I do not carry immunity in this space. Ally-ship and recognizing privilege is a process where continuous, consistent work is required. I am not perfect, and my understanding of the full scope of the benefits my whiteness affords me is likely incomplete. Much of the research for this project put me in intimate proximity with cultural injustices I have never, and will never, experience in my own life. It is with awareness of who and what I am that I respectfully and earnestly share here the stories of the women of color who have historically had their agency and privilege stripped away. I do not hold the authority on any of the topics I discuss here regarding racial passing and the heinous perpetuations of racially motivated prejudice and violence that have existed for so much of human history. I have, however, made space here for the voices of the writers on these subjects who have much more declarative agency in this conversation than I. I found a truly brilliant collection of authors in my source material, who illuminate these topics with resplendent poignancy. I engaged with these texts with empathy and compassion, and shaped my character research into something hopefully resembling intelligent discourse.

I have also undertaken the study of the lexicon of racial identifiers—"white/black" versus "Caucasian/African-American," and so forth. Because language is so powerful, it is vital that I comprehend how the usage of these terms, these labels of identity, has evolved over time. Depending on the specifics of the research I am referencing, I may use these terms

interchangeably based on what the author of my source material has utilized. As a baseline, I will most often use the following in reference to physical color: "white," "brown," and "black." Based on my reading, the concept of one's "coloring" is the most historically motivated regarding institutionalized prejudice and violence. "Blackness" and "whiteness" are both terms that carry the burden of structural oppression and cultural silencing. So much of what transpires in Nottage's brilliant play, particularly between Gloria and Vera, is directly in relation to the exact hue of their skin tones and how their society perceives its worth. How *black* or *white* they are is the sole difference between what sets them free or what keeps them bound. The sources I have consulted regarding racial passing also use these terms of color, more often than anything else, for this very same reason. Race is not biological; it is relative, it is cultural, it is constructed—and therefore it can be manipulated.

I offer this word on language with transparency and informed humility, that I may make the pilgrimage of the following pages more accessible to the reader. I am operating under no pretenses that what these next pages contain is immaculate and unblemished, but I do seek to offer the guarantee that what they *do* contain is carefully and thoughtfully penned. With this in mind, I thus invite you to grab your gin and tonic, turn the page, and travel with me into the Golden Age of Hollywood's silver screen.


RESEARCH

"I LIVE BY A **MAN'S CODE,**
DESIGNED TO FIT A
MAN'S WORLD,

YET AT THE SAME TIME
I NEVER FORGET THAT A
WOMAN'S FIRST JOB

IS TO CHOOSE THE
RIGHT SHADE OF LIPSTICK."

— CAROLE LOMBARD

"Carole Lombard." *Bio*. A&E Television Networks, 2014. Web. 22 Nov. 2014.

BODY as EVIDENCE

Prelude: Haiku

This is my body

distorted and recolored

birthing the nation

(Hobson 1)

The body is the epicenter of life. It is what breathes, it is what moves; it is the flesh carefully constructed around the skeleton that allows us the immense privilege of mobility, the housing of rational thought and motivated action. It is capable of great strength, of accomplishing incredible tasks. It is capable of attending to fine detail, of detecting the slightest and subtlest of changes in the environment around it, of picking up on cues from other bodies nearby. It is made to self-regulate—it feels pain, it seeks to stop it; it is self-healing, it is self-aware, it alerts the mind to danger and seeks safety. The body is the very foundation of feeling and expressing emotion, inextricably linked to the mind and all psychological processes. And the body, for all its practical uses throughout time, has often been the battleground for

cultural constructs and social change. It is here then, with the body itself, that we begin our conversations of agency, identity, and how history defines privilege.

In her novel *Body as Evidence: Mediating Race, Globalizing Gender*, Janell Hobson tackles the idea that skin color and biological sex have become cultural commodities, used throughout the last century, and particularly in the modern technological age, as platforms for the buying and selling of ideas.

> …while the early-twenty-first-century discourse of 'postracial' and 'postfeminist' often declares the loss of meaning attached to race and gender, I find that their definitions have become even more entrenched in the body politic. Far from reflecting a world in which race or gender no longer restricts the upward mobility of certain bodies, I argue… that the global scope of our media-reliant information culture insists on perpetuating raced and gendered meanings that support ideologies of dominance, privilege, and power. Undeniably, these meanings have attached to certain bodies to provide 'evidence' of the hypersexual or the sexually innocent, the beautiful or the ugly, the ignorant or the advanced, the illicit or the legitimate, the victimized or the liberated, the deviant or the normative (Hobson 8).

What Hobson, and indeed many other scholars, hope for is a time in which race and gender no longer hold anyone back in their respective fields; whether it be upward advancement in their careers, their ability to garner a raise for a job consistently well done, or

even in the spheres of their social lives, who their friends are, whom they choose to love. The hope is that the body only becomes a tool for unity, and no longer division. However, as Hobson states here, that is certainly not currently the case. In 2015, we are not in a postracial or postfeminist society, though some of those unaware of the global scope of the problem would still like to think so. In general, it is much safer and freer to be a woman or a young person of color now than it was a hundred years ago, but across the board, men—particularly white men—still hold the corner on social privilege and intellectual status and power. In the last century of media, how bodies were used spoke strongly to how culture thought about the importance of those bodies—marketing was geared to a particular audience by using a very specific image to advertise whatever their product. "Indeed, these older forms of media determined whose stories got told (the narratives of those in power), which bodies *produced* media (often male bodies, which still dominate fields of science and technology today), and how bodies get positioned (often women, colonized, and people of color get reduced to objects and commodities)" (Hobson 9).

In Lynn Nottage's play, *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark*, conversations about race and gender are exceedingly important, as they define the very basis of the play's story arc. Gloria Mitchell, Hollywood starlet and savvy businesswoman, knows how to play the game. She is keenly aware of how to portray the right image to the right people in order to advance her career. In order to satisfy the male movie executives who are directly responsible for hiring her, she utilizes her persona as "America's little sweetie pie" to provide for them the demure and innocent ingénue that they crave: she affects her pattern of speech, alters her physical movements, hides her exorbitant gin habit, and balances the ever-juxtaposed sense of virginal

purity with attractive sensuality to reel them in. Gloria is also firmly aware that her family lineage in 1933 is dangerous, not only to her career but to her life. She exalts her whiteness and buries her blackness. The only possible thing standing in the way of her getting away with her self-whitewashing is her relationship with Vera, and whether or not Vera is willing to keep her secret, at the inevitable expense of their friendship.

Allyson Hobbs tackles this exact conundrum in her newly published novel, *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life*. If we take Nottage's many clues laid out in the script, we cannot ignore that Gloria and Vera are meant to be cousins, and the very fact that Gloria is able to pass as fully white, while Vera is solidly entrenched in the racial identity Gloria chose to leave behind, the very proximity of these two women as "mistress and mammy," and eventual film co-stars, is sure to be rife with tension. Allyson Hobbs sets the stage for us with this historical context:

> To pass as white was to make an anxious decision to turn one's back on a black racial identity and to claim to belong to a group to which one was not legally assigned. It was risky business. In today's multiracial society, the decision to pass may seem foolish, frivolous, or disloyal; it may be reminiscent of an unexpected plot twist in a novel or a film; or it may be understood as a desperate act compelled by the racial constraints of the bygone era of segregation and racial violence. Once one circumvented the law, fooled coworkers, deceived neighbors, tricked friends, and sometimes even duped children and spouses, there were enormous costs to pay. In each historical

> period, those who passed experienced personal and familial losses differently. Their experiences open a window onto the enduring problem of race in American society and onto the intimate meanings of race and racial identity for African Americans (Hobbs 5).

This, then, begs the question: what losses did Gloria Mitchell suffer? Some today might argue that because the majority of her bloodline is traceably white, that she rightly claimed the racial identity that is most hers. But in the context of 1933, "even one drop" of black blood meant an entire life of shame—much like the parallel storyline of Marie the octoroon, the lead role in *The Belle of New Orleans* that Gloria so desperately longs to play. Perhaps because Marie's onscreen story is so like hers off-screen, Gloria seeks to use this film as the only outlet she will allow herself to face the psychological and emotional ramifications of the life she's chosen—as she certainly doesn't allow herself any other opportunity to do this, even after forty years. On Brad Donovan's talk show in 1973, we're just past the tail-end of the civil rights movement, and well into one of the biggest cultural shifts for women and feminism of the last century—surely this would be the perfect time for Gloria to make a stand, take back her identity, and reveal publicly, for the first time, her true heritage? But this is not the case, as she's given opportunity after opportunity, and multiple openings from Vera, and dismisses each of them. After a lifetime of existing with one face, it certainly cannot be easy to show the world another. But here then is another question—would Gloria have even *wanted* to reveal her past and her relationship to Vera, had she had the courage to do so?

On the one hand, it is distinctly possible that Gloria had every intention of reclaiming her past and sharing it with the world, but in this particular moment on this particular talk show, didn't find it to be the right time for her. Allyson Hobbs posits that it is "possible to pass for something without becoming what it is that you pass for… that the core issue of passing is not becoming what you pass for, but losing what you pass away from" (Hobbs 17-18). If we use this premise as an umbrella, then Gloria's hesitancy to speak up is not fueled by a lack of desire to share, but by a presence of fear for acceptance from those she left behind—specifically Vera and their combined family. Gloria's situation is unique, in that after she starting living her fully-white life, she brought Vera along with her, something the majority of those who passed would not and could not do, for fear of being found out and having their new lifestyles compromised. Would Vera have been able to accept Gloria's confession? What would Vera have been able to offer her? Forgiveness, praise, understanding, a welcoming embrace, a shared sense of "home"? Those left behind are not typically quick to forget the actions of those who chose their exile. "For many family members and friends of those who passed, racial identity came to mean much more than an individual's rejection of the race. It meant no longer belonging as a family member and no longer sharing experiences, stories, and memories of times past" (Hobbs 14-15). I would like to think that Vera would have been ready for Gloria to come out with the truth in a public forum—that it was a wish she'd had for years, for the two of them to finally be united, to finally be made equal. They'd spent so much time together, so much of their adult careers side by side, it would be the perfect cap to their joint legacy to make it known just how connected they truly were. But then again, this is perhaps wishful thinking on my part, as the white actor trying to justify Gloria's actions.

Gloria's hesitation, however, could very well be from an uncertainty over claiming something she no longer values as being "hers." "Undoubtedly, there were those who walked away from a black identity and never looked back," Hobbs explains (15). "Once they arrived safely in the white world, some may not have felt any compunction about leaving a race that had constrained them, injured them, or meant little to them at all" (Hobbs 16). This point is perhaps the murkiest of them all when it comes to Gloria and Vera, and the kinship between them: it is mentioned in the script that Gloria's father was absent, as his identity isn't "a hundred percent" known (Nottage 11), and there's absolutely zero mention of her mother—one might conclude, then, based on Gloria's references to "Granny," someone she and Vera shared as a guardian as children, that her parents were entirely out of the picture, and Gloria was solely brought up by the remainder of Vera's line, the Stark family. If this is indeed the case, it is possible to conjecture that Gloria, for all the affection she may have had for "Granny" and whomever else, never felt like she fully belonged with them. She had effectively become an orphan, a little white girl raised by a black family, who grew up to eventually leave them and fall into her white identity with abandon. She kept Vera by her side, so there is kinship there, certainly, but maybe she felt no real ties to the rest of them—and thereby did not interpret her leaving and subsequent passing as an exile or as any great loss: to Gloria, it was finally becoming who she was supposed to be all along. Hobbs goes so far as to defend the psychology of the passer, citing that:

> From their point of view, race was neither strictly a social construction nor a biological fact. The line between black and white was by no means imaginary;

> crossing it had profound, life-changing consequences. Race was quite real to those who lived with it, not because of skin color or essentialist notions about biology, but because it was social and experiential, because it involved one's closest relationships and one's most intimate communities (Hobbs 17).

So on which side does Gloria align? Which identity does she want to take with her to the grave, to be remembered as by her legions of adoring fans? Prior to rehearsals, as the actor in this process I was not sure which way she (I) would go. However, through the process of production this question became even more difficult to define. Gloria's identity is, as shall be explained in more depth as we move forward, wholly complex—she cannot have one without the other. She longs to be free to live the truth of her heritage and lineage, but is crippled by the comforts of her life as America's Little Sweetie Pie. She cannot publicly claim them both; and so will finish out her days always in conflict with herself. The longer you leave on a mask, the harder it is to remove.

- WHITE - IS THE COLOR OF FREEDOM

—It is also, allegorically, the color of innocence, purity, virginity, hope, godliness, holiness, spirituality, cleanliness, sterility, blankness, newness, indicative of cool temperatures rather than warm—and these are just the ones I can recite from memory. Color symbolism has been used in art and literature for centuries upon centuries, and through the last hundred years of media advancement through technology, this symbolic color coding has only become more foundational to the way we communicate and interpret meaning. You don't need to search for the meaning of a color symbol in an encyclopedia—the color itself will evoke a particular psycho-intellectual response within you, as the consumer, that will speak for itself. Based on the terms above, it is no accident then that "white," truthfully the absence of all color light wavelengths, has been linked historically with elevating the status of those with a skin shade to match. Lighter skin was perceived to mean a fairer spirit, a purer heart; darker skin meant danger, something exotic, something unknown and potentially unclean. These are not, of course, fair or correct assessments regarding skin color as it relates to character and human worth whatsoever—but it does, however, set the stage for a conversation regarding where these social constructs of melanin-based prejudice come from.

> To pass as white meant to lose a sense of embeddedness in a community or a collectivity. Passing reveals that the essence of identity is not found in an

> individual's qualities, but rather in the ways that one recognizes oneself and is recognized as kindred. These forms of recognition may begin with superficial markers such as skin color, speech, and dress, but these are only indicators of associative relations, ways of being in the world, and an imagined sharing of a common origin and iconic experiences.
>
> Passing works as a prism: it refracts different aspects of what we commonly think of as racial identity and reveals what is left once the veil of an ascribed status is stripped away. Behind that veil what we know as 'race' is simply the lived experience of a people, expressed perhaps as an ache for family and interconnections or sometimes as a longing for music, humor, or food. Thus passing unmasks race as conventionally understood, revealing the intimate and personal meanings of a putative racial identity (Hobbs 14).

Let's begin by looking at the history of whiteness in America. To understand how Gloria and Vera would have been affected in 1933, we have to shift our gaze into the past a hundred years. For a long time before the abolition of slavery, there existed two main categories of people: owned people and owners of people, slaves and slave masters. The issue did not have so much to do with race as it did with the valuation of property and personal rights based on their status of autonomy. The concept of passing, as a means of escape from being owned to impersonating someone who owned, has existed alongside this dichotomy for centuries. In the early nineteenth century, specifically in the United States, passing was a way for those clever enough to learn to navigate how to do it to find personal freedom from their owners. "Before

'passing as white' became meaningful, racially ambiguous men and women frequently and successfully 'passed as free'" (Hobbs 34). The concern was not to *physically appear* white in terms of hue—it was to appear "white" in terms of demeanor, dress, and general decorum. The idea of "acting the part" in order to fool others was in great usage here, and worked for many men and women during this time.

> The wide range of evidence taken into account in nineteenth-century trials of racial determination reveals that at times, passing had very little to do with skin color. This is not to suggest that passing as white is not contingent on a racially ambiguous or white appearance, but rather that a racially ambiguous or white appearance is contingent on a brew of actions, behaviors, and mannerisms. Looking white is, in many ways, contingent on *doing* white. Racially ambiguous slaves drew on highly sophisticated understandings of racial, gender, and social norms to enact whiteness; by doing so, they successfully passed to freedom (Hobbs 45).

Hobbs provides several examples to put this idea into perspective. One such example was regarding a young man named Sam, who was a valuable slave to his owner in terms of his youth and strength and worth ethic, but he was also a danger and considered a liability because he was exceedingly intelligent, fairer-skinned than the others he worked with, and had a habit of "putting on airs" to make fun of the other white owners he came into contact with. During an outing where he was to be traded to another family by his owner, his discovered that if he

looked the part and acted well, he was not taken as a slave by the surrounding light-skinned company. He then used this stratagem of *doing white* to his advantage, and managed to escape his new assignment.

> Passing is a flexible strategy that relies heavily on the category of class. The cunning and cleverness of Sam's escape reflect the possibility—even within the constraints of a mature slave regime—of fashioning a new, free self by acting and dressing the part. Sam's disguise (and that of countless others) worked because he presented himself as 'a most polished gentleman'; the ruse would likely have failed had he dressed in overalls, been unable to read and write, and displayed coarse manners. Slaves drew on all available resources to construct the appearance of the free person that they resolved to become, and in all but very few incidents, the category of class shaped these disguises. Slaves bought, traded, and stole clothing; they feigned grief, illness, and injury; and they borrowed, reused, and forged passes and certificates of freedom. With one's liberty hanging in the balance, all sorts of disguises were imaginable (Hobbs 30).

As white plantation owners and businessmen began to catch on to the growing number of slaves who tended to "disappear," only to start new lives as their freer selves, a cultural shift began to take place as the common denominators of the "runaway slave" problem were scrutinized. If all it took was for a cunning slave to put on that he or she had status, the society around him or her would assume they had a right to their social power. Rather than leaving

this to chance, it became widely socially acknowledged that an unchanging visual marker was necessary to identify the truly free from the owned. It is through this line of thinking, in an effort to eliminate confusion and put a stop to passing, that skin color became the definitive marker for slave versus slave master.

> By the 1820s, the fluid and cosmopolitan Atlantic world began to give way to a new racial regime. As it hardened, this regime neatly aligned one's status with one's race. Correspondingly, the phenomenon of passing as free gave way to the phenomenon of passing as white and reflected the rearrangements within the slave system as well as larger changes in American society… (Hobbs 41-42).

With this shift in the definition of freedom now being entirely based on color and race, the tactics of how to achieve freedom also had to change. Those who sought autonomy and liberation were no longer able to rely on intelligence and skill alone—physical appearance was now too much of the equation. This meant that almost all racially ambiguous men and women were now faced with the new task at hand: to attain freedom, you must attain whiteness. The problem, of course, is that once you attained freedom, your whiteness had to remain an integral part of your passing—it was now clear that in leaving one racial category behind to accept another, personal and familial identity hangs in the balance.

> White skin functioned as a cloak in antebellum America. Accompanied by appropriate dress, measured cadences of speech, and proper comportment,

> racial ambiguity could mask one's slave status and provide an effectual strategy for escape. Many runaway slaves neither imagined nor desired to begin new lives as white; they simply wanted to be free. As literary critics P. Gabrielle Foreman and Cherene Sherrard-Johnson have written, fugitive slaves 'passed *through* whiteness'; and once through, they would '*reject* rather than *embrace* the power and superiority whites claimed as their singular possession.' Tactical or strategic passing—passing temporarily with a particular purpose in mind—was born at this moment out of a dogged desire for freedom. In later historical periods, this type of passing would allow racially ambiguous men and women to get jobs ('nine-to-five passing'), to travel without encumbrance, and to attend elite colleges. But in the antebellum period, passing was keyed to a larger struggle for freedom (Hobbs 29).

The very idea that these men and women would have to turn their backs on their entire heritage and history just to be free was an odious concept. They used this twisting and modification of their racial identities to their advantage in order to pass when necessary, but once safely on the other side, it was seen as callous and disloyal to remain "white." Thus begins the internal conflict in the black community with disowning those who chose to keep their new personas in favor of dismantling the old ones after their journeys to freedom were complete.

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS GOLD:

THE SILVER SIDE OF THE SCREEN

The Princess Comes Across (1936)

No other era of film developed as rapidly, exploited as grossly, and excelled as fully as that of early twentieth-century Hollywood. With the advent of the "talkies," full-length pictures

with sound, the medium seemed to expand and open across broad horizons, its creators now able to explore just how far they can push their artistic limits. While the 1920s and 1930s were a volatile time economically for the nation, Hollywood's production houses were thriving. It is during this glamorous and gilded period that we see the fabrications of race and gender on the screen transform and solidify into the polarizing archetypes we are familiar with today, particularly with regard to women and people of color in general.

> When it comes to white female bodies, however, globalization efforts are far more successful. We need only look to Hollywood's cinematic history for a lesson in global circulations around raced and gendered bodies—a history founded on what film theorist Richard Dyer recognizes as an imperialist 'culture of light' that promotes white visibility through film lighting technology and through what Laura Mulvey calls the 'to-be-lookedatness' spectacle of white femininity (Dyer 1997, 103; Mulvey 1975, 11). In globalizing whiteness, Hollywood cinema reframed foreign sites through white female bodies (Hobson 14).

Gloria Mitchell herself is modeled after this exact ideal—the thin yet statuesque Hollywood blonde, starry-eyed, soft-spoken, demure but physically captivating, the very pinnacle of white femininity displayed on a pedestal of pearls and furs. It's after the turn of the century, between the two world wars, following the end of Prohibition, in the middle of the Great Depression, when the American consciousness is seeking fervently to redefine itself.

Racial passing during this time period has a lot more riding on it than even thirty years prior—we've moved on from the general issue of slavery versus freedom, but now the question has become more complex. Freedom in the 1930s is a much murkier state to attain, because the American social consciousness has now indelibly ingrained within itself a deep-seated prejudice rooted to the physiology of race. Passing isn't just about not being black anymore, but about achieving the *right kind* of whiteness, and keeping it once it's yours. It is no secret that whiteness during this decade afforded privileges nothing else could, particularly for aspiring artists and actors, especially women.

> Almost all white women—even prostitutes—were remade into 'ladies,' a class that excluded even the wealthiest and most refined black women. White ladies were to be protected—economically, physically, and sexually—at all costs, and in the Jim Crow South, daily reminders of white women's heightened status were visible on 'white ladies only' signs on public bathroom doors. The 'ladies car,' or the first-class car, on trains excluded black men and black women unless a black caregiver accompanied a white child. No white child would be made to endure the indignities and the filth of the 'smoking car,' and the second-class car, to which all blacks, white drunks, and other undesirable passengers were assigned. Legal scholar Cheryl Harris has argued that whiteness is a form of property, a privilege that unfairly allocated economic, political, social, and institutional resources along the color line (Hobbs 12).

This same preferential treatment was abundant on film sets, and in agency offices, and on the studio lots. In order to secure that leading role, in addition to being available to "casting couch" sessions with studio executives and directors, women in particular were encouraged to "white-wash" themselves as much as possible. And if you were African American or Latinx, anything but the fair-skinned genuine article, it was doubly expected before any consideration of hiring was offered. All in service of the camera, of course.

> Relating to these exotic representations, marked spectacularly on the white female body, are the more typical examples of white assimilation in which women of color are encouraged to 'whiten' or Anglicize their identities. Light-skinned black performers such as Lena Horne were encouraged to 'pass for white' or, in her specific case, as an 'exotic Latin American,' while genuine Latine American actresses such as Margarita Carmen Cansino were encouraged to change their names and public image (hence her transformation into Rita Hayworth). When Horne refused to identify as anything but African American, her film career was cut short; whereas Rita Hayworth became a movie star—a stark reminder of how race, when intersecting with gender, determines whose bodies can cross or grate against the color line and the national border (Hobson 14).

At this time in the media, "blacks represent[ed] less than [ten] percent of the actors and [were] often cast as domestic workers while their blond-haired, blue-eyed counterparts

play[ed] the leading roles" (Hobbs 22). It is no small wonder then that passing and the modification of racial identity were cornerstones for every performer seeking work in the business. Even the actors who were genuinely Caucasian in appearance and lineage were made to locate ways in which to alter themselves to become even more aligned with the prototype: superb whiteness equaled perfection, equaled the ideal, and meant more success and larger payouts than any other shade of identification. Beyond simply the premature ending to a career, being "called black was to be defamed, insulted, and slandered. No injury was incurred when one was called white" (Hobbs 13).

Now, while the 1920s and '30s were a time of rigidly prescribed on-screen archetypes, they were also a time of incredible social change behind the scenes. It took a number of years, and a lot of grunt work to make it happen, but subtle shifts in the uses of black bodies in front of the cameras slowly but steadily made it possible for African Americans to make a living off of legitimate film work. "The decade of the 1920s was the earliest period in which records were provided on African Americans working in white Hollywood" (Regester 95). In the beginning, bright-white Hollywood was staunchly competitive and fiercely exclusionary for the masses of men and women who just wanted the opportunity to work. But as many times as the studios put obstacles in front of them, they continued to return, eager to be a part of the silver machine, even if it meant swallowing a lot of pride in the process.

> However, while the number of African American actors working in white Hollywood increased, the roles assigned to them more often than not confined them to the status of extras… White Hollywood in the pre-1950 period utilized

> the screen to transfigure its construction of race, to project its own ideological complexities regarding racial otherness, and to transform an endless variety of representations deemed racially different—representations that more often than not were parodic constructions and that were manifested in the African American extras' screen representation (Regester 95).

To someone like Gloria Mitchell, her only real competition would be other similarly built light-skinned, light-haired actresses of the time. She is only ever in contest with herself, worrying over changing type categories as she ages, which is why at twenty-eight she is so concerned with scoring yet another lead ingénue role with Marie in *The Belle of New Orleans*. Vera's interest in working alongside her in the film is never actually a threat to her success. But to Vera, it means significantly more. Even though "African American extras were continually marginalized in American cinema" (Regester 95), as they were used primarily to create atmosphere rather than to play complex characters, Maximilian Von Oster's vision of slaves (albeit marginalizing) at least included something the other films of the times didn't have—significant on-screen time with spoken lines, meaning the actors playing those roles would actually get credited with those roles, and compensated accordingly, a huge step for black actors in the industry during the period.

> African Americans were certainly not cast in redeeming roles and occupied a degrading range of gradations in employment. For example, those hired to assume domestic roles were relegated to 'bit' roles, while those employed in

> individual or what was referred to as 'mammy' roles were characterized as landing 'parts.' Parts were distinguished from other roles because they allowed actors to be photographed in close-ups and remain prominently visible in the film. Part actors were usually hired on contract with individual studios and, therefore, records regarding their contracts were generally kept by the studios and not the Central Casting Bureau office. Generally, however, African American extras depended on the [CCB] office whose efforts resulted in laws to regulate earnings and to insure that some accommodations to which they were entitled were provided. For African Americans, being employed in white Hollywood meant being employed as an extra (Regester 96).

Vera understands what she's gambling for—"as long as they're casting fools," she tells Lottie (Nottage 19), asserting her knowledge that she will likely be misused, but because of the way things are, this is where she has to start, if she wants to work in this business. It takes an incredible amount of fortitude and personal courage to pursue a career in film and entertainment at any period in time, and even more so during this one. For the black men and women that waited outside in long lines to be seen for potential background roles, the reality of their situation was not invisible to them.

> The roles assumed by African American extras, arguably, were not to be envied. In comparison to its treatment of other ethnicities, Hollywood's racial othering of African Americans was pervasive and all too apparent… Most African

> Americans were denied opportunities to land major roles. At the same time, the African American body was commodified as an object of danger and desire because of its blackness… yet these actors were rendered as unimportant, expendable, and merely embellishments to the enhancement of the white stars with whom they shared the screen (Regester 96, 99).

Even though they knew they were up against great odds to really make it in the movie business, something slowly started happening for the black actors of Hollywood with the influx of artists like Maximilian Von Oster. For all his faults and prejudices—after all, he is still a man of the times, rooted in the social consciousness of the society in which he lives—Max has a new vision for the direction of cinema that involves bringing the "negroes," as he terms them in Gloria's living room, out into the open on camera. He wants to see the stories of real people, he wants to hear the "songs of the South," to capture the "true essence" of what it is to be black. Max has been enraptured, like so many others in the industry at this time, by the idea that African-American men and women are gifted with an inherent talent for deeper and more soulful speech and song, a talent that was then used to give these previously expendable performers a leg up in their visibility. "Particularly after the advent of sound, white Hollywood would capitalize on the widely held view that African Americans possessed remarkable vocal and musical talent" (Regester 98). Von Oster himself asks Vera to sing the blues for him while in Gloria's living room, effectively giving her the floor, and the impromptu audition of a lifetime.

> Arguably, African American extras had arrived in white Hollywood and were there to stay. The end of the silent era coincided with the indisputable fact that African American extras had established themselves as marketable commodities within the Hollywood ranks and they could expect continued visibility in subsequent decades (Regester 98).

While many of the types of roles available to actors of color were still the same old archetypes, sometimes relegating them to nothing more than human furniture, a palpable shift had indeed been felt within the industry. Nottage is capitalizing on this shift in the world of the play, showing us how we got from one side of the margin to the other, drawing on very real and very historically prevalent stories of the people who actually went through it. The benefit to our story is that Gloria, for all her faults and shortcomings, is an agent on the inside. Because of her relationship with Vera, we can assume she would have been encouraging and persuasive in casting decisions behind the scenes, because again, Vera posed no threat to her career—Gloria only sought to gain from the professional success of bringing talent to a director like Von Oster, and the personal success of bringing work to her friend. Vera's landing of the role of Tilly may be fictional, but it acts as a stand-in for decades of real-life stories of men and women who endured marginalized casting decisions in order to make a living and to follow their dreams of being in the entertainment industry. Tilly is modeled after the 'mammy' type, a type of nurse-nanny character who takes care of white children, who would have raised Marie as her ward and cared for her for years. A stereotype that follows Vera to her grave, Tilly is the slave girl she's bound to, "her shame and her glory" (Nottage 59). Because even though the character

type plays right into the white-washing of Hollywood, it's the role that opens doors to future liberations down the line.

> Such gains were considered advancements as African Americans penetrated white Hollywood, despite the fact that many of the roles maligned African Americans and marginalized them in cinema in much the same manner that they had been marginalized in American life. However, it is also argued that their acceptance of such roles should not imply that they were oblivious to their marginalization or distortion; in fact they were fully aware of the travesty that was being inflicted upon them, but many felt that before they could argue for improved screen roles, they first had to gain visibility (Regester 98).

Vera, like so many of the real women she was written to represent, knew what she was signing on for, and the potential pay-off it could have if the film did well. As we have seen over the trajectory of the film industry in the last hundred years, the industry changed along with the culture around it, sometimes in advance of significant social movements. That's certainly not to say there are no instances of marginalized casting in occurrence, but on the whole the industry has evolved into a machine that works much more ethically for its constituents. It is at once an art and a business—a dangerous combination, as they tend to eclipse one another. There are still films being made where casting calls ask for people of color to play maids, slaves, inmates, and the like. The difference now is that these films are telling the story of these people, rather than using them as backdrops for the pale-faced plantation owners.

The stories being told now are different, and sociologists are beginning to pose questions about whether or not we really have come as far as we think on issues of racial equality in industry and social realms. Janell Hobson wrote her entire book about the relationship of race and gender to the media and society's consumption thereof, and even she is left with a string of unanswered, but insightful, inquiries. It is a discussion that we as a culture are still having, and that I do not presume to have solutions or answers for. What I do know is that whether or not it is easy to ask, and whether or not we can find the language to discuss it, there is worth in letting your guard down to examine the issues of how culture treats humanity. If not for any other reason than to honor the people that have been lost to it continually over centuries of prejudice and injustice.

> What do millennial narratives reveal about race relations, gender dynamics, and class and status mobility? How is the body positioned to make new or recycled meanings of race and gender? Does the hyper-visibility of black bodies make legible the claims, successes, and struggles of marginal communities? Or, does it render such communities *in*visible through the promotion of certain narratives and imagery? And how do these representations shift meaning when crossing national and transnational borders (Hobson 5)?

BLONDE AMBITION:

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PASSING

> The distinctiveness of the bipolar American racial regime—the persistence of the "one-drop rule"; the lack of official categories for multiracial people; the social and economic distance between blacks and whites and the illegality of interracial marriage until the *Loving v. Virginia* case in 1967; and the history of the United States as a white majority/black minority nation until increased immigration led to massive demographic changes in the mid-twentieth century—creates conditions ripe for the singular and spectacular nature of racial passing in the United States (Hobbs 23).

Gloria Mitchell was not given an easy choice to make when she was old enough to begin to understand that the lightness of her skin in comparison to that of her family's was considered taboo and unacceptable. She was raised by her beloved Granny, in a small but colorful home in Brooklyn, where she grew up alongside her cousin, best friend, and play mate, Vera. The Starks were a theatrical bunch—on Fridays there was music-making and dancing, and Gloria and Vera quickly developed a love for performing together. The story of the two young girls growing up to become beautiful and successful stars would have had a much happier

ending—if only their skin had been the same color. The unfortunate reality is that both Gloria and Vera were subject to circumstance, and both women had to face horrible decisions in order to preserve their freedoms, their safety, and their identities.

We've looked at the history of racial pacing in America and the shift made from passing as free to passing as white. Now we turn to the lesser known evils of passing that are only just now being discussed and recorded publicly—the personal ramifications leftover. As an actor, part of my job in taking on the role of Gloria is to study the bones of the character Lynn has given me, and then flesh her out by creating history and backstory that are necessary to the performance. The script is fairly explicit in its clues as to the relationship between Gloria and Vera and where they come from—you are supposed to walk away from seeing the show believing the two were related, which completely colors (excuse the pun) the entire experience of the production. Everything else about their interaction across the arc of the play is based on that single fact—that Gloria and Vera are more connected than anyone else knows, and that is what brings them, always, back together. Included in the Character Analysis section is a family tree chart that defines the exact familial relationship Gloria has to Vera, as created by myself and director Michelle Taylor. The play itself argues for the position of Vera—the marginalization and injustices she suffered as a black woman seeking work in the film industry in the 1930s, culminating with discussions about her legacy and disappearance in the early 2000s at an academic colloquium. Her argument has been made. Let us examine then what the other side looks like from Gloria's perspective, the side that remains—from the playwright's point of view—private to the actors portraying her.

Growing up, I imagine that Gloria loved her family, and loved performing with them more than any other childhood pursuit. By the time she would have neared the age of ten, however, Gloria would have begun to notice that she was treated differently in her neighborhood by passersby, depending on who saw her and who she was with. It was uncommon for a young, blonde white girl to be seen with an all-black family in a poorer neighborhood—it was more common for a young, blonde white girl to be seen with a black caretaker on the bus or train or around the more affluent white neighborhoods, as nannies of color were still the norm. Gloria most likely endured unkind and unwelcome comments from some of the kids in her neighborhood, telling her she didn't belong with them because to them, *she* was the different one, the outsider. It is also likely that these comments found their way to Vera, and to Granny as well, and to the "whole crew," however many that encompassed. The older she got, the more Gloria realized that she was a ticking time bomb. The part of her heritage that was white didn't exist in reality—her mother had left her after discovering her father's true racial identity, and her father was out of the picture. She was an orphan taken in by relatives that socially were not encouraged to look after her. They were family, and yet, they were not alike. Gloria's whiteness and Gloria's blackness were at odds. She did not look the part convincingly enough to claim her blackness without questioning, and so was always questioning. The time would come when Gloria would have to choose between her family and herself—her own identity always the thing at stake. Around age eighteen is when Gloria decided to leave and make a new life for herself, pursuing her whiteness full-stop, in the hope that it brought her success in the performance industry. "Mitchell" is most likely a stage name—probably pulled from her mother's side, to ensure her light-skinned lineage. She had

always been close to Vera—the two had discussed leaving and running off to Hollywood to become stars multiple times. This way, if Gloria paved the way, Vera could follow after her. They could still try to make their dreams come true, together. But this kind of life-altering move does not come without a cost. For Gloria to have made such a decision, one that she never turns back from, a huge part of herself had to be sacrificed in the process.

> Some African Americans used passing as a crucial channel leading to physical and personal freedom. They declared their rights as American citizens and insisted on their humanity. What they could not fully know until they had successfully passed was that the light of freedom was often overshadowed by the darkness of loss (Hobbs 27).

In order to successfully and fully pass as "Gloria Mitchell, white Hollywood Starlet," Gloria had to leave her entire family behind, with little to no hope of ever contacting or seeing them again. Even if she had been able to anticipate the trade she was making by choosing privilege over blood, she could not have possibly prepared herself for the amount of loss and grief, the immense sense of loneliness that would inevitably find her.

> Loss is a complex human sentiment that a historian should not expect to be discussed casually or openly. It can be so transparent and palpable that it leaps off the page. But more likely, the sense of loss is voiced through hesitations, pauses, and other manifestations of the trouble that one finds when looking at

> an old photograph and trying to recall a family member's name or the location or occasion when the picture was taken. It is the struggle to find the right words or it is the absence of words entirely that conveys the depth of personal loss (Hobbs 24).

Her loss is there when she spars with Vera in the first scene—*"And besides, no one was ever really sure he was my daddy"* (Nottage 11); her loss is there when she speaks too freely in her gin, after Max and Slasvick have run out after fighting—*"How come every time I come into my living room I find someone new standing there? It's like a rent party in Harlem…"* (Nottage 37); and her loss is there when, after so many years, she still can't bring herself to speak openly about everything that is happened between them—*"Forgive me, Vera… I wish things had… well… I missed you, terribly"* (Nottage 60). On *The Brad Donovan Show*, we are lulled into thinking that maybe, just maybe, this is her moment, when Gloria will confess and reveal it all—but in the end, she can't bring herself to do it. And it's because if she did, if she actually said aloud what she'd been hiding for so many years, her concept of self would splinter and shatter and she would be drowned in questions again. Never mind what it would do to her reputation, her entire career—the very real possibility that someone could be waiting outside the studio door with a gun ready to shoot her for such an admission (the Civil Rights movement has barely had time to effect that much change)—it's the personal psychological damage that she would be facing, the overwhelming lifetime's worth of grief over the loss of her family, the what-ifs of another life.

> Passing offered countless freedoms—from the pleasures of sitting in other sections of movie theaters besides the 'buzzard roost,' to the simple dignities of trying on a hat in a store without being compelled to buy it, to the elusive opportunities to 'feel more like a man' or 'to be treated like a lady.' But passing—the anxious decision to break with a sense of communion—upset the collective, 'congregative character' of African American life; it undermined the ability for traditions, stories, jokes, and songs to be shared across generations. Even the task of completing a family history became prickly, if not impossible. To be sure, not all family relationships were congenial, but once a relative decided to pass, meaningful touchstones and common experiences were lost. The fragmentation of one's identity and ancestral memory and the scattering of family relationships represent only a handful of passing's most troubling dilemmas (Hobbs 159).

The fact that Gloria would have been able to hold on to Vera, to bring her with her, is an amazing feat. That Vera would have understood—would have been able to extend that grace, that courtesy to Gloria, and that Gloria then would do anything she could to provide for Vera, offering her a job (they still had to play by society's rules, since they couldn't be family anymore), helping her get cast, says so much about the commitment these two women have to one another. Theirs is a bond not easily broken.

> Other inconvenient—and emotionally taxing—arrangements were possible. Recognizably black relatives could choose to work as maids in the homes of family members who were passing. Those who were passing could leave white family members behind and visit black relatives clandestinely, and passable blacks could visit with family members who lived 'on the other side.' Well versed in the demands and social limitations imposed by the Jim Crow regime, some family members accepted these terms to maintain relationships with relatives who no longer identified as black… Once family members 'crossed over,' they were usually lost, essentially dead to their families. But the equation of passing to death too quickly dismisses both the ambiguity and the logic of passing, as well as the tolerance and understanding that family members extended to those who passed. Why else would a relative agree to work as a maid in a family member's home in the interest of continuing an untenable relationship in the Jim Crow era? As passing disrupted family life and made certain topics of conversation awkward if not impossible, it also called into question one's own identity and sense of personhood (Hobbs 163, 169).

Whether it was something easily admissible or not, Gloria was permanently altered by the choices that took her further away from her family and closer toward her career goals. By having Vera so close to her, Gloria flirted with the line between claiming her whiteness and flaunting her knowledge of black culture, like it was a secret she wasn't supposed to have. She is able to speak freely in front of Lottie and Leroy differently than she is able to in front of

Maximilian, Slasvick, and Anna Mae (who she presumes is genuinely foreign). Gloria even goes so far as to open flirt with Leroy, in front of both Lottie and Vera, with no thought of repercussion or consequence, should he decide to say something to his employer—though Leroy's word against Gloria's would hardly have been taken seriously, so she knew she was safe in being so brash.

> Although some buckled under the fear of being discovered, others experienced a 'strange longing' for black people and black culture, which is captured best in some of the fictional treatments of the phenomenon. Bored by her 'pale life,' Clare Kendry in Larsen's novel *Passing* is attracted to Harlem 'as if by a magnet,' as Nathan Huggins explained, because 'there is something essential to Negro life—the gaiety, the warmth that she misses in her white world.' Clare finds the appeal of Harlem irresistible, and it is 'this terrible, this wild desire' that prompts her reckless actions: she attends Negro balls, introduces black (yet passable) women to her unsuspecting white husband, and repeatedly jeopardizes her identity as a white woman (Hobbs 161).

Although Gloria never actively seeks to return home, she does seem to relish in her ability to cross the "color line" at will with comfort when she wants to, something she most likely does out of a need for camaraderie and a glimpse of home. It is not something she seeks out when she is alone or without Vera, however—Vera is her rock, her safety net, the person who keeps her grounded. Vera shows no surprise at her flirtation with Leroy, used to these

passing moments of gin-fueled wandering before Gloria passes out in her bedroom. And why should she? The relationships she has with Leroy, with Lottie, with Anna Mae, they are each authentic and full of life. She has what Gloria—who has no other friends—wants.

> In *Following the Color Line* (1908), journalist Ray Stanard Baker asked why more light-skinned blacks do not pass. He was given a variety of reasons, all of which referenced the jollity of black life. 'Why, white people don't begin to have the good times that Negroes do,' one man explained, adding, 'They're stiff and cold. They aren't sociable. They don't laugh.' These comments are not universal truisms that can be taken at face value. At the same time, the sentiments behind these responses should not be dismissed entirely. These expressions emphasize a belief in the effusiveness, effervescence, and conviviality of black life that sharply contrasts with white life as bereft of levity and laughter. The dimensions of racial identity—although sometimes imagined, amplified, and emotionally constructed—can be powerfully felt, nonetheless. These responses reveal the profound attachments that some blacks had to African American communities, notwithstanding the tendency to sometimes mischaracterize those attachments as inherent 'racial' traits. Many blacks envisioned separating from their communities as psychologically and personally devastating. In some cases, feelings of loss were intolerable, leading some passers to eventually jettison their white identities and to return 'home' to the black community (Hobbs 161-162).

Here Hobbs touches on an extremely relevant point to the issue of race and how it's used in Nottage's play. The audience is meant to love and enjoy and identify with Vera, Lottie, Leroy, and Anna Mae, all of the characters who identify as African-American and who are just trying to carve out a life for themselves the best way they know how. Max and Slasvick are thick with privilege. Gloria is draped in it herself, but exists mostly in flux—she is exalted on a pedestal of her own making, kept far from the very people she wants so desperately to be close to. The other side of the sword is that it wouldn't be as simple as just jumping down from her perch to join them—Gloria is separated because of her appearance. She is literally *too white* to be black, and is therefore not entirely accepted within either community. She vacillates in search of an identity and a purpose, using her Sweetie Pie persona to get what she wants professionally, while she spends her days alone on her balcony nursing bottles of gin privately. Gloria is, of course, not unaffected by the culture of prejudice around her. She hears the comments made to and about Vera and Lottie by Slasvick during the party and is just as stung by his comments; worse still, she has to stay even more stoic than Vera and Lottie do, as she has to pretend that they don't bother her. In between a fear of exposure and a fear of appearing too empathetic, where does that leave her?

> Another woman described her experiences with the darker side of passing: she listened to white coworkers speak about blacks with bitter contempt, and she found herself teetering on a 'state of nervous collapse,' constantly fearing that her secret would be discovered. With the ever-present fear of being exposed,

> the workplace became an anxiety-ridden site where those who were passing could never rest (Hobbs 160).

Gloria spent the next forty years of her life pouring herself into her work and relationships built out of convenience. After Vera, the only other person she ever truly loved was her third husband, Malcom Braithwaite, with whom she moved to London for twenty years before returning to reunite with Vera on *The Brad Donovan Show*. Nottage frames Gloria's arc in the show in a rather smart and beautiful way. In Act I, she's all chaos, in full denial and crisis of identity, but working to own it. In Act II, she's taken time away, she's older, wiser, more settled in herself, mature, much softer—but still unable to shed fifty years of lies and falsehoods at the drop of a hat—she had too much to lose at this point, and asks Vera, the one person who matters, for forgiveness for it. And finally, we return to the filming of *The Belle of New Orleans*—the women are bright-eyed and young, with so many dreams ahead of them, and we see Gloria for the first time wonder aloud what it would have been like had they both stayed. What we can never forget about during this entire process is that the central issue is always Gloria's relationship with Vera. Both women suffered at the hands of social circumstance. Vera's blackness is extorted and glamorized throughout her career, so much so that Vera in 1973 no longer feels like a person, but a shell that's become property of the media at large. Gloria's fame isn't like that—her whiteness was never a part of it, because it was just accepted. Is it possible, though, that they could both want what the other has, from 1933 through 1973? Vera may have been extorted, but she was herself, and never had to choose

exile over her family. Gloria got the life and the fame she wanted, by the privilege of being white, but at what personal cost?

In the end, Gloria does what all actors do: when she cannot say it herself, she has her character say it for her. If she had to choose exile, she chose an avenue that gave her a loophole with a sideways view of freedom.

Because Gloria is unable to, Marie, welcoming death, declares it instead:

"I'm free, Tilly. I'm free."

(IN)VISIBLE:

A MODERN CONTEXT

> Fact: some Whites consider themselves superior to Blacks.
>
> Another fact: some Blacks want to prove at all costs to the Whites the wealth of the black man's intellect and equal intelligence.
>
> How can we break the cycle?
>
> (Fanon xiv)

If we are to take anything away from Nottage's brilliant play, it is that these issues of race and gender are not antique ideas that belong in the past. By neatly crafting the story to last through three time periods, bringing us all the way into the twenty-first century, Nottage is giving audiences a massive hint to pay attention to what is happening around us culturally: this conversation is far from over.

In his novel *Black Skin, White Masks,* Frantz Fanon describes it in this way: "The white man is locked in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness. …As painful as it is for us to have to say this: there is but one destiny for the black man. And it is white" (Fanon xiii-xiv). Fanon was a French psychiatrist and writer who wrote this statement in 1952, as a part of his treatise examining colonialism and racism. But his observations from more than sixty years

ago, and in another country no less, still ring alarmingly true in the American modernity of the 2010's. Society today is arguably better off than it was a century ago, and yet the evolution is still not complete. While many would argue racism is not as prevalent as it used to be, the struggle for black communities to achieve the same level of status and privilege that exists within white communities is still ongoing. In some ways, *passing as white* in order to attain levels of social freedom is still highly ubiquitous.

The largest benefit we have at our disposable for social change now is the pervasiveness of technology, the ease with which the average person can connect to multitudes of audiences the world over. This access to information has allowed for a significant increase in visibility for these kinds of struggles and discussions throughout our social structure. Now, if there is an instance of prejudice, bigotry, or a riot, the rest of the world is immediately informed, allowing millions of people to respond and comment, furthering charges for change with historically unheard-of speed. While this immediacy of access is an incredible gift to our society at large, it poses a problem unto itself: with so much constant visibility, it is entirely possible and probable that many events and circumstances in need of assistance fade into the background and go entirely unseen. When the market is saturated, individual events become less important, and the numbers that pile up become obsolete in the eye of the public.

For this very reason, artists and creators, such as Lynn Nottage, take it upon themselves to devise a way for the visibility and representation to continue by making statements that demand attention. History has always been on the side of those with the most power, the ones with the loudest and clearest voices, with the resources to get their side of the story heard. With every improvement of technology and increase in easier access for the majority of the

nation and the world, these artists are finding bigger audiences for their work, and are able to actualize change more effectively through it.

After her Oscar-winning performance in the film *12 Years A Slave*, actress Lupita Nyong'o did an interview with *Glamour* magazine, as one of their featured Women of the Year for 2014. In addition to discussing the film, her training at the Yale School of Drama, and having just become the most recent one of only seven black women to have won an acting Oscar, Lupita shared personal experiences with the magazine about what it was like to grow up in Africa under the shadow of harsh beauty expectations:

> European standards of beauty are something that plague the entire world—the idea that darker skin is not beautiful, that light skin is the key to success and love. Africa is no exception. …This is the message: that dark skin is unacceptable. I definitely wasn't hearing this from my immediate family—my mother never said anything to that effect—but the voices from the television are usually much louder than the voices of your parents. …But to rely on the way you look is empty. You're a pretty face—and then what? Your value is in yourself; the other stuff will come and go. We don't get to pick the genes we want. There's room in this world for beauty to be diverse (Bennetts 238).

How wonderful it is, then, that we are now in a time when the visage of a successful African-American woman graces the covers of popular magazines, celebrated for her accomplishments, where she can speak openly about issues of beauty standards and colorism,

and use her platform as a way to encourage younger generations of women like her. Even sixty years ago, Frantz Fanon again says it perfectly: "Society, unlike biochemical processes, does not escape human influence. Man is what brings society into being. The prognosis is in the hands of those who are prepared to shake the worm-eaten foundation of the edifice" (Fanon xv). The health of our social wellbeing is entirely in the collective hands of ourselves and everyone around us. If we as a people, as a human race, wish to see the narratives of oppression and prejudice change, we have to be responsible for that shift in the cultural paradigm. Artists have always been some of the most influential players to this process, asking the questions others are afraid to, and challenging the problematic schemas of the culture. It is up to us, then, to keep the conversations, that people like Lynn Nottage encourage, alive. And we must continue to encourage our artists to keep creating, our writers to keep writing, and our youth to keep speaking. For in doing this we hope that, as Fanon suggests, we might be able to shake apart the rotted foundations of the past to make way for the rebirth of a more inclusive and compassionate society ahead.

> Writing is dangerous because we are afraid of what the writing reveals: the fears, the angers, the strengths of a woman under a triple or quadruple oppression. Yet in that very act lies our survival because a woman who writes has power. And a woman with power is feared.
>
> (Anzaldúa 170)

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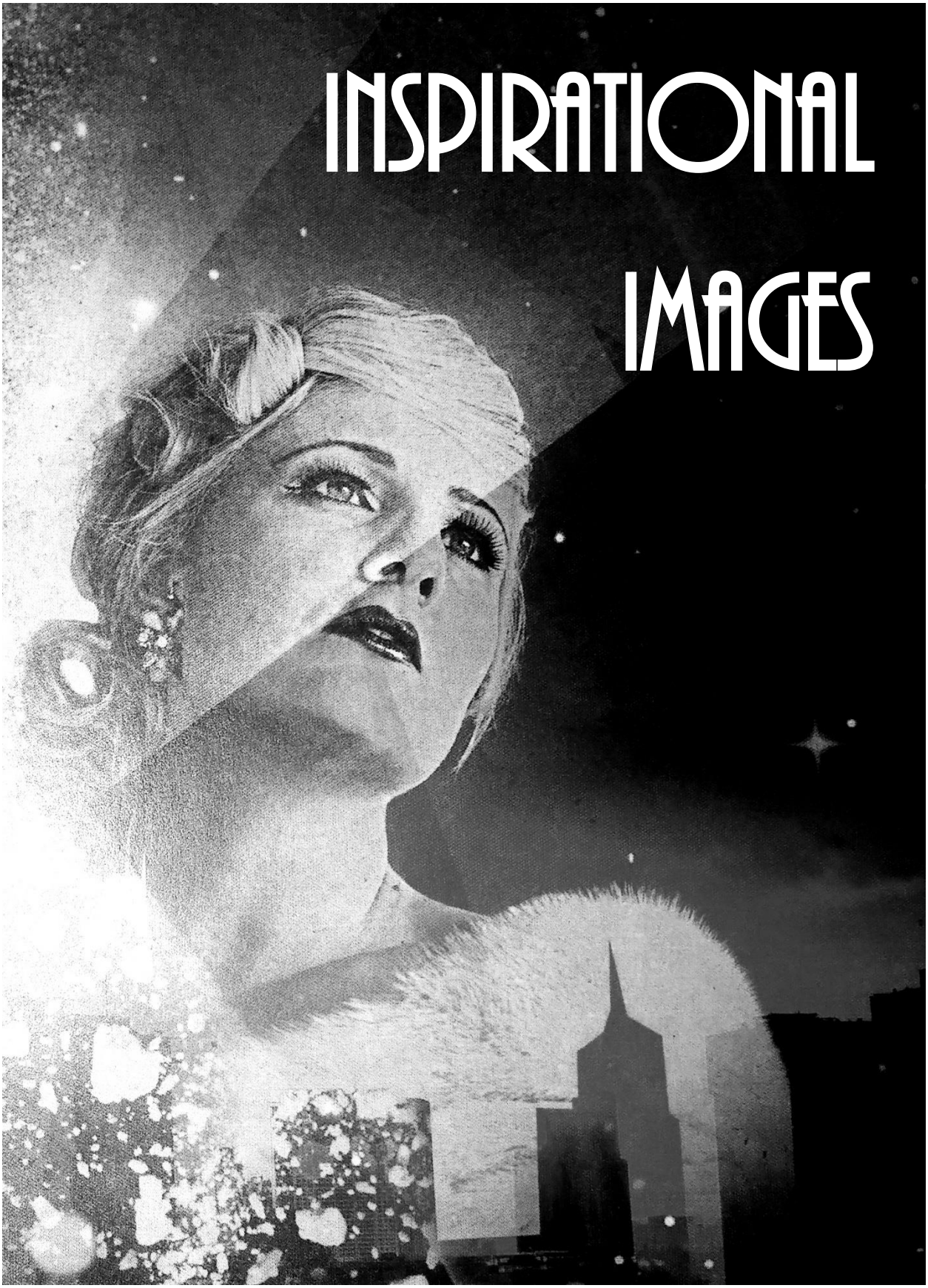

INSPIRATIONAL
IMAGES

"WALL ME UP ALIVE

IN MY OWN BODY.

THEY'D LIKE TO SEE - THROUGH - ME,

BUT NOTHING IS MORE

OPAQUE

THAN ABSOLUTE

TRANSPARENCY.

LOOK—

MY FEET DON'T HIT THE MARBLE!

LIKE BREATH OR A BALLOON, **I'M RISING,**

I HOVER SIX INCHES IN THE AIR
IN MY BLAZING SWAN-EGG OF LIGHT.

YOU THINK I'M NOT A GODDESS?
TRY ME.

THIS IS A **TORCH SONG.**

TOUCH ME AND YOU'LL **BURN."**

— MARGARET ATWOOD

GLORIA MITCHELL – 1930'S GLAMOUR

In preparation to don the mantle of Gloria, I first needed to understand the context of the glamorous world in which she lived and thrived. The cinema stills and photoshoots of the starlets of the 1930's are, on the whole, breathtakingly elegant in their composition. There are similarities across the board that tie each of these images together as part of one cohesive universe, housed within the Hollywood sphere. The following images are ones I have chosen based on their value as inspiration and guidance to me as the actor, seeking to inhabit their world.

The women depicted in this section all speak to the high level of decadence of the time: almost all are in elegant gowns, draped in silks and luxurious fabrics to frame their bodies as works of art; and art they are, as all of these women are unequivocally beautiful and radiant, tall and slender, living statues that exemplify the ideal body type for women of the time. The majority of them are fair in skin as well as hair, exalting the *lightness* that was so coveted during this half of the twentieth century. Carole Lombard, in particular, has been a great inspiration to me for Gloria, as the way she carries herself and reveals her status through presentation are enigmatic and breathtaking. I have also included images of women who have a darker coloring, who very likely had some element of ethnic passing mixed within their personas, such as Dorothy Lamour and Dolores Del Rio. Theresa Harris and Barbara Stanwyck are also included in stills from the 1933 film *Baby Face*, to showcase the common "missy and mammy" relationship that is mirrored in the play with Gloria and Vera.

Image 1

Image 2

Image 3

Image 4

Image 5

Image 6

Image 7

Image 8

Image 9

CAROLE LOMBARD WITH CLARK GABLE

Image 10

Image 11

ANN SHERIDAN

Image 12

Image 13

Image 14

DOROTHY LAMOUR

Image 15

DOLORES DEL RIO

Image 16

"BABY FACE" – 1933 FILM – THERESA HARRIS AND BARBARA STANWYCK

Image 17

Image 18

Image 19

Image 20

EXPLOITATION

It was of extreme value to me to include a section of images that epitomize the discourse I have had with the nature of exploitation in my research. Within the historical context of the film industry, we know that men and women of color have been particularly exploited with regard to the kind of work they are given and how their visages have been used to perpetuate harmful stereotypes and prejudices. While culturally and socially the climate has improved a great deal since the 1930's with regard to equality and representation, evidence of this kind of debasement and extortion are still rampant within today's media, although the problematic depictions are somewhat more subtle if not examined through a lens of sociological awareness.

In the following pages, I have included some of the more provocative and disturbing photographs and artwork I have found that speak to this imbalance of power between the subjects being photographed and those who view them, ultimately turning them into objects. I specifically focused on the role that women play in this media culture of *looked-at-edness*, and specifically how the skin color of the female body is used as a compositional tool for this artwork. Several of the pieces faced controversy as to their elements of racism and exploitation when they hit the market. Not all of the images are self-unaware; several of the artworks were created by artists and photographers who were purposefully examining the dichotomies of race and gender in their work. I have left the interpretation as to which images are which up to the viewer, as I myself went back and forth between my feelings on them. As you peruse the

following images, please bear in mind the imbalances of power in the subjects, and how the architecture of each image tells a very specific story, often with women, and more specifically women of color, bearing the brunt of objectification. The following images may be disturbing to the viewer, and several include nudity.

Image 21

Image 22

Image 23

Image 24

Image 25

Image 26

Image 27

Image 28

Image 29

Image 30

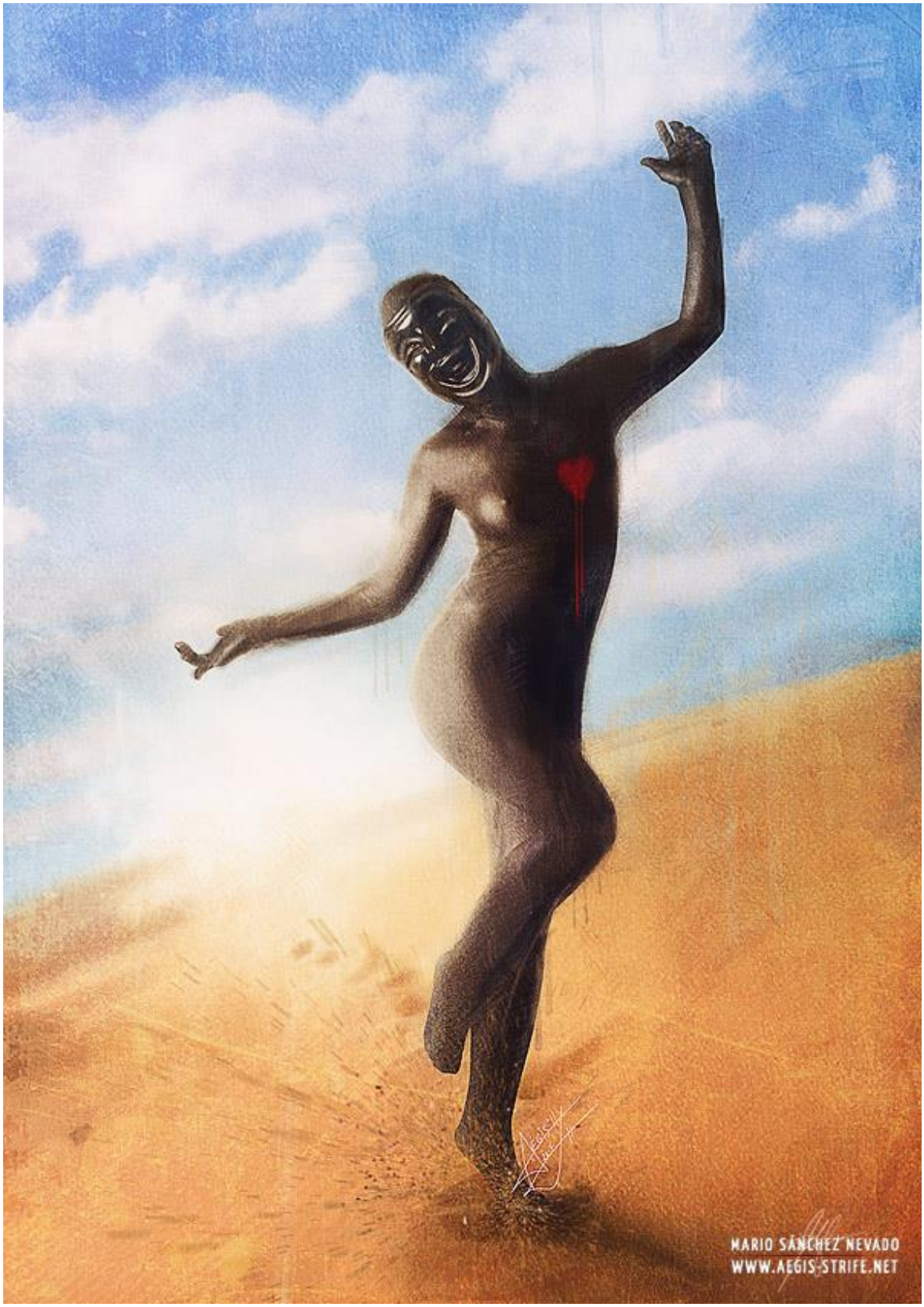


Image 31

WOMANHOOD

An integral aspect of Gloria's identity is her relationship to Vera, as well as her relationship to herself. Gloria and Vera unite through their shared experiences of womanhood, as it is the one thing that both binds them together as well as sets them apart. The next selection of images are indicative of the elements of this unity: women as equals, regardless of skin color; women and their relationships to their masks, how they present themselves to the rest of society. The majority of the images are in black and white, rather than in color, which is how I discovered them—and I personally feel that this collection presented in monochrome speaks even further to the themes of the play as a whole, beyond solely Gloria and Vera's relationship. The contrast of black, white, and gray-scale perfectly symbolizes the spectrum of differences in women around the globe—that it is not so much about color, but simply gradient, as we are all so much more alike than we realize.

I have included several images of women of different skin tones together, as a direct link to the relationship built between Gloria and Vera and the solidarity between them. I love all of these photographs, but am particularly glad to have found the two of Gloria Steinem and Dorothy Pitman-Hughes, both warrior women who have worked for the advocacy of feminism and equality their entire lives. They recreated their famous pose from 1972 in early 2014, and the two images together are a striking commentary on how the bonds of womanhood can most definitely stand the test of time.

Image 32

Image 33

Image 34

GLORIA STEINEM AND DOROTHY PITMAN-HUGHES – 1972

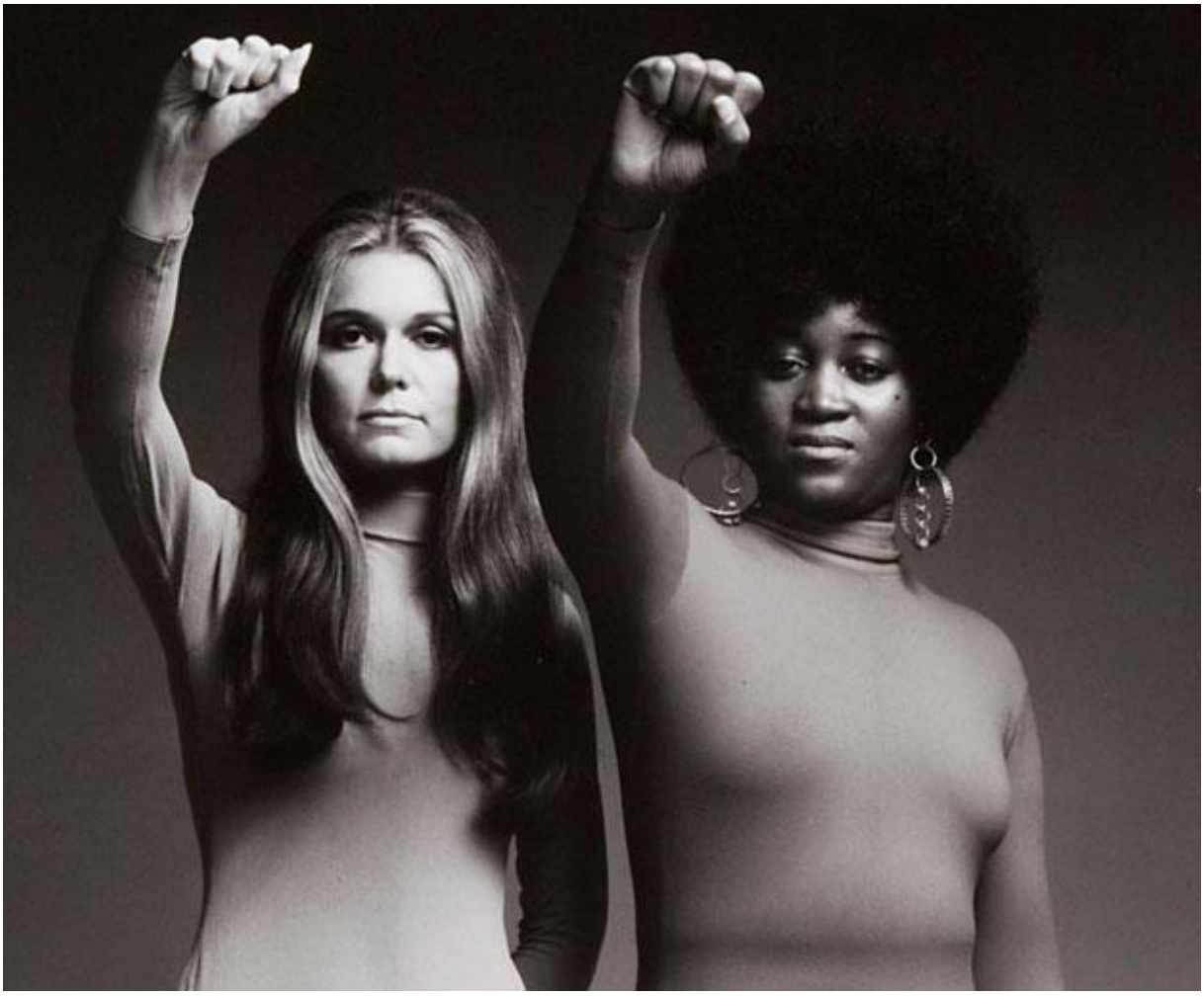


Image 35

GLORIA STEINEM AND DOROTHY PITMAN-HUGHES – 2014

Image 35 - 2

Image 36

Image 37

CRISIS OF IDENTITY

In my search for inspirational images, I came across a number of exceedingly striking pieces of art that exemplified the themes I was finding within the underlying score of Gloria's psyche. Imagine a woman so lost in crisis, so trapped within the machine she herself created, so bound to her false personas—this woman would hardly know who she truly was underneath. I genuinely believe that a huge part of the tragedy of Gloria and Vera's relationship is that neither of them are able to completely be themselves with anyone else but one another. They are both stuck in pretending, in having to wear the mask that will please society and help them climb the ladders of status and career. But never are they able to be liberated to be their true selves, to be legitimately free.

Gloria is bound by these shackles throughout her entire life. She is constantly in pursuit of recognition for her "brand," the Original Sweetie Pie character that Hollywood so adores. She embraces this life because she knows how to manipulate the system to work in her favor, to secure a bright and stable future for herself. But the internal struggle is volatile and wild, and one she barely shares with anyone—at her core, who *is* Gloria? To whom does she belong? Who is her family? Where do her roots lie? These are the questions that the real Gloria Mitchell cannot give public answers to, as she has had to deny her rightful heritage in order to pursue fame and fortune. Her very body, her very appearance separates her from any ties to home. There is no Gloria Mitchell without the mask. And therefore, whatever lies underneath that mask must inherently be a combustible chaos of fear, grief, loss, and anger.

"DELIBERATION"

Image 38

"INDIFFERENCE"

Image 39

Image 40

"SUSPENSE"

Image 41

"SHAME"

Image 42

RACIAL PASSING – HISOTRICAL CONSTRUCTS

The final element of images I surrounded myself with were depictions that brought context to the struggle of racial passing in American history. Passing, while a more visible concept today in terms of the evidence now available, was still a secret and underground movement toward freedom all its own at the beginning of the twentieth century. Passing began as an act meant for seeking liberation; now, we understand from a sociological perspective that passing can be attributed to any kind of performance that is meant to make the performer "less like" or "more like" something else. Facets of passing have been appropriated in modern culture: the lightening of hair or of skin as an accoutrement of fashion rather than as a passage out of slavery. But it would be irresponsible to forget where passing first got its feet—with people who were physical property seeking freedom from ownership by assimilating to appear like their owners. That relationship then evolved over time, and those same marginalized groups continued to use it as a way to make themselves seem more socially "normal," more like the accepted majority, which was typically white.

I have herein included images that resonate with me with regard to this topic. Some are overt in their relationship to the history of racial passing, and others are slightly more obscure. For instance, several of the images are from a graphic novel about racial passing in the 1930's, bringing an interesting new perspective to the conversation through graphic art.

I have also included an image of the singer and performer Beyoncé, who is lauded as being perhaps the ultimate image of a strong, independent woman in current pop culture, and

who here sports blonde locks. This is certainly not to say that I believe Beyoncé is attempting to make herself "more white" or "less black" by dyeing her hair blonde—but it is an interesting statement of appropriation for a hair color that has always been historically associated with fame, where those with the most fame wore the lightest hair and lightest skin possible. It is a striking image to see a successful public figure, who happens to be a black woman, with full agency take ownership over a hair color, a seemingly simple aesthetic choice that has a history of racial erasure. Is Beyonce's hair a political statement, eschewing the history behind the blonde to give it new meaning, a statement of power in blackness? Or does she just like her hair that way?

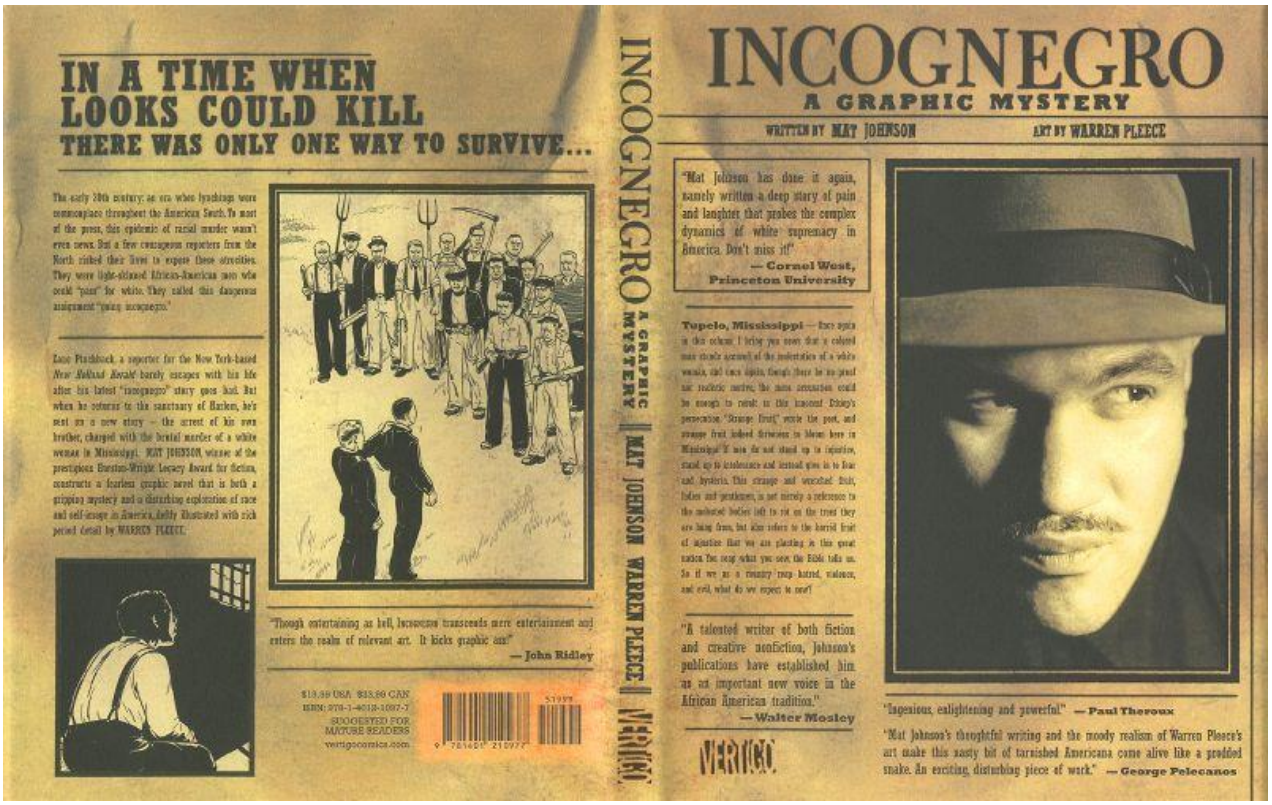
Image 43

Image 44

Image 45

Quiz from *Ebony* magazine, April 1952

Image 46


IN A TIME WHEN LOOKS COULD KILL
THERE WAS ONLY ONE WAY TO SURVIVE...
The early 20th century: an era when lynchings were commonplace throughout the American South. To most of the press, this epidemic of racial murder wasn't even news. But a few courageous reporters from the North risked their lives to expose these atrocities. They were light-skinned African-American men who could "pass" for white. They called this dangerous assignment "going incognegro."
Zane Pinchback, a reporter for the New York-based New Holland Herald barely escapes with his life after his latest "incognegro" story goes bad. But when he returns to the sanctuary of Harlem, he's met by a new story – the arrest of his own brother, charged with the brutal murder of a white woman in Mississippi. MAT JOHNSON, winner of the prestigious Hurston-Wright Legacy Award for fiction, constructs a fearless graphic novel that is both a gripping mystery and a disturbing exploration of race and self-image in America. Deftly illustrated with rich period detail by WARREN PLEECE.
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INCOGNEGRO
A GRAPHIC MYSTERY
WRITTEN BY MAT JOHNSON
ART BY WARREN PLEECE
"Mat Johnson has done it again, namely written a deep story of pain and laughter that probes the complex dynamics of white supremacy in America. Don't miss it!"
— Cornel West, Princeton University
Tupelo, Mississippi — Once again in this column I bring you news that a colored man stands accused of the molestation of a white woman, and once again, though there be no proof nor realistic motive, the mere accusation could be enough to result in this innocent Negro's persecution. "Strange fruit," wrote the poet, and strange fruit indeed dishonors in blood here in Mississippi if men do not stand up in injustice, stand up in intolerance and instead give in to fear and hysteria. This strange and wretched fruit, ladies and gentlemen, is not merely a reference to the molested bodies left to rot on the trees they are hung from, but also refers to the horrid fruit of injustice that we are planting in this great nation. For reap what you sow, the Bible tells us. So if we as a country reap hatred, violence, and evil, what do we expect to see?
"A talented writer of both fiction and creative nonfiction, Johnson's publications have established him as an important new voice in the African American tradition."
— Walter Mosley
VERTIGO
"Ingenious, enlightening and powerful!" — Paul Theroux
"Mat Johnson's thoughtful writing and the moody realism of Warren Pleece's art make this nasty bit of tarnished Americana come alive like a prodded snake. An exciting, disturbing piece of work." — George Pelecanos

Image 47


WELL THEN, IF YOU AIN'T USING HIM FOR MAILINGS, HOW COMES HE'S GONE AND GOT EVERYBODY'S NAMES AND ADDRESSES FOR?
"AT LEAST I TRY NOT TO GET CAUGHT. BUT SOMETIMES..."
"WHAT DO YOU DO THEN? WHAT DID YOU DO THIS TIME?"
"I DID WHAT ANY SELF-RESPECTING COLORED MAN WOULD DO IN THE SITUATION."
HOW Y'ALL DOING? LET ME SAY THIS IS A LOVELY LYNCHING YOU'RE THROWING HERE.
GET HIM!
"I RAN."
"LIKE BEIGE LIGHTNING GOING DOWNHILL. I RAN."
THAT'S A NIGGER! GET THAT NIGGER!
"SORRY TO INTERRUPT YOUR CHAT WITH MY GIRL, ZANE, BUT NOW I MUST JUMP IN: NOW YOU JUST BRAGGING."
"CARL, STOP. THEN WHAT HAPPENED? HOW DID YOU GET BACK TO HARLEM, SAFE?"

Image 48


BUT THIS IS NEW YORK. THIS IS HARLEM. THIS IS THE AGE OF THE NEW NEGRO.
HERE, THE POOR BECOME RICH; THE DESPISED, THE ADMIRED. YOU CAN CREATE ANY IDENTITY THAT YOU WANT.
SO THAT'S IT, I CAN JUST DECIDE TO BE A WHOLE NEW NEGRO? SO WHAT NEGRO YOU GOING TO BE, THEN?
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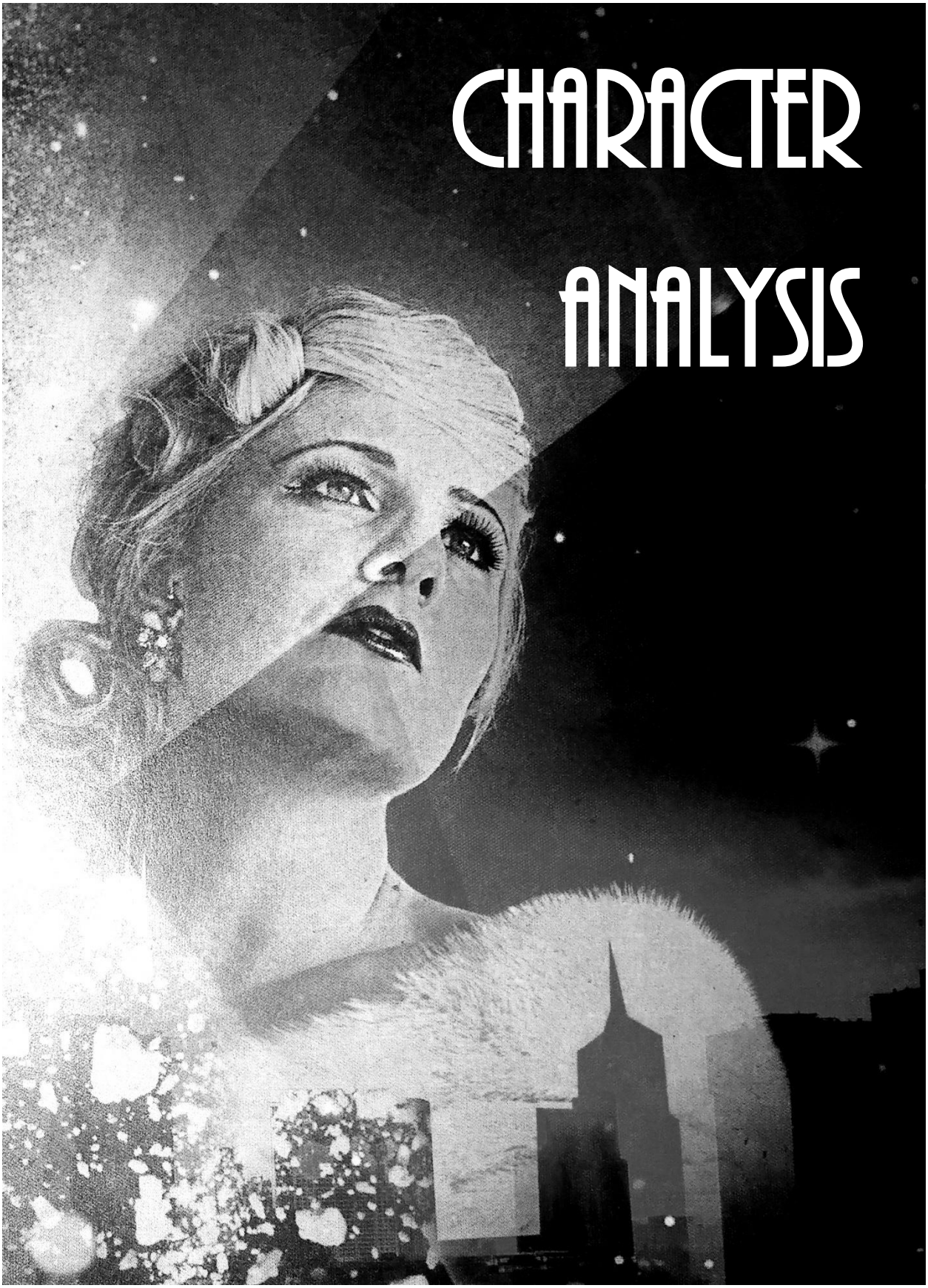

CHARACTER
ANALYSIS

"LIKE

BEIGE LIGHTNING

GOING DOWNHILL.

I RAN."

— MAT JOHNSON, *INCOGNEGRO*

UTA HAGEN'S "NINE QUESTIONS"

Through the study of Gloria's psychology, it has become apparent that her various personas are deeply integral to who she chooses to be around whom, and in particular situations. The *brand* of Gloria Mitchell, as "America's Little Sweetie Pie," beloved Hollywood starlet, and *actual* Gloria, friend and relation to Vera, are two different identities housed within one woman. "Sweetie Pie" Gloria has a specific set of parameters through which she operates with the outside, and is the persona most often seen. The Gloria Brand is the public face; actual Gloria, the real complex woman underneath, is the private persona, the veiled truth of who she is at her core. This pull between the public and private lives of Gloria's identity is what will define my performance of her—I must be able to tap into both sides to fulfill the arc of her story. And therefore, I must be able to articulate both the public and private sides of her within my written character analysis as well. In the following pages, I have answered the nine character questions, as defined by Uta Hagen, from both points of view. The public is indicative of Gloria's "Sweetie Pie" persona, what the rest of the world sees. The private are her thoughts and feelings that she keeps hidden from the majority of those around her, the things that even Lynn did not give her the language for within the script. Gloria only says so much publicly, so as to maintain her image—her private thoughts are much deeper. In considering this approach, I felt that I needed to explore both sides, as Sweetie Pie Gloria is the one you see most often in the script, but Actual Gloria is the one that lays the foundation and weathers the storms that engulf her.

1. WHO AM I?

PUBLICLY: My name is Gloria Mitchell, and I am one of Hollywood's glitziest up and-coming gems of the silver screen. I am in the absolute prime of my career, at twenty-eight years young, and I anticipate my prime lasting for quite a long while. I live in my grand penthouse suite in Hollywood, something I worked very hard to occupy on my own—it's sizeable and luxurious, styled after the Art Deco glitz of the time, and certainly something I'm proud of. My maid Vera is usually around to help keep the place in order. Vera's such a spitfire, she keeps me at my best—we actually have a good bit of history, back when we performed together as children. How funny it is we are where we are today… Anyway, part of my career here in Hollywood has been built upon the foundation of my screen persona—I am the coveted and desirable "America's Little Sweetie Pie," loved the world over for my captivatingly saccharine personality and elegant presence. After all, that's what the directors want, and I am willing to stop at nothing to make sure they get what they want and more—because then, I get what I want; and that's ultimately what it comes down to for me. I did not get to where I am because I stayed in the shadows and played nice. I see an opportunity, and I make it mine. I can adapt to any and every situation. It is my best skill—I am a chameleon, my colors change to match my environment, to suit my survival.

As is vogue, my appearance is nothing short of the height of glamor. My skin the color of the finest porcelain, not a blemish to be found; hair flaxen, sporting the golden bob of the '30s, framing my heart-shaped face; my entire wardrobe dripping with drama and luxury, as I am never without my satins and silks and furs—I am most often found draped in evening

gowns, fit like a glove, in saturated colors that accentuate my best features, and make bold statements—for this reason, I am particularly fond of red: it is the color of fire and change, ignition and passion, love and sex, drama and fame.

On the surface, life is fairly perfect. My ambition drives me, and I am currently doing everything I can to secure the lead in a new film that's about to be made. If I can just keep everything together long enough to get this job, everything hereafter will be smooth sailing.

PRIVATELY: I am an orphan. I don't even remember my parents. All I know about them are what I was told by Granny growing up—that, and the things I overheard when the adults thought I wasn't listening. From what I understand about my mother, she was sweet but ruled by what she thought was expected of her. She left my father after discovering that he was half Negro—he had been light enough to fool her and a lot of people he worked with, but it wasn't something she could bear if her own family found out. Those sorts of unions were not approved of, the races mixing. Granny always told me, though, that she must have loved me enough to make sure I had a home to be born into. She couldn't take care of me herself, but she at least made sure I got to family somehow. My father wasn't ever really around—he was the kind who traveled and swindled, to see what he could get, with his lighter skin. Granny is the only thing I've even known as real parent figure. It's been years since I've seen her now, though.

Vera and I grew up together. We were both born in the same year—1905, only a few months apart (I'm older). We shared a room and played together every day, and were raised by Granny to be performers—the whole family sang and danced, and that's how we spent our

nights and weekends, a celebration of "heritage and tradition," they told us. At first, I didn't realize how different we were—it wasn't until the kids in our neighborhood started repeating things their parents said about me that I started seeing that my light caramel skin and Vera's chocolate skin were more set apart than just in shade. As I got older, I started to notice those things—the kids who used to play with us after we did our schoolwork wouldn't be as available anymore, and the older people stopped looking me in the eyes. It was as if everyone I knew had gotten together and decided that I didn't belong anymore, that I wasn't really one of them. Granny would console me when I was upset and would cry on her lap when these things happened, and she would remind me she loved me and that I would always have Vera. We were already like sisters anyway. Granny was the one who told me once I was old enough, I was going to have to figure out who I wanted to be—I looked white, and next to them I didn't seem to have any mixed blood in me. She told me one day I might want to accept the gift my mother gave me—her fair skin—and live the life the white people lived, and leave them behind. I hated the idea of leaving everything and everyone I loved—but it soon became apparent that even if I wanted to stay, I didn't belong. They didn't need me and my being there only raised questions rather than answered them. And so when I turned seventeen, I decided to leave. Vera and I had always talked about becoming famous actresses someday—it was our dream, to keep performing together and eventually be stars. I'm just thankful she even wanted to come with me at all.

Hollywood was so different from Brooklyn; we realized if we wanted to stay together in any capacity, we would have to pretend we weren't what we were to each other in order to keep the status quo. Luckily, I started getting acting jobs and was able to start putting some

money together—Vera, headstrong as ever, was adamant that she didn't want to live off of my money, though. She was having a harder time getting performance work, but she wanted to do it herself, so she agreed to work for me for honest pay rather than simply taking handouts. It was the best set-up at the time: she had her own place, which she wanted, and I got to have her around every day, which I wanted. It wasn't always perfect… as I've gotten older, I've realized how humiliating that must have been for her after a while. Even if she is family, years of cleaning up after me can't have made her feel close to me the way she used to. I took her for granted—I loved having her there, and I loved my work, and in a way I loved that she had a reason to depend on me. I've never really been close to anyone else, especially after leaving New York. I think I was afraid she wouldn't want to stay around, that she'd realize we didn't belong together anymore.

I've gotten very good at being someone else to please other people. After my first real role in a film, I was labeled America's Little Sweetie Pie, and the name stuck. Even as I aged and matured, they still saw me as this young, naïve doe, and so—to stay employed and keep getting roles—I went with it. Personally, I like to drink and swear a lot more than the studios know about, so I'm very keen on being able to switch back and forth into "sweetie pie mode" when necessary. Keeping up with the persona is what will keep me in the good graces of the studio execs—even if it costs me personal turmoil every now and again. It's not anything I can't handle at this point. There's a hardening that happens after you've played a different version of yourself for a long time. Pretty soon the mask just becomes skin.

2. WHAT TIME IS IT?

PUBLICLY: The Golden Age, glorious 1933! Later, it will be 1973, towards the end of our careers, and post the civil rights movement, but smack-dab in the middle of the feminist movement. Beyond that, when we're dead and gone and our legacies live after us, it will be 2003, and our fame and fortunes will be discussed at symposiums and colloquiums, and we will be remembered fondly. The film we made that started it all was set in 1855, but the majority of the glory days were right there in the glitz and glitter of the 1930s. What a lovely time it is.

PRIVATELY: The significance of the time Vera and I have lived, sometimes together, sometimes apart, is elemental in understanding how much we've really gone through. Every decade of our careers, something catastrophic has happened socially or economically. So much has changed across the forty years of our prime—a Depression, multiple wars, social unrest at every turn. I don't presume to think that had things stayed the way they were in 1933, that any of us would have been truly happy. Vera couldn't work for me forever. At some point, I had to face that she wasn't *mine*, that Vera is her own strong person, and she needs freedom, too. Time has been so strange to us—good and bad and everything in between. I left for twenty years. For the first time in my adult life, I did something on my own without having to lean on Vera for support. It was terrifying and new, and also for the first time, I fell in love with someone besides Vera—Malcom. I allowed myself to see this trip to London as a new adventure, and it soon became a permanent escape. But during all that time I was in Europe, Vera was struggling here at home. The country was struggling, and I was entirely removed from

it, save for the news snippets I managed to catch every now and again. I returned home having completely missed the bulk of the civil-rights movement, something that would have mattered more to me than I could ever have been able to express. As children, Vera and I got to enjoy being cousins, because it didn't matter what we looked like at that age. But the truth is—it always mattered. Our differences have made us toxic to one another. She must have fought her hatred of me, of being in my shadow, for such a long time. I took for granted that she would always be there when I wanted her. But my time in London, away from everything I had known back then, helped me to understand. It's important that I make things right with Vera. I just hope I can make it up to her—that I can make it up to myself. This new Gloria I've become over these last forty years—she's someone else, now. Wiser, yes, but still built on the wreckage of a shell. I don't even know what's behind the persona anymore. It's all just… me.

3. WHERE AM I?

PUBLICLY: Well, it all starts in my living room, posh and luxuriously decorated in the art deco style, inside my Hollywood penthouse, filled with just enough decadence to satisfy even my expensive tastes. Later, I move to London with my third husband—a classical musician and conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, this time—for a change of pace, and I have to say I much prefer the climate there. A Hollywood starlet with as storied a career as mine on the West End is always a happy commodity, versus just one more run-of-the-mill blonde body at home.

PRIVATELY: Originally I was in Brooklyn, in a small room that I shared with my cousin, where I slept on a twin mattress with threadbare quilts that had been passed down through generations of grandmothers, patches replaced and sewn up from time to time with use. Hollywood is where much of my young adulthood took place—traveling back and forth from my generally empty apartment to the crowded sets of the studio lots, from my dressing table at home to the dressing rooms on films sets, constantly shuffled between total alone-ness and being surrounded by hordes of people. Later I will have taken to having tea every afternoon in London, going home to the same quiet and honorable man every evening, actually sharing my home with someone else for the first time since I was a child. London is where I become acquainted with theatre again—it is where my penchant for live performance is able to thrive once more, and I am able to learn how to connect through my craft in a different way than I had been doing in front of cameras all these years. After London, I will return to American television on *The Brad Donovan Show* to surprise Vera after all this time. I will eventually split my time between London and visits back home to New York, and the occasional appearance in Los Angeles. Ever since I left home as a teenager, having space around me wherever I am has been a staple of how I travel through life. Crossing oceans helps to fuel that desire.

4. WHAT SURROUNDS ME?

PUBLICLY: Decadence and the raw materials for fame-making. And gin. Rather a lot of gin. The good gin's even hidden in various locations about the house! Though I never let the heads of the studio see me drinking, of course. In my penthouse apartment, I keep a number of

interesting furniture pieces, designed with the Art Deco style, mixing the use of glass and metal to create the elegant and ethereal look I so love. Everything has a curve to it—a circular standing bar, a dish-shaped golden sofa, multiple armchairs with curved sides and no backs, oval side tables, the works. The fabrics are plush and satin, in silvers and creams and light blues, creating the perfect backdrop for my saturated dresses—I surround myself with metallic and neutrals so that I may immerse my form in bright colors to stand out against them. Even in London once I've moved there with Malcom, our home is lush and comfortable, and accoutrements in which I drape myself are the most colorful items in the environment.

PRIVATELY: Funnily enough, everyone and no one. I am constantly sniffing out the next center of attention, as is my way, but I don't often surround myself with others if there's not something to be gained from it. I've taken plenty of lovers before, but again, I don't *need* them, so it's all a matter of usage. People, especially in this town, are products, and absolutely everyone is looking to make something of themselves and get their names plastered on the center shelf of the big time—so everyone uses everyone. It's all about how you play the game. The only person I'd ever choose to have near me voluntarily would be Vera, my dear friend—she's known me practically our whole lives, there's nothing I need to do to impress her—and she's certainly not going to be the leg-up I need career-wise, so our relationship is perhaps the one thing in my day to day life that has any kind of normalcy to it. Otherwise, I do just fine on my own, with my luxurious house and art deco stylings, a closet bursting with the most vibrant and flattering evening gowns, furs and jewels to kill for, and my dignity hanging in the back there. Hah, look at me, making jokes!

I keep the house stocked with the finest liquors in the event of a party or soiree, as I tend to entertain guests from the studio when I am looking to move up casting decisions for upcoming films. And while the alcohol is readily available to my guests when they want it, I don't allow them to see how much I take to it myself. My twenties are when I formed a strong bond with gin and other hard liquors. This life takes a toll, as it requires a great deal of energy to sustain, so most nights I numb any lingering feelings of loss or loneliness in bottles. My dependence on alcohol stays strong until my marriage to Malcolm. I've not completely left it, as it is a vice I've voluntarily shackled myself to, but my life with him doesn't make me need it quite as much.

As far as people go, Vera is the only one I see every day, and who I enjoy seeing. We surround one another in that way—we are never really bereft of each other. I am thankful for her constancy. This arrangement doesn't last into our middle-age, though. She doesn't need to work for me anymore after her first few significant film roles, and her ill-fated relationship with Leroy keeps her away from me, until it's time for me to leave with Malcom. I take solace in my gin and in my thick skin. I have enough material possessions to keep my occupied through the lonely days.

5. WHAT ARE THE GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES?

PUBLICLY: I moved to Hollywood on my own to pursue my dreams, and brought Vera along as my maid and quasi-personal assistant. I am pursuing more film work, specifically the lead in a new Southern epic about an octoroon prostitute who has a doomed love story with a

wealthy merchant. Vera wants me to help her land the role of Tilly, the maid to the lead, Marie. I have every intention of building my life as a film star and staying in the spotlight for as long as possible. I am revered and beloved in the Hollywood community and will continue to have fans well into my later years.

PRIVATELY: I am building a career on a stolen foundation. I was forced to make the choice to leave what family I had behind in Brooklyn to embrace the white parts of myself and discard what of me is black. I have had the advantage of passing easily, as only a quarter of my blood is Negro, and I favor my mother's fairness. My true lineage is a heavy disadvantage to me in my career, and so must forever remain hidden. My relationship with Vera is in a precarious balance, as we have to fulfill the societal expectations of us based on our races. I will treat her as my maid in order to keep up appearances, but this way we are able to stay together and I can take care of her monetarily and attempt to help get her work with the studio. When Vera is brought on to play Tilly in *The Belle of New Orleans*, we are able to share our first film roles together, and it's our on-camera chemistry that sets us up as a powerful duo for more films to come in the future. Vera soon garners enough fame on her own that she no longer needs to always be associated with me—this does not mean she ever completely leaves my shadow, as is evident in our reunion on *The Brad Donovan Show*. Even then, toward the end of our careers, after being separated by an entire ocean for twenty years, we can never really come out to the rest of the world with the truth of who we are to each other. That secret is something we have to carry our whole lives—even when we're thousands of miles apart. We must always be bound to one another, the same way we are bound to those roles of Marie and Tilly. So much

has changed culturally by 1973 that she and I are no longer the children who played together as equals, or the young adults who shared an imbalance of power, but we are now approaching the end of our sixties, in some ways on equal ground, and in others still kept apart by the pain of how much has happened between us. While on *The Brad Donovan Show*, I will make the leap to repair the damage that has been done by confessing the truth of our relationship to the studio audience—but I will become stuck with fear and panic, and will instead announce my retirement from acting. Which, in a number of ways, is kind of the same confession altogether.

6. WHAT IS MY RELATIONSHIP?

PUBLICLY:

Vera: Vera is my maid, as well as my dear friend. She and I have been together in some capacity for much of our lives, and she helps keep me sane with all of my film work. She actually becomes something of a colleague later in our careers, after we film *The Belle of New Orleans*, which helps open the door for her to fame and some notoriety. Vera will always be partner to me—even after twenty years apart, we're still able to pick right back up where we left off, and even sing and dance together like the old days.

Lottie: I know Lottie to be one of Vera's roommates, but to me she's just an extra hand at parties when Vera requires a bit of help. I've only met the girl once or twice before.

Anna Mae/Anna Maria: Miss Anna Maria Fernandez, while not a real threat to me in my pursuit of stardom with Maximilian's new film, is still an annoying nuisance who thinks she is fair competition, and I will bring out all of my arsenal to make sure she is put in her place at

the bottom of the totem pole for this role. She is, after all, just another one of Maximilian's bimbos who he keeps around until he's tired of them. Because of their relationship, it is likely she'll end up with a bit part in *The Belle of New Orleans*, but I don't anticipate having to compete with her in any real capacity beyond this film. Once Marie is mine, and I am well on my way to immortality, I won't have to worry about her any longer.

Leroy: Just another one of the "help," hanging around to pick up any leftover stardust from the glamorous guests at my party, no doubt. He ends up starting a relationship with Vera down the road, which I highly disapprove of. First of all, she can do much better than a driver now that she's garnering some fame of her own, but secondly, he's got some issues with his temper and with authority, and the studios won't stand for that kind of riff-raff hanging around set. Celestial Pictures has threatened to terminate her contract if she doesn't get rid of him, and I've encouraged her to listen to them. Vera has got to put Vera first.

Slasvick: The head of the studio, and the ultimate player in whether or not I keep working for this production house. Slasvick is the one person who could make or break my career advancement at this point—if he thinks that I'm too old, too heavy, too tired to continue playing the youthful ingénue roles, then my time as America's Little Sweetie Pie could very well be over. He is the one I need to schmooze and convince of my worth as an asset to the studio. I do believe that of the actresses under contract, I am the most versatile and passionate. I will have to make him recognize how much of a golden opportunity I am. Then once I have his blessing, I will be able to take over the role of Marie and put myself on the map for good.

Maximilian Von Oster: Maximilian is absolutely darling, a true artist with a brilliant vision for the direction of cinema! His new screenplay for *The Belle of New Orleans* is simply

magnificent, and I would kill to be a part of this film. I've been grooming him for the acceptance that I am the absolute best choice for the lead role of Marie the octoroon, and that casting me will make this an even bigger hit than it already is. Maximilian is someone whom I will support and adore for the rest of my career, as I move from one of his actors to be one of his esteemed colleagues and friends.

Carmen, Afua, Herb: These scholars exist beyond my lifetime, and so to them I have no relationship. They, however, have a relationship to me through their commentary with regard to my career and perceived relationship to Vera Stark.

PRIVATELY:

Vera: Vera is my rock. She is my sister in every sense of the term. Through blood, we're cousins, but that reality is something we have to keep secret in the social climate of 1933. As much as she and I love one another and have chosen this way of life, our imbalance of equality will always plague us, even into the 1970s, past the bulk of the civil-rights movement, where equality should have come a little easier. Vera is the one person with whom I can be my true self. She knows how nervous and anxious I can get when dealing with the studio executives, and she knows just the perfect ways to calm me down and soothe me. Because I rely on no one else, I have always assumed she would be there for me. I took her for granted later in life—once she started building a career on her own, she didn't need me as much anymore, and wanted to forge her own path separately from mine. I had to let go of her when I married Malcolm and moved to London—but I never forgot her. I tried to contact her several times during my twenty years abroad, but never heard anything in return. I don't even know if

my letters ever reached her. Which is why I took the opportunity to return to Los Angeles and Hollywood in 1973, to accept my achievement award and find a way to reunite with her. After all the loss and pain that has defined the secrecy of our relationship, I still value her as the most important person I know. She is still my sister, that same beautiful little girl I shared a room with in childhood, and I always imagined us taking over the world and going out with a bang—together.

Lottie: My knowledge of Lottie is limited, but I am aware that she is Vera's roommate and also a fellow actress seeking work. I've only met her a couple of times, but I know she doesn't particularly care for me, which is entirely fine. She isn't privy to the knowledge of who Vera and I are to one another, so it is only natural she would think of me as the spoiled, bratty, white actress who has everything she doesn't. For the dinner party for *The Belle of New Orleans* I entreat Vera to find someone to help out for the night, and know that although Lottie is not a fan of mine, she could potentially find something worthwhile in being in my home during this event. Lottie is eventually cast in the film as well, as a smaller role than Vera's, but it allows her the leeway to jumpstart her career. Even though I do not know Lottie well at all, I am slightly envious of her. She and Vera are a different kind of sisters than Vera and I are—Lottie can actually share with Vera in the experiences they both face within this culture, which is something I cannot do. My whiteness will always be a barrier to me being able to truly understand what it is to be a part of the black community. As we the years go by, I see Vera and Lottie doing more work together while Vera and I do less, and it makes me long for a way to connect to them. And yet, I know that I cannot, and never will be able to. I am set apart; alone; in a category all to myself.

Anna Mae/Anna Maria: I know that Vera has another roommate, but I've never met her. I do not put together that Anna Maria Fernandez is Anna Mae in disguise. I believe her act, for the most part, seeing her as one of Maximilian's new accessories, which means she is vying for my role in *The Belle of New Orleans*. I had heard of other women in the industry who were of ethnic descent changing their names and looks so as to pass for a more marketable type—after knowing her for a while, I wonder if this is the case for Anna Maria, that perhaps she comes with an act the same I do. I see through her at the party fairly quickly, enough to know that she is most likely not who she says she is, and that she's not there to be in love with Max, but to scope out her competition for the film. She is red-blooded actress like the rest of us—willing to do anything to secure the part that will hopefully skyrocket her career.

Leroy: Leroy reminds me of the boys back home in Brooklyn. He is similar to what Granny always told me my father was like—handsome, charming, artistic, with just enough of a dangerous side to make you question being around him for too long. Our first encounter is after the disastrous argument Slasvick and Max have about the movie, and I'm into the double-digits with glasses of gin, no longer concerned with hiding it by that point in the night. I flirt with him shamelessly, as he reminds me of home, and I have no regard for the aesthetic distance my persona requires of me in this situation. As the years pass and Leroy and Vera become more serious about one another, I begin to have serious misgivings about him. I can see what attracts her to him, but I can also see what his problems with alcohol and authority are doing to Vera's career by extension. She and I fought too long and hard to get where we are, and now that she finally has a career of her own, and her own corner of fame, I do not want anyone—especially not an egomaniac of a man—to jeopardize that. I've taken many

lovers and even married twice and divorced twice, but actual love and companionship was never a part of it. In this business, it's about networking and clawing your way to the top. If this union with Leroy is going to get her terminated from Celestial Pictures or any other production house, then he certainly isn't worth it. I couldn't appreciate they love the two of them had for another until I found my Malcom, and by that point it was too late—I had never loved anyone before him, so the thought of giving up my dreams or rearranging my career for a man was absurd to me.

Slasvick: The head of the studio, and also the most pompous little prick I've ever met. Hollywood is definitely a boys' club, and he's one of the key players in the game. Getting on Slasvick's good side, and staying there, can change everything for a career. In this age, it is not unusual for studio executives like him to bargain with sex from their actresses who want to stay in the limelight. It's why so many of the women here play these games, like Anna Maria—we know that how seriously we are taken is sometimes only as good as we are in the bedroom. Slasvick makes my skin crawl, but he's an in credibly decisive and powerful man who can change the fate of my entire career with one snap of the fingers. Buttering him up is like a second job—I even got so good at it the man became my first husband for a short time. Once I outgrew the studio, I didn't have to worry about pleasing him anymore.

Maximilian Von Oster: Max is such an idealist, and potentially the next great director of our generation, but he's also just another power-hungry man running wild in Hollywood. If I had to choose between the two, I'd take Max over Slasvick, as he does actually believe that what he's doing with change the face of cinema and art, which I can appreciate. The one thing that Slasvick has that Maximilian doesn't is practicality—Slasvick is a realist, he sees what is and

figures out what is necessary to change it into something that benefits him. Perhaps that's why I can stand him after all—I operate in the same way. I will always be indebted to Maximilian for *The Belle of New Orleans*, as I truly believe he created something spectacular for us all that time ago. He's also not afraid to stand up to the studio, and I admire that quality immensely.

Carmen, Afua, Herb: These scholars exist beyond my lifetime, and so to them I have no relationship. They, however, have a relationship to me through their commentary with regard to my career and perceived relationship to Vera Stark. They've each seen what they've wanted to see in me—a lover for Vera, a broken family relationship, or just simple an imbalance of power of me always overshadowing her. They are all half right and half wrong in their musings, but they will never know that. Each one of these scholars will tout the narrative they connect with the most until they're blue in the face, because what matters after we're gone isn't what actually happened, only what people feel they can gain from claiming to understand something crucial about our lives. The real story about who Vera Stark is to me, who she will always be to me, will forever stay private and personal for just the two of us.

7. WHAT DO I WANT?

PUBLICLY: Ultimately, to secure my future. To get this lead role in this movie, if it's the last thing I do. Maximilian Von Oster, the brilliant director of *The Belle of New* Orleans, has a vision for a new kind of cinema that he believes will change the face of how filmmaking is done. And if he's right and that's true, I want to be right there alongside him at the helm, reaping the benefits of ushering a new age to the silver screen. As I go further along in my career, what I

want will slowly evolve, as my fame and reputation will solidify and I will no longer have to worry about maintaining them quite as much. Eventually I will meet Malcolm, and my desire will be to leave Hollywood behind, as I will have outgrown it, and to spend the next chapter of my life exploring live performance in London. I will return to reunite with Vera after such a long absence, and to finally be recognized by the industry that tossed me around for so long. No matter where the road might have taken me, the endgame was always to secure the kind of life that I live comfortably and happily, as a name not easily forgotten.

PRIVATELY: There's more at stake here than just getting another line on my résumé; the story of Marie, the doomed octoroon, is one of those special roles that can only be brought to life onscreen by someone who truly understands, who has lived through what she has lived through. Now I'm not talking brothels and dying of scarlet fever or anything like that, I'm as healthy as a hundred dollar bill—I mean someone who understands the scrutiny and the fear that comes along with hiding your heritage. Marie has the luxury of confiding in the women closest to her; but in reality, that is not something I can speak of to anyone, and absolutely no one can know about my past life—other than Vera, of course. This isn't just the role that will put me on the map to the rest of my career—it's the role that will tell my truth the only way I'm capable of revealing it—through the life of someone make-believe. After all, America's Little Sweetie Pie is a fabrication, and it seems to work for her.

Toward the end of my career, before I retire, and have had plenty of time to bask in my fame, I will want to return to Hollywood to accept the United Motion Picture's Medal of Honor for my lifetime of achievements, but the purpose of making that trip will be to reunite with

Vera. It will have been twenty years since our last meeting—so much will have changed. I want to see her again, and be like the sisters we always were to one another—I want to make things right for her. I just want to be a star and be able to love Vera, too—without it having to be anything other than what it is. She's my best friend. I… don't want her looked down upon. Simply, I want to live the life I want to live. I want to be free. Of worry, of prejudice, of guilt for having left home and those who raised me, of Vera having to carry my burdens… Just free. After everything we've been through—I just want for none of it to have been in vain.

At least, she and I share a small strain of the same bloodline, although the majority of my lineage is pristine porcelain. My ghost of a father may have been somehow distantly connected to Vera's mother, but that's not something I ever need dwell on. Anyhow, I just don't want to have to worry, to be concerned for the safety of my career (if anyone ever found out about my real heritage, as that is apparently taboo).

8. WHAT IS IN MY WAY?

PUBLICLY: For the part, the director and the head of the studio not seeing eye to eye. Possibly the tramp Anna Maria Fernandez, Maximillian's "guest," although I can't imagine she'd be any kind of true competition for me. And even to an extent Vera herself—we become slightly estranged toward the end of our careers, and I want my return to Hollywood to be glorious and full of happy nostalgia, and she doesn't seem too keen to allow me to do smoothly, as evidenced by her behavior toward me on *The Brad Donovan Show*.

PRIVATELY: My relationship to the entire rest of the world is founded on artifice, and I am damn good at it, too. "America's little sweetie pie" doesn't get her way for nothing. With everyone else, that is who I am: sweet, innocent, smart and naïve; but they have practically no idea what really runs in these veins. Slasvick and Maximilian are the ones who have to agree, or this film isn't ever getting made. I can schmooze and flatter all day long, but if they can't see eye to eye about this project, it'll be hopeless. It will be the end of my career—this is the thing that will save it.

For so long, my relationship with Vera is what has kept me grounded, but even she mustn't be able to overtake me, or I'll lose everything. She practically outs me on *The Brad Donovan Show*, using live television as a platform for putting me in hot water—of course she would, she's no stranger to drama. I want to secure my future, yes, but the biggest obstacle in my path is my own identity—the person constantly standing in the way of me getting what I want is, in fact, myself. I am trapped in a limbo of not really belonging anywhere, with anyone, and must fight to present to the rest of the world just how much they need and love me. I will always be battling myself. What makes what I want difficult is the fact that even though I know who I am and where I need to go, the life I left in New York follows me, the family that's there—as I was brought up largely by the family Vera and I share, so when I decided to leave and come to Hollywood and to disown ever having any kind of relation to them—well. Fame comes at a price, does it not?

9. WHAT DO I DO TO GET WHAT I WANT?

PUBLICLY: Well now, I do what any self-respecting businesswoman would do: slap on some lipstick, flatter the right people, and make everyone else think my big plans were their brilliant ideas to begin with. "America's little sweetie pie" may be quaint, but she isn't stupid. I am willing to do practically anything to secure the role of Marie, and to keep the spotlight trained on me. I will have this next step for my career, I swear it. There's a reason this well doesn't run deep, darlin'—everything I need I can find right here along the surface, and if anybody's asking, the gin drank itself. What more do you need?

PRIVATELY: I have done more than most people could ever dream of doing. I have left my home, my entire family, behind in pursuit of this career. I have wrestled myself into something desirable for these studio lackeys, and I have developed an entire persona built around pleasing them and being exactly who they need me to be at the turn of a dime. I have put my best friend and only remaining relative in a maid's uniform and made her clean up after me for years, while still expecting her to remain loyal to me and to keep my secret. I sleep with the right people when necessary, and two of my three husbands were really just business deals that came out of convenience and strategy. I can't have anything threaten my climb, so even something like an unexpected pregnancy cannot stand in my way. There's no way I would ever be able to entertain the idea of creating my family—who knows what I could pass on to an innocent child? No, my family is gone, it's just me now, and that's how it will stay. Vera has always been the exception, but even she is someone over whom I've had to trample to

continue rising in my career. Until I met Malcolm, that was the only thing that ever mattered: just secure my future. He is the only other person besides Vera I have every truly loved—and in order to be with him, to be happy, I leave everything here behind and move across the world with him to Europe, and we spend many beautiful years together in London. But even though I finally found the joy with Malcolm that I had been missing for so much of my life, my thoughts constantly turned to Vera and how sourly we left things. When Hollywood finally calls to bring me home for the award, I orchestrate appearing alongside Vera on *The Brad Donovan Show*. I wrote to her several times while I was away, and never heard anything in return—if she's moved beyond me, then so be it, but I have to do what I can to make things right with her. We're getting too old now to lose the only person in either of our lives who ever really understood us. I use the live television show as a way to effectively corner her, to force her to see me, and after seeing how much she's changed, realizing the full weight of my influence on her, I try to confess to the audience the truth. After almost seventy years of denying who I was, I tried to reveal it all on national television—needless to say, I could barely speak the words. I have lived so long behind this mask I don't know if there is anything underneath anymore. I say the only thing I find I'm capable of getting out—announcing my retirement from acting. Vera and I argue, twenty years of silence and even more of tension built up after so long finally coming out. But I can't do it. I can't explain to the world what she really means to me, there's no way I could ever accurately sum up what we've had to do to survive. And so rather than taking that spotlight and outing us both, I ask Vera for forgiveness. After all, she's the only one who ever really mattered. I don't need for the rest of the world to understand as long as I've got her. I have feared for some time now that if the grief of what we've lost didn't end us, we'd

never die. How do two people exist for so long under so many pretenses and manage to survive as long as we have? Vera is the one that matters. She's the stronger of the two of us. And if I can make anything right in this world, it has be to be with her.

PHYSICAL ANALYSIS – LUGERING

For this particular analysis, I thought it beneficial to compare my natural physical state to that of Gloria's. Because Gloria is a character type that I identify as having in my "wheelhouse," meaning that she is someone with whom I share enough physical/psychological similarities that I feel strongly connected to her even at the beginning of the development process, I wanted to be sure that I do not falsify the development of Gloria just because she feels so close to my own range of motion. I began with an examination of my own dominant physical properties, through use of Michael Lugering's Expressive Actor technique—the physical technique I am most familiar with through training in graduate movement courses. I chose the three most dominant properties of myself compared to the three most dominant properties of Gloria, as I currently understand them based on the text. As I begin the rehearsal process, it is likely one or more of these may evolve as my development of Gloria moved forward.

DOMINANT PROPERTIES OF MOVEMENT: EMMA HARR	
CENTERED	The majority of my movement is initiated from my center, a property that is simultaneously sensuous and practical
DIRECT	I am incredibly direct in my movement and in thought, which is motivated by my centeredness
STABLE	My stability is likely a byproduct of my centeredness and directness, but of the other properties on the spectrum, it is the most fitting for my general range of motion

DOMINANT PROPERTIES OF MOVEMENT: GLORIA MITCHELL	
CENTERED	Gloria moves from her center on purpose, as much as by instinct. She uses her sensuality to her advantage in her line of work, using it as a way to bargain and negotiate with movie executives and to craft character.
UNSTABLE	As much as she is centered, she is dichotomous in her instability, able to turn on a dime emotionally. Particularly in act one, in the 1930s, Gloria is "all over the place," constantly weaving back and forth in movement and in thought, and is often heavily swayed by gin.
SHARP	Her turns might not be the most stable, but they are nothing if not sharp. Gloria is hyper observant, as she is constantly playing the game, so she has perfected the art of turning on a dime. Her statements and actions are always pointed. With these three properties combined, she is a force to be reckoned with.

My biggest challenge to differentiate myself from Gloria is to make sure *my* centeredness doesn't overshadow *her* centeredness—it is possible that I could mistake my directness for her sharpness, and that my stability could creep in and erase her instability. I will be vigilant in physical warm ups with rehearsal to create a sense of removing myself from the equation and adding her. I think as much as this provides a challenge due to the closeness of the properties, it is also going to be a fun experiment to see just how far away I can get from myself while still staying rather nearby. Rather than thinking about leaving my center, it will be about staying centered while leading from heart, as I believe Gloria would. I look forward to developing her body further and discovering what quirky mannerisms she may develop as well.

POST-SHOW COMMENTARY:

Throughout the entire rehearsal process, as is evident in many of my rehearsal logs, Michelle and I had conversations about Gloria's movement, particularly in Act I when she would oscillate between Actual Gloria and Sweetie Pie Gloria. I was having a hard time finding the kind of physical instability Michelle was looking for—I would be overtaken by Gloria's melodrama and the effects of the gin and I would be wandering aimlessly in what would seem would be the way a non-stable person would move, and yet my movements would, as Michelle would inform me, still be rather gracefully categorized and grounded. My feet never left the floor without uncertainty as to their next mark, so even if I swayed dangerously in getting there, I was still very stabilized in doing so. I had anticipated that this would be the area where I struggled, as forcing myself to tip off-balance never felt natural or appropriately motivated to where it didn't become farcical, so at the end of January I had a meeting with Sean to discuss how to tackle this idea of instability. He offered an interesting insight that helped to reframe the way I approached Gloria—we've categorized her as unstable because of how she operates beneath multiple identities, all of which rely on the shifting of balances in power (Gloria has power over Vera, Slasvick has power over Gloria), but it takes a great amount of control for Gloria to organize all of these elements within her single person. One way Sean suggested I could tap into the physical instability would be to look to the breath—breathe in places I wouldn't normally stop within a line of text, and it chops the phrase, which gives it an unstable quality in the speaking of it as well as in the hearing of it. He suggested an exercise where Hillary and I run through a scene where, on her line, she gently pushes me on my back, either

on my shoulders or sides, in a place that will cause me to lose my balance for a moment, then have to seek to regain it, which will happen as I attempt to respond to her with my next line, incorporating the breath technique. Unstable people are not always flailing through their everyday lives—it's a much more organized type of movement than the exaggerated version I had been imagining. All it takes is the subtle tip off of my center, the fight to regain balance, and oscillating back through, a kind of ellipsoidal rotation.

Another thought Sean brought to the table was that maybe Gloria's instability was a byproduct and not a main property—perhaps there was something else she was doing, or could do, that would lend itself to making her unstable rather than me as the actor getting caught up in swaying on my feet every night. Gloria is centered, she is grand, she is dramatic, she makes sharp turns on a dime, when she enters a room she take it with her presence—she's *expansive*. When you consistently throw your own weight around, you run the risk of potentially losing your stability in your balance. I had taken her expansiveness for granted and hadn't even thought of it as a major property until it was put into this context. After our meeting, I took this information into rehearsal, started focusing on how Gloria uses her size, how she seeks to take up space with purpose, and immediately felt more at home in her body, found the instability we had been looking for, and satisfied what Michelle was asking of me in the scenes.

If I relook at Gloria's physical properties now, the chart would look more like this, with room made for the byproducts that became quite evident:

DOMINANT PROPERTIES OF MOVEMENT: GLORIA MITCHELL	
CENTERED	Dominant
EXPANSIVE	Dominant
SHARP	Dominant
UNSTABLE	Byproduct
LIGHT	Byproduct

The addition of "lightness" actually comes from her development across her age. Gloria had this twirling mannerism that kept her light on her feet—her sharpness aided in this, that if she needed to fly at a moment's notice, she could quickly escape a room like a gust of wind—an expansive, and also light, action. I think she gets lighter and more stable as she ages. By the time we see her on *The Brad Donovan Show* in 1973, she's had time to mature, to settle into herself, and to find her grounding. She and Vera effectively swap places in Act II—Vera is now high drama and biting wit, and Gloria is the one who seems much more at ease in her skin than her younger self.

I have thoroughly appreciated the arc of the physical explorations in this play, as they've challenged me to broaden my sphere of comfort and change the way I initially look at a character's breakdown. By the end of the run, Gloria was a second home, someone I could slip into without having to think about it, she felt that natural and familiar.

VOCAL ANALYSIS – LESSAC

There are at least three separate dialects used in this show, spanning the course of the forty years between Act I and Act II. We begin in 1930s Hollywood, with the popular transatlantic affectation of the time, sliding into the Southern plantation dialect, befitting Marie in the film, ending with the acquired sound of Gloria having lived and worked in London for twenty years. I feel like Gloria would have naturally resonant tone, with how centered she is, but a fluid and fluctuating pitch range with her expansiveness (referring to the Lugering physical property). I think she would utilize consonant NRG the most, as she is predominantly sharp in her speech and movements, and she would use every opportunity available to her to "sizzle" and "sparkle."

DIALECTS / VOCAL PROPERTIES: GLORIA MITCHELL	
TRANSATLANTIC FILM	1930s Hollywood, fast, snappy, of the times – consonant NRG, breathiness
THEATRICAL SOUTHERN BELLE	"America's little sweetie pie," as Marie in *The Belle of New Orleans* – structural NRG
DEREGIONALIZED WITH BRITISH LILT	Act II, after having lived in London for twenty years, an American accent with a British "twinge" – tone, structure, vowel substitutions, consonants

I personally love to live in tone and potency, but Gloria, as much as she can turn on the potency whenever she wants, exudes radiant NRG. I think the combination of her Lugering physical properties and Lessac vocal qualities lead her to a very distinctive quality of being bright, sharp, and quick-witted, which is certainly how she is written. I also feel that she is never quite far from buoyancy, and that the moments she chooses to strike her dramatic poses are when she either gives over to buoyancy when she's relaxed and just being herself, or she chooses to demand attention with potency. I think as Gloria ages, she relaxes even more into that buoyant liveliness, so her Act II persona is a mite lighter and, dare I say, a mite more "even-keel" than Act I Gloria. Combining the physical properties I've chosen with these vocal qualities will be interesting, as they are again just close enough to my own natural state that I will have to be cognizant of the very specific changes and differentiations I want to make. I look forward to finding the many voices of Gloria in addition to her many poses.

POST-SHOW COMMENTARY:

The vocal work for Gloria felt very intuitive throughout the whole process, thanks to my nearly three years of training with the Lessac technique, and the added benefit of having recently taken the dialects course in the fall of 2014. I've always been drawn to and fascinated by sound and voice and the way you can manipulate them, and happily discovered I am rather adept at picking up accepts and other vocal affectations. To define Gloria's three separate voices, I did a lot of listening to sound clips and videos from YouTube to get a range of cultural sounds for each dialect and time period, as best as I could track down. For the Transatlantic

sound, I looked at several clips from films from the 1930s and early '40s—most of the women in these films used the quick, consonant driven, with an air of breathiness sound that defines the Transatlantic dialect, so I wanted to inhabit that same style and feeling while still projecting and articulating well enough for the stage. Michelle didn't want me to go too far into the "film sound" for all of Act I, but she did encourage my study of the voices of actresses like Judy Garland and Katharine Hepburn. I did the same for Vivien Leigh in *Gone with the Wind*, which doesn't make use of a particularly Southern sound for the majority of the white characters, but it does provide the basis for the missy and mammy relationship we were going for in *The Belle of New Orleans*. Having grown up in Georgia, with my mother's side of the family being from the Blue Ridge Mountain and Atlanta areas, I've heard different versions of Southern dialects all my life. It's one of the main reasons my own natural sound is already so deregionalized—I grew up listening to a smattering of different types of lilts and twangs, some grand and plantation-esque, others endemic to the mountains and country terrain, balanced out by the uniquely urban-southern sound of Atlanta, which creates its own melting pot of elongated vowels and truncated ending consonants. This was the most intuitive for me because it's a sound I know so well—it relies on the changes in the structure the most, and the smart usage of selective consonant NRG for clarity in projection. I combined my Southern heritage with my film study to create a theatrical Southern dialect that pleased Michelle to fit Marie and differentiate enough from Gloria to offer a distinct enough change between the characters. As for the London years, this was another interesting mash up of influences—Michelle didn't want me to be overly British, as Peter Rhys-Davis was already holding the corner on that, so I looked into what would naturally happen to a fairly deregionalized American voice that spent that much time in Britain.

I listened to the dialect coaching of Jerry Blunt as a starting place, then took to YouTube to get a cross-section of how current professional actors in the London area sound (such as the actors at the National Theatre or someone like Carrie Hope Fletcher, the current Eponine in *Les Mis* on the West End) to see what a naturalized English actor sounds like. Gloria would have gone to London to pursue some film work, but would have turned her main attention toward the stage, having married the conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra. It would have given her an opportunity to work on her voice in an entirely different environment—to be surrounded by English actors all working on vocal warm ups to help them fill their performance spaces, Gloria would most likely have naturally adapted to their sound, which I think would have been a bit more of a fluid and aware version of a British accent rather than just the rote, every day version you'd hear on the street. Her exposure would have come from performers, so she would have learned British styles of vocal production from the best of them. I think Gloria, then, would have maintained a solid deregionalized baseline, and then gained a lot of forward structure and placement in her training, so the liquid "u," the long "ah," and the long "e" would be go-to's for her.

...BUT JUST HOW DRAMATIC IS SHE?

THE ATTITUDES AND PHYSICALITY OF GLORIA MITCHELL, AS DICTATED BY THE SCRIPT

Upon my first reading of the script, it quickly became apparent that Lynn Nottage, in crafting the character of Gloria Mitchell, cared a great deal about how she was portrayed by the no-doubt multitudes of actors who would try her on the world over—indeed, she cared so much that she went to great lengths in dictating the style of her physical movements in the stage directions that almost equal, if not outright surpass, the number of lines of text she gave Gloria. Gloria is the only character in the entire play that Nottage has done this for, the only one she has been consistently specific with, regarding her movements and her changes of mood. This speaks volumes to the style of the show, and to the style of the character herself. Gloria is, on paper, grander than life, and Nottage wanted to make sure anyone who attempted to tackle her as a role knew that that is how she must also be on stage.

Because of Nottage's clear textual clues concerning Gloria's physical life and general attitudes, I decided to create a flow chart for myself, detailing every single mention of Gloria in the script. The majority of the notes that follow are stage directions, explicitly given as notes to the actor, combined with references to dialogue from other characters that describe Gloria in a particularly significant way. Being able to look at this color-coded chart has already been immensely helpful in allowing me to identify significant places in the script to use in support of

my research, and has given me even more fuel for my overall character analysis—thus is the luxury of now having looked at everything so closely.

As I worked through the script, I took note of three specific things: first, the number of times the word "dramatic" is used to describe Gloria's actions; second, the number of times her alter-ego moniker "America's little sweetie pie" is used; and third, the number of instances where Gloria's blood relationship to Vera or her suspected racial passing is mentioned.

COLOR KEY:	**Separation of Acts / Scenes**
	Usage of the term "dramatic"
	Usage of moniker "America's little sweetie pie"
	Evidence of racial passing / relation to Vera

I have charted the type of scripted description (stage direction or character dialogue), provided the specific text of either type, and then catalogued the significance of the action in that moment, and whether or not it provides evidence to a larger scheme. The chart goes through the entire play in chronological order, and should be read left to right.

CHART OF DRAMATIC EVOLUTION

TYPE	DESCRIPTION	SIGNIFICANCE
ACT I, SCENE 1		
Opening Description (Stage Direction)	Gloria Mitchell, twenty-eight, "white" starlet, in a dressing gown, lies across the couch nursing a healthy glass of gin	First notes regarding Gloria—these are the initial given circumstances, and already they give away the secret to Gloria's passing, as noted by the purposeful quotations around the word "white."
Stage Direction	Gloria registers shock and dismay	In response to Vera's line prompt
Stage Direction	With sweet girlish Southern accent	Affecting the character of Marie
Stage Direction	Tenderly	Emotional shift in Marie's lines
Stage Direction	Gloria smiles, wrestling with what to say	Unsure of how to respond, emotions versus pride
Stage Direction	Gloria gasps dramatically[1]	First use of term
Stage Direction	Gloria coughs	Indicative of Marie's illness (scarlet fever)
Stage Direction	Gloria reaches out for Vera's hand	Perceived connection between Marie and Tilly—an "acting moment"
Stage Direction	A long pause, Gloria is thinking	At first seemingly emotionally motivated, but really jut Gloria unsure of her next line
Stage Direction	Another long pause	Gloria grasping, at a loss for her next line
Stage Direction	Dropping the Southern accent	Dropping character of Marie
Stage Direction	Gloria presses her fingers to her forehead, finally:	Working to remember next line
Stage Direction	With accent. Excited.	Attempt to finish scene as Marie
Stage Direction	Exasperated—dropping accent	Dropping character in frustration
Stage Direction	Gloria stands theatrically[2]	Second use of term (synonym)
Stage Direction	Gloria snatches the glass back	Ease of relationship to Vera, and to the gin
Stage Direction	Gloria grabs the script	Indicative of ownership, aggressive
Stage Direction	Gloria tosses the script	Indicative of ownership, dismissive
Stage Direction	Panicked	Fear at the late hour

Stage Direction	Overly dramatic[3]	Third use of term
Stage Direction	Gloria makes a dramatic[4] show of growing faint	Fourth use of term, indicative of Gloria's general habits
Stage Direction	Suddenly alert	Able to turn on a dime
Stage Direction	…Who does her best to pretend she doesn't care	Even with Vera, always has to keep up the façade
Stage Direction	Gloria digs into the dish, and bites into a chocolate	Familiar, comforting, active
Stage Direction	Gloria grabs another chocolate from the dish and pops it into her mouth	Familiar, has ownership, perfunctory sharp movements ("pop")
Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"They're questioning when, if ever, you'll lose the baby fat." (10)	Vera knows how to push Gloria's buttons, indicative of Gloria having a curvaceous figure as well as an excitable temperament
Stage Direction	Gloria sucks in her gut and spits out the chocolate	Vera's jabs hit exactly where they're aimed, and Gloria, for all her bravado, isn't one to be shown up or out done
Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"But it appears you're wearing it rather more comfortably than they'd like." (10)	Second jab at Gloria's appearance, meant to incite a response
Stage Direction	Gloria lights a cigarette and regains her composure	Always able to turn it around in her favor, Gloria resumes her glossy veneer, Vera's words can't touch her
Dialogue: Gloria to Vera	"Baby fat?! I'm not the least bit bothered. Well, I don't care! I'm "America's little sweetie pie[1]." *Photoplay* called me one of the most beautiful 'young' starlets on the scene." (10)	First mention of "America's little sweetie pie, declared by Gloria herself. She is entirely aware of the veneer and the image she portrays
Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"The red makes you look coquettish." (10) → "Marie's not supposed to appear coquettish." (10)	Vera's judgments, and honestly helpful advice, regarding Gloria's chosen wardrobe for the meeting with the film director
Stage Direction	Beneath her breath	Slip of the *real* Gloria, underneath
Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"And you might remember there's a lot I could say about your daddy, my mother's—" (11)	First spoken reference to Gloria's heritage/passing
Stage Direction	Gloria rolls her eyes and pretends to be unfazed	Clear direction her from Nottage regarding the relevance Vera's words have to Gloria, and how they are easily covered by her glossy veneer

Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"And what exactly does that say about your mother?" (11)	A familiar move in their sparring matches, Vera's jab assumes Gloria's mother's history was diverse and storied, alluding to perhaps a not-so-neat background for the privileged starlet
Stage Direction	Gloria feigns shock. Gasps.	Used to Vera's tricks and biting commentary, a familiar feeling that is not unlike her own in regard to her family; Nottage provides specific punctuation for this stage direction—pointed comment regarding the choreography of Gloria's response/movements
Stage Direction	Gloria feigns exhaustion	Just another part of the game
Stage Direction	Truthfully	A slip of the real Gloria peeking through
Stage Direction	Affecting an emotional Southern accent	As Marie, diving into character with the final lines now to prove she can
Stage Direction	Gloria smiles	Triumphant
Stage Direction	Gloria grabs the green dress and exits with a flourish[5]	Fifth use of term (synonymous phrasing), ownership, whimsy, for a moment taking Vera's advice about the dress
ACT 1, SCENE 2		
Dialogue: Vera to Lottie	"At the studio making sure Gloria didn't piss on herself." (13)	Indicative of Vera's comfort level in discussing her employer's moods/temperaments (allusion to her **dramatic** tendencies); possible way to build herself up in the eyes of her roommate while simultaneously putting down her mistress
Dialogue: Vera to Lottie	(of the cigarettes) "Nothing, I pinched them from Gloria." (13)	Vera is obviously comfortable enough with Gloria to validate stealing from her; question of respect? Or just familiarity?
Dialogue: Vera to Anna Mae	"…Gloria is having a dinner party next Sunday…" (15)	Offer to Anna Mae to help as a maid at the party
Dialogue: Vera to Lottie	"Because I know how you feel about Gloria." (15)	In response to Lottie's remarks about not being invited to work the party—indicative of Lottie's dislike of Gloria

Dialogue: Vera to Lottie	"Oh, um… a Southern epic. Nothing. You know, Gloria's testing for the lead. It's nothing." (17)	Downplaying of Gloria's involvement with *Belle of New Orleans*
Dialogue: Lottie to Vera	"So, why don't ya ask that white hussy of yours to put a word in for you?" (17)	Again, Lottie's disdain of Gloria is evident, "white hussy" being a particularly charged racial/sexually negative epithet
Dialogue: Vera to Lottie	"Gloria? It ain't worth the trouble." (17)	Response to Lottie's name-calling, but neither an acceptance of the epithet or a rebuttal of it. Does Vera think Gloria will actually help her? Or that she can't be relied on?
Dialogue: Vera to Lottie	"And… Gloria says, they wanna make a discovery." (18)	Possible evidence of Gloria's private altruism with Vera, encouraging her to go out for the role. Whatever the baggage between them, Vera at least trusts Gloria's word enough to repeat it to Lottie.
ACT I, SCENE 3		
Dialogue: Vera to Leroy	"…I'm just here working for Gloria Mitchell." (21)	Admission of her station to Leroy, Gloria is auditioning, Vera wants to audition
Dialogue: Leroy to Vera	"Gloria Mitchell?!" (21)	He knows her name, Gloria's fame precedes her
Dialogue: Vera to Leroy	"The one and only. She's inside testing for the lead for *The Belle of New Orleans*." (21)	This is the life Vera leads, she serves Gloria's needs, even if Gloria gets everything Vera wants
Dialogue: Vera to Leroy	"…She's all nerves and worries. I had the feeling she was about to yell at somebody and that somebody wasn't going to be me… I figure I've got another twenty minutes before she realizes I'm gone and all hell breaks loose." (21)	Indicative again of Gloria's **dramatic** nature; additionally indicative of how well Vera knows Gloria, her mood patterns, and her likely responses to stress
Dialogue: Leroy to Vera	"Oh I see. And so what's the role you're playing today? Gloria Mitchell's maid." (23)	An obvious dig, blatant remark on Gloria's higher status
ACT I, SCENE 4		
Stage Direction	Gloria, dressed in a glamorous red evening gown, rushes in with a	Ignored Vera's suggestion for not wearing the red dress—but then, Gloria

	decorative vase filled with azaleas. She sets the flowers on the coffee table the frantically searches the bar area.	is a red-dress-no-matter-what-the-occasion kind of woman; quick and frantic in a crisis
Stage Direction	Panicked	How she calls for Vera; she always seems to look to her in a crisis
Stage Direction	She's growing increasingly panicked, recklessly pulling things from the bar.	This is the balance in their relationship—Gloria's up, Vera's down.
Stage Direction	Gloria crumbles	So quick to fall apart—further evidence of her **dramatic** persona—always high, always moving, then deep lows
Stage Direction	Gloria snatches the bottle. She pours herself an overly generous drink.	Her movements with objects are always snappy—she "grabs" or "snatches," never "places" or "gently acquires." Gloria is no stranger to alcohol or quick shifts to get what she wants.
Stage Direction	She knocks back the drink	Real Gloria versus "America's little sweetie pie"—real Gloria is gritty, messy, her polished showbiz veneer ever the act
Dialogue: Gloria to Vera	"What? He can't see me drinking. I'm Gloria Mitchell, 'America's little sweetie pie[2]." (26)	Fully aware of the game she plays, second time this title is mentioned, and about herself. She knows her role, even if she does resent it.
Stage Direction	Gloria forces a smile and pours herself another healthy-sized drink, and knocks it back.	There's an edge here, a sliver of that grit, that sass that the Real Gloria doesn't share with Sweetie Pie Gloria.
Stage Direction	Gloria goes about making Mr. Slasvick a martini.	Per Vera's suggestion. Vera really centers her.
Stage Direction	Gloria starts to leave with the martini, then abruptly changes her mind.	Hot-cold, yes-no, up-down. Battle between RG and SPG, insecurity versus job security.
Dialogue: Gloria to Vera	"I can't go back out there. I've run out of conversation. It's awful, Vera. I went deep into my reservoir, and you know it doesn't go very deep. I can't do it—" (26)	Is she actually vapid, or is the act itself shallow and not self-sustaining? Gloria puts on like she constantly lives on the surface, but I think it's just because she keeps the things that are personal to her super private, and meticulously crafts what the rest of the world sees. It's not that she's dumb, it's that she's exceptionally smart.

Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"Honey, you know your problem, you don't realize how damn lucky you are. Mr. Slasvick's out there for the taking, and with a little flutter of your eyelashes you can have everything you want." (26)	Vera knows Gloria's game, too. Gloria gets what Gloria wants, one way or another. Definite envy.
Stage Direction	Dismissively	Nonchalance is a great pretender
Dialogue: Gloria to Vera	"Oh bother, you don't know how much work this takes. It's exhausting to be this fabulous[6]." (26)	Drama drama drama. Sixth use of term (synonymous phrasing), self-admission. It's all part of her game.
Stage Direction	Gloria is tempted to take one. She fights the impulse.	Vera is teasing her; she knows how to get her back on track.
Stage Direction	She suddenly has a fresh, brilliant idea.	Back to the highs
Stage Direction	Gloria makes a show, shedding her sheer, silky shawl.	Most pointed alliteration I've ever seen in a stage direction. DRAMA.
Stage Direction	Gloria finds her perfect lighting, and strikes a glamorous[7] pose.	Seventh use of term (synonymous phrasing), incredibly specific physical direction. This is Gloria, summed up.
Stage Direction	Gloria, tipsy, starts to leave, then notices Lottie.	Self-explanatory. She's had plenty of time to get real familiar with the gin in this scene.
Stage Direction	Gloria exits in a flurry[8] with the martini.	Eighth use of term (synonymous phrasing); Nottage likes to describe Gloria's entrances and exits as being incredibly grand and attention-catching, for one reason or another.
Dialogue: Lottie to Vera	"*(Imitating Gloria)* Vera, Vera, Vera, oh there you are, I've lost my mind and I can't find it anywhere. Help me, oh please help me[9]." (27)	Ninth use of term (synonymous phrasing through imitation); pointed fun-making. Gloria's got everybody fooled but Vera.
Stage Direction	Gloria reenters like a gust of wind[10]. She carries an empty plate.	Tenth use of term (synonymous phrasing), very specific, poetic phrasing
Stage Direction	To Lottie	A chance to assert dominance, ownership of the evening, and throw a dash of nonchalant belittling in the mix.
Stage Direction	Gloria exits in a flourish[11].	Eleventh use of term (synonymous phrasing), second time this exact phrase is used.
Stage Direction	Lottie slowly and dramatically[12] puts her maid's cap back on, and exits singing.	Twelfth use of term (synonym), through imitation. First time terminology of this kind has been attributed to Lottie.

Stage Direction	Vera smiles and picks up Gloria's shawl. She theatrically[13] drapes it around her shoulders.	Thirteenth use of term (synonym), through imitation. First time terminology of this kind has been attributed to Vera.
Dialogue: Vera, to herself	"Darling, of course I'd love to be in your picture. Do I sing? Why, of course I do[14]." (28)	Fourteenth use of term (synonymous phrasing through imitation)
Stage Direction	She dramatically[15] crossed the room and finds her light.	Fifteenth use of term, almost exact replica of an earlier direction for Gloria.
Stage Direction	She does a sexy dance[16].	Sixteenth use of term (synonymous phrasing); still in imitation, but how much is the real Vera beginning to show through?
Stage Direction	Gloria, exasperated, enters. She doesn't notice Mr. Slasvick.	Another specific entrance, and an opportunity for Gloria to make a fool of herself as RG in front of Slasvick.
Stage Direction	Gloria catches herself, and shifts into "sweetie pie[3]" mode.	Third use of term, most blatant switch between RG and SPG yet, especially as it's in front of Slasvick.
Stage Direction	Feigns surprise	Not to be 'caught' by Slasvick, Gloria takes control of her blunder in front of him, by ignoring that it happened and redirecting.
Stage Direction	Affecting innocence	Buttering Slasvick up
Stage Direction	Gloria pulls a reluctant Mr. Slasvick from his chair. He resists. The doorbell rings.	Ownership, control, establishment thereof
Stage Direction	Excited	For the presumed arrival of the director
Stage Direction	Gloria finds her light and strategically strikes a dramatic[17] pose.	Seventeenth use of term; Nottage is being as clear as ever here that Gloria's movements are by and large strategic, seemingly always.
Stage Direction	Dramatically[18]	Eighteenth use of term; greeting Maximillian
Stage Direction	Gloria makes a dramatic[19] cross	Nineteenth use of term; Gloria knows how to use the room and present herself
Stage Direction	Gloria jealously gives Anna Mae the once-over.	Gloria is not one to be outdone, and in walks competition. Of course, to Gloria, she's no *real* threat—just an obstacle in her pursuit of attention.

Dialogue: Anna Mae to Gloria	"I can' believe I'm actually meetin' 'America's lettle sweetie pie[4].'" (30)	Fourth use of term, first time someone else has said it to Gloria
Stage Direction	Sourly	Of her response to Anna Mae—she presents a threat, an obstacle in the room, so Gloria treats her with clear contempt—perfect watermark of the envious attention-hogging dame
Stage Direction	Gloria, irritated by the performance, breaks in.	She may not know Anna Mae, but she's knows an act when she sees one. Anna Mae's playing the game, too.
Stage Direction	The women watch Anna Mae with obvious contempt. Gloria's eyes fall on Anna Mae's butt, as she bends to sit.	Anna Mae is bothering more than just Gloria of the women in the room; Gloria studies her competition, making comparisons—hearkening to Vera's comment regarding Gloria's weight
Stage Direction	A little edge	She sees right through her (or what she thinks is through her)
Stage Direction	Gloria sucks in her stomach and crosses the room, trying to recapture the attention. She lights a cigarette.	Playing the game, ante-ing up
Stage Direction	Gloria makes a show of offering both men cigarettes, deliberately excluding Anna Mae as she reaches for one.	The Alpha-female establishing her dominance and marking her territory
Stage Direction	Wickedly	She sees right through Vera's game, and for the moment lets her go on with it, but certainly doesn't do anything to help her
Dialogue: Gloria to Vera	"Yes, go on, Vera. Sing us the blues, because you know them so well." (32)	Second allusion to Gloria being intimately aware of Vera's past—also an allusion to the fact that Vera's not lived a terribly hard life at all, at least not as hard as the one she's putting on she lived for show. Speaks to the history of the two women—longtime familiarity.
Stage Direction	Gloria, suddenly feeling upstaged, interjects	Taking back control, establishing her Alpha presence in the room by playing taking her own game up a notch
Stage Direction	With Southern accent	Laying it on, really performing
Stage Direction	With Southern accent	Repeated, playing right into Maximillian's fantasy without really

		caring about what he's saying, just keeping her eyes on the prize
Stage Direction	Gloria starts to exit and then stops herself.	To admonish Vera for her part in the breakup of the party
Stage Direction	Gloria exits.	First time her exit hasn't had a flair-filled qualifier—the men have left the room, there's no one in the immediate vicinity for her to impress
Dialogue: Anna Mae to Leroy, Lottie, Vera	"So, what's the big deal? Some broads dye their hair blond. And some of us are a little more 'creative.' Believe me, I ain't the only colored gal masquerading for a living. Get off my back…" (36)	Perfect script excerpt to accompany "blonde ambition" research; blatant comparison here to be drawn with Gloria, although the other characters and the audience may not be in on it yet. Vera would be piqued.
Stage Direction	Gloria, tipsy and exasperated, reenters.	Solace in gin
Stage Direction	Gloria glares at Anna Mae. The women have a silent show down.	Gloves are off, no more pretenses
Stage Direction	She notices Leroy, and pulls herself together.	Putting back on the polish and the glam for the man in the room
Stage Direction	Flirtatiously	Something to note is that, for the time period, for Gloria to be flirtatious with the black young man who's clearly the driver of her more statured guest, it would cause quite a stir. She obviously feels comfortable in this situation with him—this could be her general dramatic demeanor, always enticing, no matter who's in the room, or the fact that she's comfortable with and even possible attracted to black men, something that would be frowned upon in her "Sweetie Pie" social circles.
Stage Direction	Overtly seductive	Add that to the amount of gin she's had, and she could easily play it off as drunk flirting—but there may yet be something more underneath. In vino veritas.
Dialogue: Gloria, to the room—Leroy, Vera, Lottie	"…it's like a rent party in Harlem, where people just show up, drink your booze and pretend like they're lending you a hand." (37)	The gin has made her loose, she's slipping into Real Gloria, sharing more knowledge about her background than perhaps she ought

Dialogue: Leroy to Gloria	"What do you know about rent parties in Harlem?" (37)	Implying that such events would be well below her station, and certainly not of her demographic.
Stage Direction	Lying	Nottage minces no words here—blatant clue to the actor that Gloria's has history with this
Dialogue: Gloria to Leroy	"Absolutely nothing." (54)	We've already been informed this statement is a lie; SPG trying to cover for RG
Stage Direction	Gloria giggles, as if remembering something wonderful.	Alluding to whatever past she has with Harlem rent parties and the various people who come and go there—an old flame, perhaps
Dialogue: Vera to Leroy	"That's the official story." (37)	Not selling Gloria out, but definitely not keeping her secrets, either.
Stage Direction	She is completely liquored up	This latter section of the scene, Gloria spends a steady stream of time getting steadily more and more drunk—hence the break down between her alter ego and her actual superhero's identity
Stage Direction	Gloria slyly beckons Leroy to follow, then drunkenly exits.	Blatant flirtation, most likely made more accessible to her in her lubricated state, but even so, inviting a young black man (a driver, no less) to accompany her to her bedchamber is incredibly taboo—unless that's the sort of thing she's used to
Dialogue: Leroy to Vera	"That's 'America's sweetie pie[5]?'" (37)	Fifth use of term, second by someone other than Gloria herself, said incredulously following Gloria's less-than-couth behavior; Leroy is smart—he'll see through her in no time
Dialogue: Vera to Leroy	"Welcome to the house of mirrors..." (37)	Everything is an illusion—Gloria's persona, possibly even a hugely veiled reference to Gloria's past and their relationship
Stage Direction	Leroy pours himself a drink, takes a cigarette from Gloria's holder.	He's quickly established his own level of comfort and ownership in being able to be present with Vera in Gloria's house and drink her liquor and smoke her cigarettes
Dialogue: Vera to Leroy	"…And I got to thinking about what I'd be willing to do to have a taste of what	Privately for Vera this could be a double meaning; she's seen what she can do to

	Gloria's got. You know, be a star! And tonight I crossed a bridge, and I'm telling you, I ain't going back!" (38)	manipulate the situation around her to get what she wants, just like Gloria does—Gloria has no trouble passing, but Vera doesn't have that luxury—she must use what is available to her
ACT II, SCENE 1		
Stage Direction	Gloria, playing the role of sickly Marie, the octoroon mistress of a wealthy merchant, sits up in bed.	Excerpt from the film, *The Belle of New Orleans*; Gloria has secured the role of the lead, of course. The significance of her playing an octoroon in the film is not lost on me as the actor—the audience may not yet be fully on board with it yet, but they will be by the end of the play.
Stage Direction	Weak, struggling to speak	Marie is sick and dying
Stage Direction	Gloria coughs.	Marie is sick and dying
Dialogue: Marie (Gloria) to Cecile (Anna Mae)	"…my blood isn't pure, that it carries a drop of shame and misery. I'm an octoroon, Cecile, and eventually he will discover the truth." (39)	Spoken as Marie within the context of the film's storyline, but this is basically Gloria's exact personal history (as far as Nottage has alluded to, anyway—it is never explicitly stated); this is an important link for Gloria to make in her life and in her career
Stage Direction	Dramatic[20] music. Gloria closes her eyes.	Twentieth use of term; even in the film, Gloria is always punctuated by drama
Stage Direction	Tears shower Gloria's face.	Marie's shame for her situation, perhaps more for her pride than for the potential loss of her lover
Stage Direction	Gloria coughs, she tries to get out of bed, but doesn't have the strength.	Marie is sick and dying
Stage Direction	The music dramatically[21] punctuates her words.	Twenty-first use of term
Stage Direction	Gloria weeps.	Marie's sorrow builds as her friend leaves her
Stage Direction	Gloria registers shock and dismay.	Tilly has informed her suitor, Mr. Lafayette is here to see her
Stage Direction	Tenderly	She does love him, she just can't bear to have him see her like this, weak and dying
Stage Direction	Gloria smiles, wrestling with what to say.	Marie wants to see him, but her pride won't let her.

Stage Direction	Gloria gasps dramatically[22].	Twenty-second use of term; Marie can't bear to have him know of her condition
Stage Direction	Gloria coughs, she grows faint.	The stress over him knowing
Stage Direction	Gloria reaches out for Vera's hand.	Kindness, kinship between Marie and Tilly
Stage Direction	A long dramatic[23] pause. Close-up on Gloria's intense face, carrying the dramatic[24] burden of the moment.	Twenty-third and –fourth uses of term; this precedes the speech she rehearsed with Vera at the very opening of the play, then sloppily paraphrased, now perfectly emoted
Stage Direction	Gloria, spent, closes her eyes.	Marie's at the end, she used her last bit of energy to tell Tilly what to say to Mr. Lafayette, how he should remember her
Stage Direction	Gloria manages to say—	Marie's release, the quiet surrender a dying person makes at the very end
Stage Direction	Gloria opens her eyes.	The moment has come
Stage Direction	Triumphantly	Marie's moment of honest clarity
Dialogue: Marie (Gloria) to Tilly (Vera)	"I'm free, Tilly. I'm free." (41)	Marie's final words, rife with multiple meanings—free of sickness, free of worry, free of prejudice and judgment
Stage Direction	Gloria gently touches Vera's face. Vera takes Gloria's hand. Gloria dies. Her hand drops away from Vera's grip.	Marie dies clutching her friend Tilly; a poignant moment for the pair in the film, considering the time period, as well as a poignant moment for the two women as actors
Dialogue: Herb to Colloquium Audience	"Marie is played by Gloria Mitchell, 'America's little sweetie pie[6]'…" (42)	Sixth use of term; the film is being discussed at the 2003 Hollywood colloquium for themes of race and gender
Stage Direction	A still of Vera tightening Gloria's corset.	From the film, parallel relationship of "missy and mammy"
Dialogue: Herb to Colloquium Audience	"In the early thirties, Hollywood was beginning to push boundaries, black folks were cavorting on screen, women were stripping out of their stockings an exploring their… sexuality. And, thankfully, *The Belle of New Orleans* was made in this pre-code Hollywood, thus the relationship between the two women on screen is more tender and textured than anything we'll see	The majority of act two is set up to parallel the relationship between Gloria and Vera to that of their fictional counterparts, Marie and Tilly; the reveal of Marie's identity parallels the quasi-reveal of Gloria's—only at the end of the actual play, *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark*, do we get a sense of who Gloria really is, and who Vera really is to her

	between races until the fifties… In fact, it's only near the end of the film that we discover Marie's true racial identity. She's an octoroon." (42)	
ACT II, SCENE ii		
Stage Direction	Vera Stark in her early 60s, sexy, ebullient, and hardened by booze, enters, dressed to kill. She makes a grand entrance, ravenously absorbing the applause… Vera makes an elaborate show of her dress.[25]	Twenty-fifth use of term (synonymous phrasing), this time for Vera—second usage for Vera within the play, but this time not as an imitation of Gloria—she has now become, in some way, a version of Gloria
Stage Direction	Flirtatiously / Dramatically[26]	Twenty-sixth use of term, third time for Vera
Dialogue: Brad to Vera	"I mean, everyone's 'little sweetie pie[7]' Gloria Mitchell, just magical…" (45)	Seventh use of term
Dialogue: Leroy to Interviewer	"You want the truth? Ask Vera about Gloria Mitchell, if you really want to know about the Hollywood game?" (50)	Leroy strongly hints at the secret between Vera and Gloria that is their relation and shared heritage; by the time this interview was taken, Vera had risen to stardom through Gloria and *TBONO* fame, and they spent the remainder of their careers tied up with one another, no matter how much distance they put between them
ACT II, SCENE iii		
Dialogue: Brad to Vera	"And I have someone else who is very eager to join us. Vera, an old friend of yours found out that you were on the show and insisted on joining us." (51)	This begs the question why, after something around 20 years since the last time they've seen each other, Gloria would use this avenue to have her grand reunion with Vera; it's on live television during an interview, definitely for the wow-factor, but it's not at all private or personal—what would have motivated Gloria to choose this particular time and place? Is it out of convenience, that drama is truly the only thing she knows now, having lived it for so long, that she can't be real and intimate with someone who knows her as well as Vera anymore? Or is this the only way she can get Vera to see her?

Dialogue: Brad to Studio Audience	"Please give a warm round of applause to 'America's original sweetie pie[8]''—Gloria Mitchell." (77)	Eighth use of term, morphed now into "original," indicative of Gloria's considerable influence on the industry and the sweet film ingénue type itself
Stage Direction	Gloria, sixties, wearing a red dress, a fabulous fur coat, dressed to kill and smoking a cigarette. She has a tinge of a British accent from years of living abroad.[27]	Twenty-seventh use of term (synonymous phrasing); "dressed to kill" used to describe both women; Gloria is never one to miss the opportunity to make a grand entrance
Stage Direction	Dramatically[28]	Twenty-eighth use of term; some things never change
Stage Direction	The two women embrace.	I wonder how easy this embrace will be, how charged or genuine it will feel—it is interesting to see that Nottage here has left this up to interpretation by the director/actors without qualifiers, when so much else is scripted
Stage Direction	Gloria shows off her fur coat.	Gloria never misses an moment to shine
Stage Direction	Gloria gives Vera her handbag to hold as she takes off her coat. A moment. The women sit.	Old habits die hard; "a moment"—choice for the director/actors to play how this moment is different from the hug a few lines up
Stage Direction	Gloria waves to the audience. Vera rolls her eyes.	Same old, same old; always a magnet for attention
Dialogue: Vera to Brad, Studio Audience	"Don't believe her—this woman came out the womb wearing pearls and a fur coat." (52)	Vera's old jokes are back—a little cut to them, but generally supportive
Stage Direction	Gloria laughs, basking in the audience applause.	Genuinely enjoying the attention, and the "help from her scene partner," as it were
Dialogue: Vera to Brad	"Gloria caught a break, and I had to catch the bus to work every day, honey. It was the Depression…" (52)	First time Vera starts to get real about life with Gloria, and in front of a live audience to boot; possible double meaning regarding Gloria's fortune in being able to get away
Stage Direction	Gloria laughs uncomfortably.	Vera's starting to hit on the real story, a touchy subject Gloria clearly had no intention of discussing here or anywhere
Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"And tell 'em the truth, we go a little further back than that." (52)	Vera is clearly pushing Gloria into dangerous territory she doesn't want to be in; is it because Vera's lost her

		censorship in her career? Or is she getting back at Gloria for making their first reunion in twenty years a surprise TV interview? Both?
Stage Direction	A moment.	Uncomfortable silence/stillness—what lies within the unspoken?
Stage Direction	Gloria launches into an old African-American vaudeville song like "I'm Just Wild About Harry."	Her ability to turn on a dime and change the subject to fit her needs is still as sharp as ever; Nottage included the qualifier "African-American" for a reason
Stage Direction	The women joyfully sing together.	The two sing together, for the first time in ages; a familiar event that must be emotionally charged
Stage Direction	They battle for the spotlight.	Twenty years and still in competition
Stage Direction	Applause. The women hug.	There is more than just perfunctory camera-readiness here for these two, but the tension between them is so hot and cold—Nottage is revealing a large width of gray in which they exist together
Dialogue: Brad to Gloria, Vera	"…It's fascinating, I didn't realize the circuit was integrated back when you two were performing as children." (53)	Fifty years late, Brad is ignorant of what he's just said that could ignite a world of personal pain and historically social taboos
Stage Direction	A moment. Vera glances at Gloria for a response.	Vera may be inadvertently trying to 'out' Gloria, but she's not going to push farther than what Gloria herself is willing to share; she stills looks to her to gauge where this will go
Stage Direction	Gloria is clearly growing uncomfortable.	Vera keeps pushing the issue—and perhaps her years away from Gloria and of jaded cynicism with the industry have made her less capable of being able to cater to the social needs of others—she's not getting Gloria's vibes of evasion, whether on purpose or just because it's become a habit, I'm not sure
Stage Direction	Applause. Gloria acknowledges the audience.	Always one to thank her adoring fans
Stage Direction	Whispers.	She is genuinely thankful for receiving thing medal of honor—she fought long

		and hard for her career, and she's finally getting recognition from the academy
Stage Direction	She takes Vera's hand.	There is solidarity here, genuine affection for her friend, even under layers of pretense for the cameras
Stage Direction	A projected slide of Vera and Gloria in *The Belle of New Orleans*.	The film that made them what they are, the relationship parallel they can never escape
Dialogue: Vera to Brad, Studio Audience	"She won't tell you this, but Gloria gained fifteen pounds while we were filming this picture…" (54)	Definitely putting Gloria on the spot, in a pointed and borderline harsh way; Vera doesn't seem to want to let Gloria get away with any of her old tricks in this interview
Stage Direction	A moment.	In response to Brad's comment about the criticism of Tilly in the film; Gloria speaks honestly and humbly, defending Vera's portrayal as raising the bar for all of them
Dialogue: Carmen to Afua, Herb	"…But, she talked mostly about her cousin, sometimes with disgust, sometimes with awe. A girl who she performed with in the early days on the vaudeville circuit, when the Stark family had a popular song-and-dance team. Vera seemed to suggest that her cousin had the career that she herself deserved." (56)	Carmen's tale is not entirely believable, but this piece of commentary seems very much like it could perfectly describe the relationship between Vera and Gloria, and explain their hidden history; Nottage has done an incredible job here heavily insinuating Gloria and Vera's connection without ever outright stating it—she has sown just enough reasonable doubt that the reader is never quite sure
Dialogue: Herb to Carmen	"It's a wonderful book by the way, and in it you claim that Vera's cousin was none other than the screen legend… Gloria Mitchell." (56-57)	The first outright mention of the idea in the play, to be immediately contended by Afua
Dialogue: Afua to Carmen	"There's no written or anecdotal evidence to support this claim." (57)	Factually true
Dialogue: Afua to Carmen	"In fact, we know that Vera worked as Gloria's maid, and as to the nature of their relationship, I think it's safe to say that it was probably that of mistress and servant. Missy and mammy." (57)	Afua relies on factual evidence of their connection, and entirely disagrees with Carmen's claims—Nottage's reasonable doubt at work

Dialogue: Herb to Afua, Carmen	"Interesting. In Dr. Eugene Clarkson's book *Sexual Misadventures in Black Hollywood* it's suggested that Gloria and Vera were lesbian lovers…" (57)	A third version of events, one that seems altogether crazy, but *could* very well be true—it may not have happened on stage in front of the audience, but that doesn't mean it isn't a part of the characters' history
Dialogue: Carmen to Herb	"No, Herb, I've made a very strong case for them being cousins." (57)	I wonder if she did any research on the culture of racial passing in the early twentieth century
Dialogue: Herb to Carmen	"Kissing cousins." (57)	A well-timed joke, possibly a more serious dismissal of Carmen's hypothesis
Dialogue: Carmen to Herb, Afua	"Cousins. The interview is very telling. Cousins. And I think we miss something key, if we don't examine their careers in that context…" (57)	A brilliant point is made here—why the years of competition between the two, why the long history of them performing together, why are they thrown together time and time again, if not for something that potentially goes blood deep?
Dialogue: Afua to Carmen	"…I know how strongly you feel about this, but I disagree. As a black lesbian, I want nothing more than to claim Vera. But, yo, can Vera not exist without a relationship to Gloria? C'mon, y'all, why do my colleagues insist on framing the conversation in these reductionist terms. I'm not gonna allow Gloria to hijack our discussion about Vera. It's too easy. White women hijacked Vera's career. Fuck Gloria Mitchell!" (57)	An equally compelling argument—this goes beyond the general nature of how they knew each other, it's the fact that Vera's entire career was confined within the shadow of Gloria's; this is where the conversation turns to agency and exploitation—a white body is elevated above a black body, and the historical context here cannot be ignored
Dialogue: Brad to Gloria, Vera	"…You've both had really interesting and varied careers. Gloria, you were one of the biggest and brightest stars in Hollywood, and Vera, well, you… you lit up scenes with your memorable sassy presence…" (57-58)	The perfect follow-up to Afua's cue; even here, when the interview started out as Vera's, Gloria's accomplishments are now elevated above hers
Dialogue: Gloria to Brad, Vera, Studio Audience	"Before you finish, can I share a terrible secret with the audience? / No, let me finish— / I… I wasn't going to share this, but the moment seems right." (58)	Gloria is seemingly taking a moment of true humility to reveal something personal, something that seems to matter very much to Vera; the truth of her identity/their relationship?

Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"…Gloria? / What are— / Honey, here, now? If you—" (58)	There is so much tenderness, and so much hope in what Vera thinks Gloria is about to say; as if she's been counting on this moment, this confession, all these years
Dialogue: Gloria to Vera, Brad, Studio Audience	"No, let me. I've been hesitant to say this for a long time. And I think I owe my fans and everyone here the truth. I… I am… formally retiring from acting. Yes. / And I wanted to say, here live on television, that I owe a great deal to this marvelous woman. Vera, I know I should have told you that years ago." (58)	Not at all what Vera was expecting—if we do assume that Gloria was potentially about to expose her secret, the truth of her past and of her relationship to Vera, then why did she stop? Did she ever really mean to out herself, to reveal her past, or was she truly trying to come clean, and just couldn't out of fear?
Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"Oh, stop the theatrics[29], you're not auditioning for anything." (58)	Twenty-ninth use of term (synonymous phrasing); full of poison, blatantly calling Gloria's confession of retirement a shoddy performance
Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"…You couldn't give up acting if your life depended on it. And you know exactly what I'm talking about!" (58)	Exceedingly clear, Vera is completely calling Gloria out on her lies and hiding her past—best of all on live TV
Stage Direction	Exasperated, old Gloria creeps in	Dramatic and vilifying
Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	*(Shouts)* "You have no idea what it was like for me!" (59)	Each stance valid, each defending the hardships they suffered, because they did both suffer, albeit differently
Dialogue: Gloria to Vera	*(Shouts)* "You have no idea what it was like for me!" (59)	Each stance valid, each defending the hardships they suffered, because they did both suffer, albeit differently
Stage Direction	The women rise with their emotions.	The climax of their fifty-year war
Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"'America's little sweetie pie[9]'! I cleaned up after you, didn't I? Just quietly watched you do what you had to do. And I know what you did, honey." (59)	Ninth use of term, first with vitriol; Vera is the one person who knows all of Gloria's secrets, who could air every single piece of dirty laundry Gloria's ever owned, and she uses this information as a bargaining tool and as a weapon
Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"But, I didn't say anything, waiting, hoping that you'd— / Your success meant the world to me, but never once did you turn back around to consider the rest [of] us—" (59)	Vera kept Gloria's secrets; who are "the rest of us"? Is it a general statement, for those Gloria left behind career-wise? Or "the rest of us" meaning her family? The family she and Vera shared, the family Gloria most certainly left, and never again returned to?

Stage Direction	Recovering.	Brad has stopped the escalating volcanic activity, and the women, remembering where they are, return to themselves; Gloria regains composure as Brad shifts the conversation, no doubt breathless and worn from her gladiatorial showdown with Vera
Dialogue: Gloria to Vera	"Oh, darling, if people only knew what it was like at the beginning. / Forgive me, Vera? / Oh, for not being better in touch. For taking you for granted all of these years. I wish things had… well… I missed you, terribly." (59-60)	I believe this is the most humble and genuine attempt to encompass the past fifty years' worth of pain and heartache with Vera within a single apology from Gloria—it doesn't begin to cover it, and it's barely specific enough to mean anything, but in this moment, because what she's asking forgiveness for is just too huge, it's all she can manage right now, and I think Vera understands that; Real Gloria has come a long way from Sweetie Pie Gloria
Stage Direction	Gloria takes Vera's hand.	The familiar gesture that has connected the two of them for decades now, on screen and off; kinship, sisterhood
Dialogue: Afua to Herb, Carmen	"Because, when I watch Vera act, I'm watching a young woman, an artist, grappling with representations of self. Who am I? Who am I?—" (60)	A statement that describes them both; who *are* these women?
Dialogue: Carmen to Herb, Afua	"…but ultimately she was… was denied agency." (60)	Carmen now echoes Afua's argument from earlier—Vera was constantly framed in relation to Gloria; the white body was exalted above the black body, on screen, off screen, everywhere and by everyone; their gender may have tied them together, but their race tore them apart
Stage Direction	Light shift. The movie. Black-and-white. *The Belle of New* Orleans. A richly appointed Southern boudoir, circa 1855. Gloria, playing the role of sickly Marie, the octoroon mistress of a wealthy merchant, sits up in bed.	Shifting back to the film, now being shown on stage, acted side by side the screened images; revealing what really went on during filming for the first time in our story
Stage Direction	The women step offscreen and onto the stage: Young Vera and Gloria from	Move backward in time, about to capture a private moment between

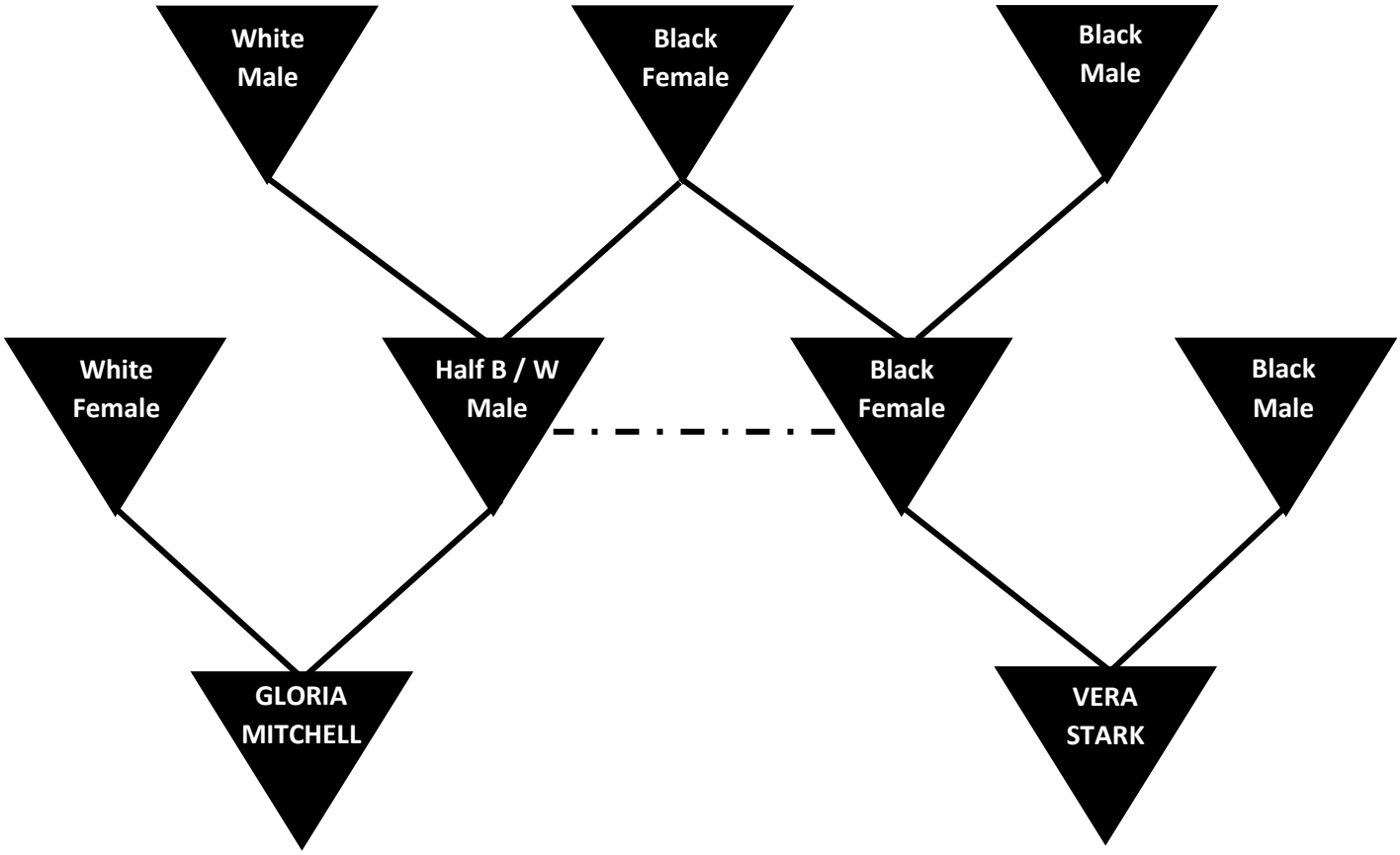
	The Belle of New Orleans. Activity whirls around them, cameras shift.	Gloria and Vera that existed only for them
Stage Direction	Gloria smiles.	A good-natured laugh at Vera's suggestion to run lines
Dialogue: Gloria to Vera	"I was just thinking what if… that's all, what if… you know, what if we'd stayed back in Brooklyn with Granny and whole crew. You know. It's funny how things work out." (62)	First truly clear admittance of Gloria's relationship to Vera in the play, and the first time Gloria has even hinted at it herself; if we assume truth from their first scene at the start of the play together, where Vera mention Gloria's father as being somehow connected to her mother, then we can take the context of "Granny" here to mean that Gloria and Vera very well had the same grandmother—making them cousins, by blood
Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"Well, what if in that moment Marie is sharing with Tilly what it means to be free of slavery. You know: *free*." (62)	Hugely significant character choice to connect Tilly and Marie, as a parallel to Vera and Gloria
Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"Yes, Marie is finally liberated, and she's telling Tilly for the first time what it means to be free of prejudice. Truly free." (62)	This is an incredible moment for the two of them, as it completely and immediately parallels exactly what Vera would want from Gloria, more than anything in the world—Vera would want Gloria to tell her that she, too, suffered, and that she has finally found what it means to be *free*—free enough for both of them
Dialogue: Gloria to Vera	"But, for God's sake, how will anybody know that?" (62)	Gloria's not quite there with the significance of what Vera is suggesting
Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"We will." (62)	She offers Gloria the last piece of the puzzle; an intimate offering of their sisterhood bond through this on-screen moment
Stage Direction	A moment.	It sinks in for Gloria
Stage Direction	Emotional.	It hits Gloria in her heart, the Real Gloria, no pretenses about her, and she accepts Vera's offering—reminiscent of the numerous times she's reached out to clasp Vera's hand in solidarity
Stage Direction	Gloria thinks. Contemplates.	She's mulling over how to infuse the line with the meaning they want

Stage Direction	Gloria makes an adjustment.	After a line reading, she modifies, and finds it—the perfect infusing of the heart of her connection with Vera with the last line her character speaks
Dialogue: Gloria to Vera	"I'm free, Tilly. I'm free." (62)	I'm free, Vera. I'm free.
Dialogue: Vera to Gloria	"Stay awake… and together we'll face a new day." (62)	Stay with me, and together we'll find our place in the world.
Stage Direction	The women step back into *The Belle of New Orleans.*	Their private moment secured, they return to the realm of fantasy, bonded together as sisters in their special, shared secret
END OF PLAY		

SUMMARY:	**Usage of the term "dramatic" = 29**
	Usage of moniker "America's little sweetie pie" = 9
	Evidence of racial passing / relation to Vera = 54

GLORIA AND VERA: POSSIBLE FAMILY TREE

EXAMINATION OF RELATIONSHIP AND MIXED RACIAL HERITAGE



Gloria and Vera are related via their father and mother, respectively, who are half siblings;

Gloria's father being of mixed racial descent, while Vera's mother is not.

"Vera: …there's a lot I could say about your daddy, my mother's—
Gloria: …And really, no one has ever been a hundred percent sure he was my daddy.
Vera: And what exactly does that say about your mother?"

(Nottage 11)

TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL EVENTS IN THE U.S.: 1953 – 1973

WHAT GLORIA WOULD HAVE MISSED DURING THE LONDON YEARS

Early 1953 – Gloria Mitchell marries Malcolm Braithwaite, conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, and moves with him to London. She leaves Vera, hoping this change with do both of them good. She promises to write.

October 30, 1953 - The Cold War continues in earnest when President Dwight D. Eisenhower approves a top secret document stating that the U.S. nuclear arsenal must be expanded to combat the communist threat around the world.

December 30, 1953 - The first color televisions go on sale.

April 22, 1954 - Joseph McCarthy begins televised Senate hearings into alleged Communist influence in the United States Army. Later this year, on December 2, the U.S. Congress votes to condemn Senator McCarthy for his conduct during the Army investigation hearings.

May 17, 1954 - Racial segregation in public schools is declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court in Brown vs. the Board of Education. The ruling of the court stated that racial segregation violated the 14th Amendment's clause that guaranteed equal protection. The Monroe School in Topeka, Kansas had segregated Linda Brown in its classes.

May 31, 1955 - The Supreme Court of the United States orders that all public schools be integrated with deliberate speed.

December 1, 1955 - Rosa Parks, an African American seamstress, refuses to give up her seat on the bus to a white man, prompting a boycott that would lead to the declaration that bus segregation laws were unconstitutional by a federal court.

March 12, 1956 - Congressmen from Southern states call for massive resistance, the Southern Manifesto, to the Supreme Court ruling on desegregation.

June 29, 1956 - Interstate highway system begins with the signing of the Federal-Aid Highway Act. The interstate highway system would enable quick and efficient travel for business and leisure travelers and make destinations like Disneyland and the National Park system more easily connected to the urban population centers of the USA.

September 25, 1956 - The first transatlantic telephone cable began operation.

Eventually making international telephone calls possible, but not until 1971. Gloria would have to write to Vera to contact her prior to international calling.

January 20, 1957 - President Dwight D. Eisenhower is inaugurated for his second term in office.

April 29, 1957 - U.S. Congress approves the first civil rights bill since reconstruction with additional protection of voting rights.

September 4, 1957 - National Guard called to duty by Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus to bar nine black students from attending previously all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. He withdrew the troops on September 21 and the students were allowed entrance to class two days later. A threat of violence caused President Eisenhower to dispatch federal troops to Little Rock on September 24 to enforce the edict.

December 10, 1958 - Jet airline passenger service is inaugurated in the United States by National Airlines with a flight between New York City and Miami, Florida.

February 1, 1960 - Four black college students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro, North Carolina stage a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth lunch counter, protesting their denial of service. This action caused a national campaign, waged by seventy-thousand students, both white and black, over the next eight months, in sit-ins across the nation for Civil Rights.

November 8, 1960 - The presidential race to succeed two term president Dwight D. Eisenhower is won by Senator John F. Kennedy, the Democratic candidate from Massachusetts, over incumbent Vice President Richard M. Nixon. Kennedy was a narrow victor in the popular vote, by slightly more than 120,000 votes, but won a more substantial victory in the Electoral College tally, 303 to 219. 62.8% of the voting age population took part in the contest. The 1960 campaign for president had seen the first televised debate on September 26.

April 17, 1961 - The Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba is repulsed by Cuban forces in an attempt by Cuban exiles under the direction of the United States government to overthrow the regime of Fidel Castro.

August 13, 1961 - The construction of the Berlin Wall begins by the Soviet bloc, segregating the German city, previously held in four sectors by Allied forces, including the United States. The wall would last for twenty-eight years.

February 7, 1962 - The first sign of a looming Vietnam conflict emerges when President Kennedy admits that the military advisors already in Vietnam would engage the enemy if fired upon.

October 1, 1962 - Three thousand troops quell riots, allowing James Meredith to enter the University of Mississippi as the first black student under guard by Federal marshals.

August 28, 1963 - The Civil Rights march on Washington, D.C. for Jobs and Freedom culminates with Dr. Martin Luther King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Over 200,000 people participated in the march for equal rights.

November 22, 1963 - In Dallas, Texas, during a motorcade through downtown, President John F. Kennedy is mortally wounded by assassin Lee Harvey Oswald. Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson is sworn into office later that day. Two days later, Oswald was himself killed on live national television by Jack Ruby while being transported in police custody.

June 29, 1964 - An omnibus legislation in the U.S. Congress on Civil Rights is passed. It banned discrimination in jobs, voting and accommodations.

March 25, 1965 - Martin Luther King speaks at a civil rights rally on the courthouse steps of the Alabama State Capitol, ending the Selma to Montgomery, Alabama march for voting rights.

Vera Stark marched with Dr. King – Gloria would not have known, but would have been watching the progression of this battle in international news.

August 6, 1965 - The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Two significant portions of the act; the outlawing of the requirement of potential voters to take a literacy test in order to qualify and the provision of federal registration of voters in areas with less than 50% of all voters registered.

August 11, 1965 - The Watts race riots in Los Angeles begin a five day siege, culminating in the death of thirty-four people and property destruction in excess of $200 million.

June 29, 1966 - United States warplanes begin their bombing raids of Hanoi and Haiphong, North Vietnam. By December of this year, the United States had 385,300 troops stationed in South Vietnam with sixty thousand additional troops offshore and thirty-three thousand in Thailand.

November 8, 1966 - The first black United States Senator in eighty-five years, Edward Brooke, is elected to Congress. Brooke was the Republican candidate from Massachusetts and former Attorney General of that state.

January 27, 1967 - The Outer Space Treaty is signed into force by the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, to take effect on October 10, 1967.

July 1967 - Black riots plague U.S. cities. In Newark, New Jersey, twenty-six are killed, fifteen hundred injured and one thousand arrested from July 12 to 17. One week later, July 23 to 30, forty are killed, two thousand injured, and five thousand left homeless after rioting in Detroit, known as the 12th Street Riots, decimate a black ghetto. The riots are eventually stopped by over 12,500 Federal troopers and National Guardsmen.

October 2, 1967 - Thurgood Marshall is sworn into office as the first black Supreme Court Justice.

March 31, 1968 - President Johnson announces a slowing to the bombing of North Vietnam, and that he would not seek reelection as president. Peace talks would begin May 10 in Paris; all bombing of North Korea halted October 31.

April 4, 1968 - Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee while standing on a motel balcony by James Earl Ray.

Definitely a story Gloria would have followed with a heavy heart.

June 5, 1968 - Presidential candidate, the Democratic Senator from New York, Robert F. Kennedy, is shot at a campaign victory celebration in Los Angeles by Sirhan Sirhan, a Jordanian, after primary victories, and dies one day later.

November 5, 1968 - Richard M. Nixon recaptures the White House from the Democratic party with his victory of Hubert H. Humphrey and 3rd Party candidate George Wallace. Nixon captures 301 Electoral College Votes to 191 for Humphrey and 46 for Wallace.

November 20, 1969 - Alcatraz Island, the former prison in San Francisco Bay, is occupied by fourteen American Indians in a long standoff over the issues of Indian causes.

May 4, 1970 - Four students from Kent State University in Ohio were killed and nine wounded by National Guardsmen during a protest against the Vietnam War spread into Cambodia.

1971 - Transatlantic dialing was extended. Six British cities (Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool, London and Manchester) were able to dial direct to the whole of the mainland of the USA by dialing 0101 followed by the USA area code and local number. [1]

Gloria is finally able to phone the US from London – but is never able to reach Vera at any of the old places.

June 17, 1972 - The Watergate crisis begins when four men are arrested for breaking into the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate office building in Washington, D.C. on the same day that Okinawa is returned from U.S. control back to Japan.

January 22, 1973 - The United States Supreme Court rules in Roe vs. Wade that a woman cannot be prevented by a state in having an abortion during the first six months of pregnancy.

Spring 1973 – Gloria flies from London to Los Angeles, to accept her award from the United Motion Pictures Association, and to surprise Vera on Brad Donovan's popular talk show.

The span of time Gloria would have been gone from the United States exactly bookends the majority of the civil rights movement, all the way up until the equality movement begins to shift (even if only slightly) from skin color to gender. The 1970s are when feminism and female bodily autonomy are really starting to pick up steam in the social realm. Lynn was very clever to span Gloria's timeline in this way, even down to 1973 being the same year Roe vs. Wade occurred. I think the significance of this is twofold: Gloria had no idea if racial equality would ever even be fully achieved, so when she met Malcolm and decided to go back with him to London, it seemed a welcome respite from the tense cultural climate she was leaving. On the other side, it gave Vera the space to fully exist on her own, without Gloria's physical shadow hanging over her, so when Gloria returns on *The Brad Donovan Show*, it is even more evident how much she has missed in the meantime, and how so very separate she and Vera are at this point in their lives. It brings an even more piercing poignancy and sting to their reunion.

[1] *UK Telephone History.* Last revised Dec. 20, 2010. http://www.britishtelephones.com/histuk.htm. Web Jan. 24, 2015.

U.S. Timeline. *America's Best History.* Copyright 2014. http://americasbesthistory.com/abhtimeline.html. Web Jan. 24, 2015.