

ECONOMIC AND SPATIAL (IM)MOBILITY IN MARI EVANS'S *STATIONS*:
A QUESTION OF ETHOS

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Abstract

This project examines Mari Evans's definition of Ethos as "the environmental laboratory," the literal and figurative space of African American identity where lived and recorded experiences are subject to manipulation and adjustment by the dominant group. By analyzing the events of her theatre piece *Stations*, I demonstrate that Evans is justified in contesting the popular belief that the African American citizen of Reagan-era America had the freedom in the 1980s to live the American Dream of economic mobility regardless of societal pressures. I further argue that spatial mobility ("freedom of movement") is actually non-existent during this time period as opposed to Evans's belief that it is merely "threatened" by the hegemonic institution of the State. I examine how the Winters family in *Stations* subverts the stereotype of being untrustworthy citizens and analyze how Ethos has affected their perceptions of themselves and other African Americans.

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Framing the Question of Ethos for the African American Writer and the Citizen

One inescapable truth that has been hard to accept is that little has changed in the United States in terms of race. Poet, essayist, and playwright Mari Evans puts it this way: “Black life *is* drama, brutal and compelling” for every Black citizen in America (“My Father’s Passage” 19). No matter the circumstance, racial discourse continues to permeate local, regional, and national American culture and still works to prevent many African Americans from achieving economic, social, cultural, and political consciousness. In her 1989 essay, “Where we Live: The Importance of Ethos to Creativity,” Mari Evans presents her understanding of her own experience with Blackness in relation to poet Lebert Bethune’s defining statement, “Black is my colour”:

It defines who I am in Indianapolis [Evans writes]. It shapes the nature of my creativity, influences whether I am creative, and in the final analysis determines how my creativity is received, whether space is made, and whether I can draw from the atmosphere the nurturing I require to be the most of who I am. (“Where We Live” 21)

For Evans, racial identity informs not only who she is as a person, but who she is as a political writer, artist, and activist. Evans believes that the Ethos of the African American artist—the credibility afforded to that artist based on what s/he communicates and how his/her racial identity relates to the content of that message—allows one to succeed or fail as the work becomes accessible to larger publics.

Ethos, as an expression of African American experience, emerges in “the environmental laboratory within which creativity, whether positive or negative[,] roots, and is, or is not

nurtured” (“Where We Live” 22). The creativity of the Black artist in America is often limited by the dominant culture based on what is deemed acceptable for the public to consume. The voice and message of the African American writer are stifled to serve the needs of the dominant discourse. Lois Tyson writes, “until the mid-twentieth century, black writers had to treat [the subject of combined racism, classism and sexism] carefully or encode it in their writing...in order to be published by white editors and read by white audiences” (389). Evans notes that many African American writers still cannot “explicitly...speak their truths” in a post-Civil Rights era without fear of losing the right to their voice (“My Father’s Passage” 19). For the African American writer, the truth s/he speaks is relative to who does or does not value it. When an African American political writer reveals to his/her primary audience the realities of racial dominance and oppression in America, it unites African Americans under a common cause—to end oppression by any means necessary. Not only will this create intra-racial unity, but it will allow the mobilization needed to incite desired change (whether or not there is a presence of White assistance in this change). Thus, by discrediting the individual Black experience, White publishers are in effect marginalizing and/or controlling the Ethos of Black writers. The writer is wrongly accused of “pulling the race card” when s/he speaks the truths of his/her experience, causing him/her to doubt him/herself and/or react in anger.

For Evans, and, historically, for a large percentage of African American artists, it has not only been difficult to avoid altering their writing due to hegemonic influence but also to know whether their messages have achieved true clarity. In a personal interview with me on March 18, 2013, Evans spoke on the topic of miscommunication in relation to basic conversation: “We use language to talk past each other. It is not that we connect a whole lot because we define things differently, we use the language differently; even though we think we’re talking the same

language, we really are not because of our definitions” (8). Evans explains that audience perception is key to the interpretation of a given message. A breakdown in communication can occur when the writer’s affect (emotional response through verbal and nonverbal means) or the message’s linguistic content is misinterpreted by the reader of the message. If a reader of the message misinterprets the message and communicates his interpretation to a new audience, the reader not only revises the original message but affects his audience’s perceptions of the writer. When a particular interpretation is highly disseminated and favored by many audiences, this (mis)interpretation becomes collective belief or “truth,” making it difficult for the writer to communicate what s/he desires and to maintain credibility with his/her audience. Collective “truth” can also serve to classify or categorize a writer, forever branding him/her identity to a particular genre, theme, or ideology.

The multitude of messages that Evans sends to her readers, and the array of genres in which she presents these messages, have caused many readers within and outside of her local community to misinterpret her work as being homogenous inappropriately categorize her oeuvre to a fixed literary period and political ideology. For the majority of Evans’s career, she has been classified as a poet associated with the Black Arts Movement (BAM) and wrongly termed as a feminist writer. Evans gained critical attention for her poetry collection *I Am a Black Woman* when it was published by William Morrow and Company in 1970 near the end of the Black Arts Movement. This body of poetry has largely defined Evans’s identity in the poetic community. Haki Madhubuti wrote on the back cover of the collection that “The lines [of Evans’s poetry] don’t jump off the page, wolfing ‘bout blackness’ but rather stretch out in feminine waves to entice ‘an undying love.’ Her waves, though softly feminine, are black woman movements and therefore are strong and angular like Mari herself—we look on her and are renewed, positively

renewed” (qtd in *Black Woman*). Madhubuti’s testimonial to Evans’s collection (as well as the other two testimonials on the back cover) causes audiences to define the purpose of her writing, her audience, and her writing style. From the first line of his accolade, readers can see that Madhubuti is comparing Evans’s work to the Black Arts Movement—“the lines don’t jump off the page, wolfing ‘bout blackness”—portraying the Black Arts Movement as a loud, vibrant, and violent rhetoric and explaining that Evans’s style is possibly different because she has a feminine perspective. Madhubuti’s statement that “[Evans’s] waves, though softly feminine, are black woman movements and therefore strong and angular” (qtd in *Black Woman*) implies that African American women, like Evans, have a unique quality to their femininity that other women do not.

Although Madhubuti’s accolade attributes many strengths to Evans’s writing and the credibility of her character and African American women in general, the linguistic content of the message allows readers to somewhat misinterpret Evans’s goals and misrepresent who and what she stands for as a political writer. Madhubuti rightly claims that Evans’s writing is somewhat different from the Black Arts canon, even though many critics after Madhubuti have tried to place her oeuvre in the canon by anthologizing her poetry in BAM collections. Kristin L. Matthews, in her article “Neither Inside nor Outside: Mari Evans, the Black Aesthetic, and the Canon,” notes that Mari Evans aligns with Black Arts sentiment in that she calls “the people to view the nature of their oppression, identify their oppressor and advocate for their freedom by whatever means necessary” (qtd in Matthews 35). However, Matthews sharpens Madhubuti’s idea that Evans’s writing is different by enumerating the three ways in which Evans’s ideology departs from the Black Arts Movement. First she is “wary of an essential Blackness” (Matthews 35). Evans believes that the Black Experience is not monolithic, that she can speak based only on

her own experience. Second, Evans's intended audience is different from those of other BAM writers. Phillip Brian Harper describes Black Arts poetry as "meant to be heard by blacks and overheard by Whites", but he concedes that "it... achieves its maximum impact in a context in which it is understood as being heard directly by Whites and overheard by blacks" (247). Yet, Evans mentions in her essay "My Father's Passage" that she "write[s]... Reaching for what will nod Black heads over common denominators... according to the title of poet Margaret Walker's classic: 'For My People'" (18). Evans attributes her writing to the poem's title because, like Walker in "For My People", she writes primarily for an African American audience. Evans has "no objections" to members outside the African American community enjoying her works but calls such cases "serendipity." Third, Matthews notes that, even though Evans writes about many Black Arts themes, she also writes outside of these themes, particularly about personal struggles—love, acceptance, loss, and individual experience. Thus, Evans runs a risk as an "insider/outsider" of the Black Arts community, as Matthews calls her.

Both Madhubuti and Matthews work hard to define the differences in Evans's writing, but, nevertheless, overlook two important qualities of Evans's writing: 1) Evans's work is just as powerful as her male counterparts, and 2) Evans does not write solely for women. First, Madhubuti implies that Evans writes her poetry in soft, feminine waves (*Black Woman*). Sometimes Evans does write her poetry in a softer voice, such as in her poems "Into Blackness Softly" and "Where Have You Gone," but in other cases Evans writes in a strong, powerful, and challenging voice such as "status symbol," "I Am a Black Woman," and "Vive, Noir!". Madhubuti may be implying that Evans's voice is "softer" because she does not usually write using profanity as many of her male counterparts during the movement have. Nevertheless, many of Evans's poems are just as powerful as her male counterparts' without using profanity, and not

every piece by male poets of the BAM can be considered strictly “powerful.” Second, in an attempt to define Evans separately from other writers, Madhubuti has confined Evans to the role of spokesperson for Black women’s rights (a misinterpretation that Matthews overlooks). In my interview with Evans on March 18, 2013, she stated that “I never became a feminist because I never felt I had much in common with ladies” (14). Evans sees herself as a writer for African peoples, not strictly women. She notes that if she writes with any particular group in mind (men, women, and children) it would be for African American children. The multitude of children’s books Evans has written over the years attests to this fact. In the interview she mentioned that she wrote *I, Look At Me!* for African American children because they did not have books to read in which physical representations of themselves were present.

The chief characteristic of Evans’s work in diverse genres, disciplines, styles, and voices is her desire to politicize her audience. As Evans has branched out of poetry, her oeuvre has become increasingly complex, approaching her task from a variety of disciplines and genres in the humanities. She writes essays, poems, lyrics, and theatre pieces. She has edited major collections. She composes haunting blues music. She photographs and paints. Evans’s creative philosophy is deeply indebted to the humanities as a necessary and important part of her developing consciousness and explicitly political message:

The humanities can play a fundamental role in effecting the transformation from naivete and delusion to political awareness. Art, music and literature, written or performed, provided intrinsically useful vehicles for piercing delusions, disseminating information, substituting values, instituting new forms of thought, and generating a matrix for the national political unity based on the political

concepts and premises incorporated into that material. (“Political Writing as Device” 102).

Evans believes that the aspiring Black political writer must “read, read, read—everything [s/he] can get [his/her] hands on” (“Clarity” 71). The political writer must use all genres possible to spread his/her message about a Black experience in order to unify the community and mobilize change in an oppressive world. Evans’s dedication to this philosophy has made her more than a political writer; she is a true Renaissance artist. Mari Evans remains elusive to those who wish to box her into a clear cut definition. Yet some critics have boxed her into her poetry, codifying her experience into *I Am A Black Woman*. They ignore the diverse media and methods she has used to enlighten those of her primary and secondary audiences who disbelieve the current state of racism against African Americans in the United States.

There is no doubt that African American artists must conquer hurdles in order to disseminate uncensored work to the public. With the advent of independent Black publishers such as Third World Press (1967) and Black Classic Press (1978), authors have been able to reach a larger number of their intended audiences and focus on subjects that have not attracted the interest of larger commercial publishers. Yet, the oppression that Mari Evans, her contemporaries, and their successors have experienced is limited not only to the artistic world. To reiterate Evan’s words, “Black life *is* drama, brutal and compelling” (“My Father’s Passage,” 19). Just as the Ethos of the African American artist is in question, so is the Ethos of each African American every time s/he tries to speak to his/her experiences.

Evans’s definition of African American Ethos is neither directly stated, other than saying it is an “environmental laboratory,” nor is it connected overtly to general lived experience.

However, it assumes a shared relationship with one's audience that outsiders would not have. In Evans's view, her readers are able to understand covert connections between the artist and the reader based on commonalities they share. There is an underlying assumption that when Evans alludes to African American Ethos, she assumes her audience will be familiar with its Aristotelian counterpart (which is present in most Western pedagogy). According to Aristotle's rhetorical triangle (Ethos, Logos, Pathos), one can judge the strength of another's argument based on credibility (Ethos) of the individual and scholar, the soundness of the argument (Logos), and its ability to effectively engage and release the audience's emotions (Pathos). If one element of the triangle is called into question, the other two are subsequently called into question because the argument is unbalanced. Thus, Ethos becomes a measurable quality, an assignment of value to an individual's character which affects whether or not an outsider will take an individual's claim seriously. In the event that a group of individuals who have like characteristics (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) are assigned similar value based on outside judgment, Ethos morphs from a question of individual character to an affirmation or denial of value for the entire community. If the wider public begins to associate a group of people with negative characteristics, a social stigma develops which damages both the collective Ethos of the group and the Ethos of individuals who belong to the group.

Because African American Ethos is controlled by hegemonic forces, any tampering with the collective Ethos can upset the balance of the rhetorical triangle and deny individuals and communities alike the voice(s) they desire to have (either in the scholarly community or the specific cultural or ethnic community). How the dominant group defines African American Ethos affects the following aspects of African Americans' individual and collective lives: 1) it decides whether they have the freedom to traverse economic, social, and geographical spaces, 2)

it measures their trustworthiness as productive and reasonable members of society, and 3) it establishes a precedent on how other races define African American identity and how African Americans evaluate themselves and other members of their race.

This project seeks to examine Mari Evans's definition of Ethos as "the environmental laboratory," the literal and figurative space of African American identity where lived and recorded experiences are subject to manipulation and adjustment by the dominant group. By analyzing the events of her theatre piece¹ *Stations*², I will demonstrate that Evans is justified in contesting the popular belief that the African American citizen of post-Civil Rights, Reagan-era America had the freedom in the 1980s to live the American Dream of economic mobility regardless of societal pressures. I will further argue that spatial mobility ("freedom of movement") is actually non-existent during this time period as opposed to Evans's belief that it is merely "threatened" by the hegemonic institution of the State. I will examine how the Winters family in *Stations* subverts and combats being stereotyped as untrustworthy, unproductive, and irrational members of society and analyze how Ethos has affected their perceptions of themselves and other African Americans. I will also connect the struggles of the Winters family to the collective struggles of Black Americans of the 1980s by contextualizing the political, racial, and social climate in Philadelphia (the theatre piece's setting), and explaining how these events relate to the national temperament at the time. I conclude by reviewing Mari Evans's personal belief that history is repeating itself in the 21st Century: "we have been a troubled people far too long...we are vulnerable still" ("Preface" x).

¹ Evans prefers to use the term "theatre piece" in place of "play" given the serious, politically-charged nature of her work. She considers "play" an inadequate term in communicating the inspiration, effect, and great change a playwright's work can have on its audience. I am choosing to use this term as well.

² As of right now, *Stations* has not been published by a mainstream press but has been performed publicly. I have used a copy of the play's original manuscript with the author's permission.

Examining the Political Climate Informing Evans and her Work

Theoretical Foundations for Understanding the Political Climate

In the preface to *Stations*, Mari Evans provides her reader with a basic premise: “freedom of movement may be the only real freedom left to a colonized people within the structure of the state” (*Stations* “Preface” a). Evans’s use of the word “colonized people” harkens back to Frantz Fanon’s discussion of colonizer and colonized in his foundational text on post-coloniality, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon’s work, which centers on the decolonization of African peoples during the 1950s and 1960s, strongly influenced the Black Arts Movement and other movements that took economic, socio-cultural, or political liberation as their theme. Jenny Sharpe notes that many scholars of the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s “modeled their activities after Third World liberation struggles” after students at San Francisco State College began to “articulate the disenfranchisement of racial minorities as a form of colonization” (105). Sharpe points out that the U.S. power movement groups were actually describing “internal colonization,” a term that should not be associated with the struggles of colonized people in the Third World because it is “only an analogy for describing the economic marginalization of racial minorities” (106). Sharpe argues that a country can only be described as postcolonial when “internal social relations intersect with global capitalism and the international division of labor” (106). Like her contemporaries, Evans often uses the Third World movement terms “colonizer” and “colonized” interchangeably with “oppressor” and “oppressed” and the State and the citizen. Although, using the term “colonization” to describe racial and social oppression and economic marginalization in an American/African American context is considered not acceptable by many contemporary scholars, in the context of *Stations* the term seems highly appropriate. In the early

1980s, the field of Postcolonial Studies was just emerging and the differences between oppression in the First and Third worlds would not be commonly understood for another two decades. Evans's definition of colonization—"suppression and exploitation designed to keep a people powerless, mystified, dependent and subordinate" ("A Virtual Grounding" 90)—closely resembles Sharpe's "internal colonization", further solidifying why Evans collapsed the differences between the Racial State in the First and Third World.

Although Evans uses the term colonization to describe the phenomenon of institutionalized racism and economic marginalization, I will use Michael Omi and Howard Winant's term the "Racial State" and Fanon's "subject or citizen" to describe colonizer and colonized. Omi and Winant, in their groundbreaking work *Racial Formation in the United States. From the 1960s to the 1990s*, assert that "The state is composed of *institutions*, the *policies* they carry out, the *conditions and rules* which support and justify them, and the *social relations* in which they are imbedded" (83). For Fanon and Evans, the State also becomes the Racial State when "every state *institution* is a racial institution" (83). When defining the current Racial State in America, one explains how the institutions of the State assign value to each race of people in America based on the collective beliefs or "truths" the members of the State have acknowledged about these races. The way in which a race of people (or an individual who belongs to that race) is treated by the State and its citizens based on this racial hierarchy defines the outcome of the current Racial State.

As early as the 1950s Evans believed, as did other African American writers, that in post-World War II America, African Americans were still excluded by law, custom, and social practice from the exercise of their civil and human rights as American citizens, unlike most European immigrants who assimilated into mainstream American society during the first half of

the twentieth century. In the 1980s, Evans also challenged the idea that Americans lived in a post-racial society by stating that economic mobility was still, without question, a pipe dream for many African Americans during the Reagan Era³. Omi and Winant note that great racial strides were made in the 1960s and 1970s in what is commonly termed the “Great Transformation,” which “claimed to favor racial equality. Its vision was that of a ‘color-blind’ society where racial considerations were never entertained in the selection of leaders, in hiring decisions, and the distribution of goods and services in general” (117). By 1980, the rhetoric of American politics had changed. Many believed that America had reached “the mountaintop” of racial equality. The New America of the 1980s could “‘do without’ race, at least in the ‘enlightened present’”, and could in effect exercise the practices of a color-blind society (55). It was widely believed in America that citizens and politicians alike could now celebrate the rights of individual achievement and hard work because anybody could achieve the American Dream. However, as Omi and Winant rightly point out, “it is rather difficult to jettison widely held beliefs, beliefs which moreover are central to everyone’s identity and understanding of the social world” (55). Individual citizens and governmental bodies “cannot suddenly declare [themselves] ‘color-blind’ without in fact perpetuating the same...differential, racist treatment” (55). In an effort to purge racial inequality, many American citizens and leaders purged all conversation about racism, in the process defining a new racial project—“color-blind racism”—which continued to negatively affect a continued belief in an African American Ethos.

Omi and Winant’s views are particularly helpful for understanding the relationship between color-blind racism as a *racial project*. “An interpretation, representation, or explanation

³ One can see Evans’s ideas on economic mobility particularly in her essays “Clarity: More Than A Concept,” “A Virtual Grounding African Style: Race as Power/Democracy as Paradigm for Colonization,” and “Political Writing as Device” in her essay collection, *Clarity as Concept. A Poet’s Perspective*.

of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along racial lines” assists the average citizen, businessman, and politician in making generalizations about a race of people and developing a commonly held belief, as well as widespread response, in reaction to that race, according to Omi and Winant (57). A racial project in itself is not necessarily negative. As Omi and Winant explain, “We expect people to act out their apparent racial identities; indeed we become disoriented when they do not” (59). However, a racial project becomes *racist* (and therefore negative) “if and only if it *creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race*” (71). As a racist project, “color-blind racism” allows for the purging of overtly racist conversation, and the creation of a new covert conversation that upholds established racial stereotypes that were instituted by playwrights, entertainers, and plantation writers of the Antebellum Period. For example, instead of saying, “African Americans are lazy and try to get out of doing hard work”—a stereotype instituted as far back as the days of blackface minstrelsy—conversation changes to “People on welfare (who are incorrectly believed to be mostly African American) are lazy and don’t want to work.” “Color-blind racism” largely derives from *racialist* sentiment. Lois Tyson defines *racialism* as “the belief in racial superiority, inferiority, and purity based on the conviction that moral and intellectual characteristics, just like physical characteristics, are biological properties that differentiate the races” (381). The codified language of “color-blind racism” was racialist when it was the linguistic center of debate over welfare reform in the state and U.S. congresses during the 1980s and 1990s. Holloway Sparks points out that commentators in welfare reform hearings “regularly invoked racist and gender-biased images of ‘welfare queens’ out to cheat taxpayers” (172). Many Congressmen and women believed Whites to be racially superior to African Americans and other minorities due to their quick rise to affluence. Color-blind racism, in turn, reinforced the continuation of economic

inequality between White and Black populations during the 1980s, allowing *institutionalized racism*⁴ to continue.

The Political Climate of the Early 1980s

Mari Evans wrote *Stations* in 1984 near the end of Ronald Reagan's first term as President of the United States. Former Vice President Walter Mondale and Rev. Jesse Jackson participated in a heated battle in their bid to become the Democratic candidate for the presidential election of that year. *Stations* focuses on the socioeconomic marginalization of African Americans by institutions of the State during the early 1980s. Frank and Lorelle Winters believe in the American Dream of economic mobility. Their beliefs are shaken when Frank is fired from his job and cannot obtain gainful employment. Frank becomes disillusioned with the idea of economic mobility, although he attempts to maintain his socioeconomic status. He pressures his son, Robbie, to find a job and begin contributing to society, but he feels like a failure when he cannot do the same. Over a period of about two years, Frank befriends a street character, Teal Blue, a member of the African American underclass, who teaches him the reality of the Racial State of America.

Frank easily navigates his way between the two spaces of class difference (his quiet, middleclass neighborhood and the street). Frank attempts to start his own business with Teal, hoping to regain some of the affluence he lost. The business receives its funding through illegal means but is not successful. Believing that spatial mobility (freedom of movement) may be the only freedom African Americans have left, Frank travels to racially-segregated geographic areas

⁴ Lois Tyson defines *institutionalized racism* as “the incorporation of racist policies and practices in the institutions by which a society operates: for example, education; federal, state, and local governments; the law, both in terms of what is written on the books and how it is implemented by the courts and by police officials” (382). The Welfare Reform Act of 1996 (the fruition of Congress's debate on welfare) was largely considered by the American left as a racist project that reasserted institutionalized racism.

where he is a racial outsider and returns from these journeys unharmed. He tries to convince his family, Teal, and his friends Ann and Roy McKinney that although African Americans are marked and monitored by the State, no physical harm will come to them. The play ends as the Winters family and the McKinneys are assaulted by the police in the Winters' family home, a place that should be designated as a safe space. Evans leaves her audience questioning what freedoms, if any, remain for African Americans in a country where the State has unlimited authority to police its citizens.

In the twenty years prior to *Stations'* first public performance in 1984, various "racial minority movements [had] challenged established racial practices...through direct action, through penetration of the mainstream political arena...and through 'ethical/political' tactics" (Omi and Winant 105). Benjamin P. Bowser notes in his book *The Black Middle Class: Social Mobility and Vulnerability* that as Black, Chicano, Asian, and Native American power movements had lobbied to force changes in the racist framework of the American government, President Lyndon B. Johnson had instituted a number of "antipoverty and job training bills [that were] aimed at alienated urban blacks" and other minorities⁵ (79). In 1965, one of the most crucial changes to America's racist job market was "presidential Executive Order 11246, which required affirmative action [a new racial project] in the hiring of African Americans" (101) in the hope of improving the socioeconomic status of African Americans nationwide. Executive Order 11246 also worked to desegregate the workplace, adding another measure to the Supreme Court's overturn of *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, a statute which enforced "separate but equal" segregation.

⁵ Bills passed include, but are not limited to, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968.

Luckily, during the 1960s, universities, governmental organizations, and businesses instituted affirmative action policies before Executive Order 11246 was signed by President Johnson. Bowser points out that in the seven-year period of 1970-1977, the number of African Americans who entered white-collar jobs rose from 10 to 13% (103). Even more surprisingly, in the same seven years “Black college student enrollment more than doubled nationally” (103). In the period from 1964 to 1977, African Americans began to move into the middle class in great numbers.

However, these achievements were truncated as early as 1976 in the Supreme Court case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*. This case “challenged the practice of racial set-asides” in the college admissions process⁶ (Bowser 106). By 1980, national sentiment toward affirmative action had started to decline. A great number of Americans began to look at affirmative action as a negative racial project, one which caused reverse discrimination (106). The idea of reverse discrimination had shifted from colleges and universities to hiring practices as well. Questions arose, such as: how could one know if a minority individual was hired because s/he was qualified for the position or because s/he was a minority? According to Rev. Joseph E. Lowry, “political forces, including the Reagan administration itself, were trying to ‘turn back the clock of racial history’” (qtd in Omi and Winant 113). As Omi and Winant discuss, “many Americans resented having to provide for the ‘underprivileged’,” a color-blind term referring to African Americans and other minorities (113). Twenty years after the major Civil Rights reforms, economic mobility among African Americans had waned. The goals of Johnson’s Great Society programs were not met.

⁶ Previous to this case, many universities across the nation had created slots specifically for African American students to compete for (also known as “racial set-asides”), while White students competed for the majority of admission seats (Bowser 106). Universities had done this to meet racial quotas. Thus, they were only admitting the number of minority students that were required.

Ignoring the numbers, many Americans (including the Reagan Administration) instituted “color-blind” practices, claiming faith in the American Dream for all. Mari Evans notes in her essay “A Virtual Grounding African-Style: Race as Power / Democracy as Paradigm for Colonization,” that American individualism should work in theory, that “at this point in time color should be irrelevant. It is simply not. Color remains an indicator, a false signifier of ‘status.’ Consciously, sometimes unconsciously, but always without conscience it assigns value; it becomes a referent for how a group is or is not received, allowed to participate, or deliberately held at bay” (83). When businesses decided to hire only the “most-qualified” individuals for open positions, this threatened the new racial state through the re-establishment of old hiring practices. More often than not, White individuals were hired over African Americans due to the stereotypes that persisted about African Americans. By the end of Reagan’s second term in office, the percentage of African Americans in white-collar jobs had dropped over 2% from what they had been in 1978 (Bowser 103). Only 1.78 million African Americans were employed in white-collar jobs as opposed to the 27.4 million White Americans. Thus the economic situation for African Americans in the United States during the 1980s was not as “color-blind” as conservative Americans claimed.

Dissecting Economic Mobility in *Stations*

The American Dream as Pipedream for Economic Mobility

At the beginning of *Stations*, Frank, Lorelle, and Robbie Winters appear to be an aspiring middle class family. Evans notes in her preface: “Frank Robinson Winters is a Black man whose morals and whose vision of the society are shaped by his Belief in the [American] Dream. For him the Dream became a visible attainable goal” (*Stations*, “Preface” a). It is the spring of 1982.

Frank, at 52, has managed to climb a few rungs on the corporate ladder of a Philadelphia steel foundry, Bascom Combs⁷, and is now sitting comfortably in middle-management. Frank clearly knows what it means to reach for the American Dream: he worked on the manufacturing floor as a floor sweeper and “took fifteen years...to cross the invisible caste barrier, the DMZ [De-militarized Zone], that separates the floor from the office” (a). He has worked to behave like upper management, “sound” like them, and share their political perspective. He has bought into the myth of American individualism, believing “the best possible revenge” one could take after the turbulent racial climate of the company during the 1950s and 1960s is to prove to his economic superiors that he is fit to be in the same economic circles as them (b).

Frank has worked hard so that he, Lorelle, and Robbie can now live in an “upperclass, Negro neighborhood” in the Philadelphia metro-area (*Stations* “Preface” b). Lorelle has an administrative office job and regularly opens the family home to lavish parties for their social club, “The Ladies and Lords of Distinction.” The couple entertain the idea of what it means to be middle-class—as Evans states, “in the Black community... ‘middle-class’ is a state of mind” (*Stations*, “Preface” c). The couple may not live what is generally perceived as a true upperclass way of life, but they have worked tirelessly to subvert the damaging stereotype of “poor, lazy African Americans” that has troubled the African American Ethos due to the new racial project of the Reagan Era. Frank and Lorelle work to revise their Ethos by exhibiting qualities of the above average, economically mobile American: “hard-working, ambitious, [yet] deeply in debt” (b-c). Frank has believed that since he has worked for Bascom Combs for 25 years, he has finally overcome racial discrimination—“in his mind only, [he is] an ‘old boy’” (b). Indeed, Frank exposes the vacuous nature of the American Dream as Evans conceives it:

⁷ The spelling of Bascom Combs varies throughout the script. I have chosen to use the first written spelling of the company for consistency.

Afrikan-Americans *are* the fanciest of all other oppressed people. They own more houses, more conveyances, hold more token jobs and make more appearances on television, however negative, than any other colonized group. Consequently it is not entirely surprising that, despite the permanence of rat/roach infested ghettos, escalating Black suicide, divorce, drug and alcohol abuse rates, a Black unemployment rate almost double the national average...despite all this evidence... the appreciable majority of Black Americans feel they have tied into the American Dream, or that such an engagement is imminent. ("Political Writing as Device" (1975) 101).

Frank and Lorelle ignore the political, social, and economic plight of those of their race around them, refusing to associate with any who do not uphold the standards of the oppressor, afraid that they may be viewed as societal scabs as well.

Even though they expect their twenty-two-year-old son, Robbie, to buy into the same packaged American ideal that has been sold to them, Frank's perceptions of masculinity translates to how he parents, making his parenting style different from Lorelle's. Frank believes that Robbie should find and maintain a job because having gainful employment demonstrates a willingness to be "a team player" (*Stations 7*) and upstanding citizen in American society. He attempted to instill this idea in Robbie at an early age when he introduced him to sports. For Frank, hard work is equivalent to success. Robbie must make similar sacrifices that Frank made in order to act like a true man. Lorelle expects that her son should be successful as well, but she requires him to act gentlemanly by being respectful to his elders. She sees good manners and

education as integral to economic mobility. Nevertheless, Lorelle does not believe that Robbie must attain these qualities in order to stay living in her house. In the opening scene of the theatre piece, Lorelle and her friend Emma are hosting a party for the Lords and Ladies of Distinction. Frank has arrived home late from Bascom Combs and proceeds to argue with her over their son's employment situation:

FRANK: He was raised t'be a team player, be a man, match wits with th'white boys—and he'll get a job or he'll get out. That's all I got t'say.

LORELLE: Well you're not exactly the only one's got something t'say. My money goes in this house too y'know. An long as I got a roof over my head, Robbie's got a roof over his!⁸ (7)

Lorelle immediately jumps to the role of mother and protector. Although she feels that Robbie is making the wrong life decisions, she will not allow Frank to kick him out of the house. Frank argues that Robbie “wasn't raised to be no bum” (6). Robbie will not gain Frank's respect until he becomes a true man by making gainful employment and active strides toward building his own nest egg. Frank believes that the only technique he has left to push Robbie in the right direction is by making Robbie survive on his own as he did as a young man.

Robbie must also be a productive member of society because if he is not it will reflect negatively on Frank's image as a successful parent. He will then fit into the stereotype of African American fathers who fail at raising their kids properly or are absent from their lives from a young age due to incarceration or death. In an essay published in 1985, Mari Evans predicts,

⁸ All quoted dialogue from *Stations* will appear as it does in the typed manuscript.

based on a university study, that by the end of the twentieth century, “70 percent of all Black children [would] be born in homes where there are no males and that 70 percent of all Black males [would] be unemployed” (“Childrearing Practices” 141). Frank maintains a legitimate fear that he might be perceived as an unfit father, especially because his own father was absent throughout the majority of his life⁹; however, his fear remains grounded mainly in his justification that “‘middle-class’ is a state of mind” (*Stations*, “Preface” c). Frank cares more about how his friends, colleagues, and superiors credit his Ethos than he does for raising his son properly.

At the moment Robbie first appears on stage, the audience does not realize that Frank and Lorelle’s conflicting expectations on how their son should follow the American Dream have negatively affected him. Robbie is disillusioned with America and has crossed over into a life of drugs and alcohol. However, it first appears that Robbie is just acting out. When he finally appears at the party, he crashes it in an illustrious way and in the process embarrasses his mother and Emma:

(Door to ‘affair’ opens and there, smiling expansively, clothes also a bit awry, is LIL’ ROBBIE. He is feeling no pain and continues to keep the door partly open because he is leaning back on it.)

ROBBIE: Heyyyy....y’allllllllll! Par – ty – ing?! (Slow insinuating hip/knee movement.) Git downnnnn! (*Stations* 7)

⁹ In Act I, Scene II Frank reveals in a conversation with Lorelle that his father was absent for most of his life. He relays a conversation he had with his football coach when he was fifteen: “I know its hard for your mother trying to bring up four of you by herself—but you hang in there y’hear?” (*Stations* 13).

Robbie proceeds to further embarrass his mother by slurring to the party guests that he is “Carry-ing dy-na-mite”—cocaine mixed with heroin (7). He is disrespectful to his mother and father, causing many in the audience to sympathize with Frank and Lorelle and draw further negative conclusions about Robbie and his generation. Frank and Lorelle reprimand Robbie and try to save face in front of their guests. Nevertheless, as the action continues, Evans causes the audience to question their previously held assumptions about Robbie and enlightens them about the miscommunication between Robbie’s and his parents’ generations.

In Act II, Scene 4, the audience realizes that Robbie has not bought into the same American Dream that his parents and their friends have. He mentions to his father, mother, and their dinner guests that the plight of college students in the 1980s “ain’t no different than they were back in your time. Still think that piece a’ paper an not rock the boat’ll buy em a chunk of white heaven...Negroes’ so ignorant it make you want t’hurt em!” (*Stations* 63-64). Robbie’s declaration is only the beginning of his subversion. He subverts any kind of discourse coming from his parents’ generation, which supports the agenda of the new Racial State as imagined by the conservative majority, by Signifying on such discourse. His Signification restructures and reforms the African American Ethos so that it may be free from the grasp of hegemonic forces.

Henry Louis Gates, in his seminal essay “The ‘Blackness of Blackness’: A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey”¹⁰ discusses definitions of Signification and gives examples of the many forms Signification can take. Gates primarily defines Signifying as “a trope that subsumes other rhetorical tropes, including metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony (the

¹⁰ Gates’s essay focuses on the “Signifying Monkey,” a character found in many narrative poems: “The Signifying Monkey invariably ‘repeats’ to his friend, the Lion, some insult purportedly generated by their mutual friend, the Elephant. The Lion, indignant and outraged, demands an apology from the Elephant, who refuses and then trounces the Lion. The Lion, realizing that his mistake was to take the Monkey literally, returns to trounce the Monkey” (Gates 690). The Monkey is not only a trickster. His identity in itself is a Signification of a classic stereotype. African Americans were constantly compared to animals, particularly monkeys, before the mid-20th century. The monkey’s trickery subverts the false idea that African Americans are “savage” and “stupid.”

‘master’ tropes), and also hyperbole, litotes, and metalepsis (Bloom's supplement to Burke)” (686). In other words, Signification is a variety of “indirect, clever, ironic, and playful ways of giving your opinion about another person...without saying explicitly what you mean” (Tyson 390). When Robbie and another character, Teal, Signify in Act II, they are indirectly pointing out to Frank and Lorelle the ridiculousness of believing in the American Dream:

TEAL: What chu need, Baby is y’own thang. You create the model. Break outa convention, break outa tradition...

ROBBIE: (Breaking in and walking with TEAL.) A-wayyyy from the way things have always been just-be-cause-they-have-al-ways-been-that-wayy...

TEAL: You lookin in the cathedrals and testin’ white folks in some greasy spoon f’ some mysterious answers—when you aint got t’ go farther than your mirror.

[...]

ROBBIE: Build a system f’ yourself... This one aint workin f’ ya. Y’all want t’ inch up t’ the white man, beg him for a piece a his rock. Lil tenancy piece massa... (*Stations* 67-68)

Robbie and Teal attempt to reverse the harmonious relationship between Robbie’s parents and their White-adopted ideology by insinuating that imitating White life is unproductive and ludicrous. The pair use the term “greasy spoon” as both a metaphor and literal representation of the greasy, White-trash cafeteria Frank visited in the previous scene. Robbie and Teal explain that although Frank has attempted to find an alternative to achieving the American Dream, he is still looking in traditionally White, racist spaces for affirmation that he has the freedom to

be a successful and reputable individual. Frank is the “greasy spoon” because he is still looking “t’ inch up t’ the white man” for acceptance (68). The pair inform their audience that there are other, more productive methods of living in an oppressive society. For Robbie and Teal, an African American Ethos should not be defined by hegemonic forces of the Racial State but created, maintained, and altered accordingly by the hands of the citizens themselves. In their view, the American Dream is a White-constructed myth, a Dream that is unavailable to the average African American citizen.

Throughout much of Acts I and II Frank does not understand why the Dream has failed him (*Stations*, “Preface” c). At the end of the opening scene Frank announces that “after 25 g’dam years---I just been....fired” (11). His layoff comes only a few months from before his retirement. Bascom Combs decided that Frank was not a necessity to the company anymore, and, at the beginning of Act I Scene II, Frank begins to realize that the Dream was a lie: “It’s like you dreamin, ‘see. Y’ comfortable. Y’ at th’ circus, y’ family’s with you. Y’ all all laughin. Th’ clowns clownin. Then th’ biggest one...when he turns around...He’s Black, but he’s got that white paint all over...his face, and—he’s ME” (12). Frank pictures himself in whiteface—a literal inversion of the practice of blackface minstrelsy¹¹. He understands that for the past twenty-five years he has been naïve. The men who darkened their faces with cork, who enacted a racial stereotype, could never understand or live the Black Experience just as Frank could never attain the White American Dream. Frank finally “*experience[s]* the acid of psychological locking out that

¹¹ Blackface Minstrelsy began in the early 1800s. The first known occurrence of Blackface was recorded in Pittsburgh, PA, in 1830 when T. D. Rice “confronted, one day with the dazzling spectacle of black singing...saw ‘his opportunity’ and determined to take advantage of his talent for mimicry” (Lott 24). Rice borrowed a slave’s clothes, put them on, and blackened his face. He proceeded to sing and dance to the song “Jump Jim Crow” in front of a White audience to make money. The resulting character, Jim Crow, became the mascot for racist legislation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and yielded a series of powerful stereotypical characters that permeated the stage, literature, and film for years to come. For a more detailed explanation of Blackface, see Eric Lott’s *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy & the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993.

depends on color as the referent” (“Where We Live” 24). While Frank processes the events surrounding his layoff, Lorelle cannot. She optimistically credits Frank’s dismissal to “the economy” (13) and believes he will find an equally fulfilling job in the near future¹².

Frank’s worries rest not only in his ability to successfully parent and find a job, but also in his role of husband and head of household in his marriage. The audience soon learns that Frank, unlike Lorelle, has never graduated high school: “She’s got the education and the reputation—here’s a Black woman known all over the country—and her husband? Don’t even have a high school diploma—but I get there just the same. She’s got the name—I’ve got the game” (*Stations* 15). Frank believes that his success as an African American man relies on his status as breadwinner of the family (an idea perpetuated by a White male-centric society).

Frank’s anxiety about his manhood begins to create a rift in his marriage, but the largest cause of marital problems is the miscommunication he has with Lorelle. At the beginning of Act I, Frank and Lorelle both suffer from a similar kind of denial that Mychal Denzel Smith attributes to the African American male experience. Smith states that “Black men experience this world in ways that are quite similar to the Kubler-Ross ‘5 Stages of Grief Model.’” He argues that the first stage of Black manhood is denial: “every Black man is afforded a period of unburdened optimism. The length varies for each individual...but there also comes a moment, an internal realization generally prompted by an outside force, where Black men have to confront their reality as ‘the Other’” (Smith). Frank has lost some of his “unbridled optimism” because he has been fired from his job. He begins to evaluate his social, economic, and racial position within the hierarchy of the Racial State, while Lorelle remains optimistic. Lorelle cannot see herself in the same position as

¹² The United States suffered a severe economic recession from 1981-1982 due to the Oil Crisis of 1973, the Energy Crisis of 1979, and widespread inflation. The economy regained quickly due to President Reagan’s economic policies, causing many to label his first term of office as an overall success.

Frank. While Frank's optimism dries up, hers remains intact, causing their outlooks on life to diverge. They have trouble understanding each other's point of view and struggle through their marriage during most of the piece.

While Smith's model focuses on Black manhood, Evans expands this issue to show that it is a collective problem facing the entire Nation¹³. Many years before Smith wrote his article on grief, Evans communicated a similar idea about the "unbridled optimism" of African Americans: "In this country we are programmed to disbelieve what we experience,' that since we [African Americans] are both segment and sum of all that is past, it is prudent to be clear about the nature of that past experience as well as the continuing impact it has on how we view society and how we view ourselves" ("Where We Live" 21). Frank and Lorelle's individual struggles to fully understand their status are not unusual in a society that discredits their Ethos and treats them as unequal to the majority. While Frank evaluates his current jobless situation, he comes to the realization that his layoff was not a matter of chance but rather racially motivated. Frank asks Lorelle what his twenty-five years at Bascom Combs has yielded. She lists their material possessions, including two cars, a boat, a nice house, and "a cottage on Pescotota Island" (*Stations* 15-16), but argues that these do not constitute true success. Frank shrugs off Lorelle's response and instead relays to her a conversation he had with his boss, Herb Irish, shortly before he was fired. Lorelle prompts him to realize that Herb knew of Frank's layoff weeks before it happened:

FRANK [as Herb]: "Not planning to retire on us are you?"

[...]

¹³ By Nation I mean the African American citizens of the United States, a term commonly used in the Black Arts Movement to mean all people of African descent.

FRANK: “No sir. I been her long as you’ve been Herb. Guess we’ll go out together. I know I’ll be eligible in a few more weeks—but I wouldn’t know what to do with myself around the house.”

LORELLE: (Challengingly.) What he say?

FRANK: (Muses.) Now that you mention it, what he said was “guess we all gon’ have to learn some new skills.” That son-of-a-buck knew then! (18)

Frank’s epiphany reveals some important facts to the audience. First, from Frank’s conversation, the reader is led to believe that Herb is White. Lorelle also makes known that Herb has worked at Bascom Combs since Frank was hired: “He’s that one hired you—when he first got to personnel. And fast as he moved up in management he tried to help you move up in the plant” (18). Thus, Lorelle (and most likely Frank) have credited Frank’s success for years to the help of someone who had to climb the economic ladder as well. Frank also points out that “Irish dont have no high school diploma either” (19). Evans makes a few justified assumptions about the plausibility of the American Dream for European descendants versus African Americans. First, although Herb’s education is equivalent to Frank’s and he has worked for Bascom Combs only slightly longer, he had the ability to traverse economic stations much more quickly than Frank. Second, Herb originally extended a helping hand to Frank, but later “psychologically locked [Frank] out” (“Where We Live” 24) when Herb decided “helping out” was no longer necessary. The “brotherhood” that Frank supposedly shared with Herb was in fact an illusion. Herb and the administration at Bascom Combs use racialist attitude to exercise racism in firing Frank. Frank’s credibility as a hard worker and productive member of the company becomes subject to debate

while Herb's remains untarnished even though they have the same level of education and have been working at the company for almost equal amounts of time.

Lorelle comforts Frank near the end of the scene, telling him that his twenty-five years at Bascom Combs make him "a good husband, a good father, a good citizen and – a good American" (19); however, she admits that if no employer will hire Frank based on his skills, work ethic, and experience, he is right in believing that he is the "clown" in whiteface who, as Frank puts it, "believed in th'circus" (*Stations* 23). As Act I ends, members of the audience recognize the foreshadowing that occurs. Frank's unemployment will remain permanent.

Attempted Economic Mobility through Independent Action

As the theatre piece continues, in Act II, Scene I, Frank has changed from a "productive" working member of society into an unproductive, unemployed mess. Almost two years have passed since Frank lost his job at Bascom Combs. In autumn 1983 the family is in a tight economic situation. Lorelle has plans to sell the house, but Frank appears to sabotage every effort she makes to get the house ready for sale. He has not found a job or done any housework to keep the home presentable so it may be sold. He appears to accept that he is a failure as a husband and father, and he resists adopting the role of house husband because he views it as "beneath" him. Frank has entered Stage 2 of the "5 Stages of Black Manhood"—anger. Smith argues that Black men become angry in this stage because "Everywhere [they] go, [they're] viewed as a problem that needs to be solved" (Smith). Because Frank is now unemployed and cannot attain new work, he is considered an unproductive citizen and therefore a "problem". Neither does he comply with Lorelle's wishes, causing him to be a problem at home. In reaction, Frank searches for a new site of productivity. Frank will navigate between his home and this new space, creating a double life for himself.

The audience learns that Frank has been living a double life for a while, trying to maintain his middle class amenities while exhibiting a lower class attitude. He regularly leaves the comfort of his upper class Black neighborhood to join a street character, Teal Blue, near the dividing line between the upper class and lower class neighborhoods. Frank willingly “accepts a roach” (a joint) from Teal, and Teal jibes, “two years ago you wouldn’t a’been caught dead on this corner. A year ago you woulda been frosty” (*Stations* 25). It is apparent that Frank had originally thought he was better than Teal, yet he now realizes that Teal understands his alienation and disenfranchisement because he comes from a similar experience. Teal makes an important revelation for the audience: “Lotta dudes lose they jobs, but you have made the most rad-i-cal change I ever seen. Be like you trying t’juggle two lives—one on the street, one on th’hill. An keep em sep’rate” (25). Frank operates from a position of class privilege. Since he is a member of the same racial group as Teal and maintains a higher economic status within that race, he is able to traverse physical boundaries that separate him from those beneath him in class terms. He knows he will be welcomed in this new space because he is able to establish a common bond with Teal. They both suffer at the hand of the same hegemonic forces.

For Teal, being on the street is a state of mind just like being up on the hill. The African American on the hill is living in whiteface, experiencing an illusion of middle-class amenities and ignoring the persistence of racism toward an ever growing Black underclass. Being on the street means one of two things 1) physically living on the street under the radar of the law, or 2) figuratively living on the street by understanding what it means to have no one to turn to but one’s fellow citizens who are also aware of their marginalization. The members on the hill (the Lords and Ladies of Distinction) not only ignore the plight of their underclass brothers and sisters, but also deny that their Ethos is just as subject to question. It is better to live an

enlightened life and know the limits of what one can and cannot do in a racist society, than live a life of deception.

Evans uses Frank's double-life on the hill and the street as an example of W.E.B. DuBois's "double consciousness." DuBois defines the inner-struggle of "double consciousness" in his foundational text *The Souls of Black Folk*: "One ever feels his two-ness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (DuBois 38). Typically, an individual suffering from double-consciousness struggles internally with recognizing that he is both American and African. He has lost part of his African heritage because his ancestors were forced across the Middle Passage into slavery. This individual is also not wholly American because he is not White and cannot fully assimilate into the dominant society. Frank wants to be treated as an upstanding citizen regardless of his race (through color-blind eyes). However, he understands that the only way he can be viewed as an upstanding American citizen is to shed his African American Ethos. He cannot do this because it is a part of his marked identity.

Frank's double life serves as a didactic tool for the author. Mari Evans is staging a revision of DuBois's "double-consciousness" in order to awaken African Americans to the current Racial State. Evans also revises DuBois's "Talented Tenth" by borrowing ideas from Black Arts Movement scholar David Llorens's 1966 essay, "The Fella, The Chosen Ones, and the Guardian." In *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois argues that the "Thinking Classes" (or "Talented Tenth"), "as an educated black elite (10 percent) ought to lead and provide an uplifting example for the masses of the race" (qtd in DuBois 204). Since the Talented Tenth controls the majority material wealth of the Black community, they are held to the responsibility of enlightening other members of their race as to the appropriate action to take to become equally

successful. Llorens calls the “Talented Tenth” “The Chosen Ones.” Llorens argues that many of the members of the Black upper-class or Chosen Ones are embarrassed to be seen by the Guardian (the White man) in the company of the Fella (members of the Black working class), fearing they will be perceived as equal to the Fella by the Guardian. In the Chosen Ones’ minds, this stereotyping of the African American Ethos would ruin their chances of being assimilated into White society (Llorens). Thus, the “Talented Tenth”/Chosen Ones wish to provide an example for the working class but avoid associating with them.

Frank, as a Chosen One, wants to hold on to the socioeconomic status he believes he achieved when he was a member of “the Boys’ Club” at Bascom Combs. Although he realizes that he is not a legitimate member of the White “Boys’ Club”, his material/economic status yields him respect as a “Lord of Distinction” in his own community. The “Lords of Distinction” mold their Ethos according to White standards of social respectability. Frank struggles between wanting to maintain his respectability as an upstanding citizen and embracing his authentic identity as a disenfranchised African American whose credibility is always subject to debate. Frank reflects on this inner struggle in a monologue:

FRANK: I think I been trying t’find out—where I belong. I don’t seem t’fit nowhere. I’m outa step wherever I am. Took me a lifetime a’trying—t’realize ain’t no place f’me. Th’country ain set up f’me Spent 55 years trying—most of th’time trying the best I knew how—t’be (sarcastically) what might be called—“a good nigguh”...On-ly to dis-cov-er...‘good niggus’ a dime a dozen....and....they ain’t no future f’good niggus. (*Stations 27*).

Frank admits that he was at one time embarrassed by what he termed the Fellahs of the world: “corner loungers, welfare cheaters, fat and skinny Black women with il-le-git-tim-ate children using up [his] tax dollars...” (28). Nonetheless, Frank understands that “we all [African Americans collectively] are in the same pot” (29)—the Black Experience may not be monolithic, but the engrained stereotyping of African American citizens by the majority and the State itself is something which defines African American Ethos.

Frank’s speech reflects what Evans calls “the escalation of group political consciousness” (“Political Writing as Device” 96) that occurred during the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s. Frank stands as “the politically motivated” speaker (96). The stage creates his literal “platform from which he [can] affect the minds of his listeners [the audience] in the manner he felt most effective” (96). By standing Frank on his figurative “soapbox,” Evans causes the audience to reminisce about a time when Black Nationalism instituted the necessary, extreme political change that asserted a positive African American Ethos and a socially and economically mobile life for the African American citizen. Early in the theatre piece, Lorelle and Frank have a conversation about Black Militancy. Lorelle admits that “the country’s in trouble”, but the pair agree “that don’t have to make us Black Militants...Hating everybody—particularly everybody White” (*Stations* 19). However, as the play progresses, Frank develops a respect for Black Militancy that he never fully voices. Evans uses Frank’s suffering and anger to demonstrate that American racism remains largely unaltered between the 1960s and the early 1980s. Despite the policies that were enacted (presidential Executive Order 11246, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, etc.), subsequent challenges to these policies suggest an increase in racism. Evans (and Frank) comprehends what many others cannot: it is not age, over

qualification, or inadequate education that prevents Frank from being hired at a new foundry but racialist sentiment that has informed racist actions.

After having his conversation with Teal, Frank moves on to the third stage of Black Manhood: bargaining. In the second scene of Act II, Frank further resists the role of house husband by attempting to become self-employed. He believes he is “either...the man, out there looking for a job, or...the housewife, in here cookin and cleaning up” (*Stations* 31). Lorelle reacts dismissively to Frank’s gender stereotyping, not wanting to pick a fight. He unrolls “a cloth banner with printing on it. He rummages in one drawer until he finds a tack hammer and tacks, then proceeds to tack [the] banner up in [the] kitchen, using [the] woodwork for [an] anchor” (*Stations* 32). The banner reads “Winters and Son, Landscaping.” Mychal Denzel Smith would describe Frank’s actions as “a trade off.” The African American man must bargain with what he can get from hegemonic society. Since Frank cannot obtain a job, he makes one for himself in the hopes of becoming economically mobile again. Frank explains to Lorelle that he would like to sell her yellow Triumph TR-7 so he may acquire a truck and equipment for the business. Amidst her protests, he preaches that the only available option for Black men in a society that discredits them is to “be y’own man. In fact, a Black man don’t really have no option—he ain got no way a protectin hisself” (*Stations* 33). In this context, Frank is stating that Black men cannot protect themselves when it comes to economic success. They are largely wardens of a White-controlled workforce.

Harming the woodwork is an act of defiance for Frank, but even more so an act of desperation to prevent the ultimate failure: losing the house and his wife. Frank defies Lorelle’s wishes to keep the house clean and marks the woodwork with the sign because he is trying to hold on to the remains of his American Dream. Frank views the house as the literal embodiment

of his accomplishments. Losing this space would be another reminder to him that he is no longer upwardly mobile. Lorelle wishes to sell the home as a means for survival, but Frank believes that the sale will be another step in the family's continuing economic regression. Also, Frank fears that if he does not reverse this slump, Lorelle may leave him. He mentions to Teal in the previous scene that Lorelle's "hangin—but I don't know f' how long. Could book an-y day. Still got her [sports car] an her job" (*Stations* 29). Lorelle remains in a state of denial when it comes to the American Dream. She does not attribute Frank's continued unemployment to racist sentiment but rather to unlucky circumstances. Lorelle perceives Frank's persistent refusal to sell the house as an act of jealousy and chauvinism. From her viewpoint, Frank cannot bear the fact that she has been able to maintain a successful career in the midst of his unemployment. However, what she does not realize is that the house is also a safe site for Frank. If Frank continues to own this space, he will be able to keep his street life separate from his "life on the hill." Ultimately, it is Teal who blurs the lines of class separation by entering the house and puncturing its sanctity as refuge of the American Dream. Teal arrives as Frank attempts to wrangle Robbie into joining his new, independent family business. The appearance of a shady-looking individual flabbergasts Lorelle, and Robbie leads her out the door to a board meeting in a moment of confusion. Annoyed, Frank immediately chastises Teal for appearing at his home in the presence of his family, stating, "I keep home and the corner separate" (*Stations* 37). Frank has always been allowed to keep his street and home life separate because he does not have to worry about members of the underclass crossing into more affluent spaces in which they would not be welcome. When Teal brings the threat of the street into Frank and Lorelle's safe space, he exposes Frank's double life to Lorelle. This shatters the illusion that Frank follows the rules of being a "Chosen One" (i.e. not associating with Fella). Teal retorts, "Scuse me, baby... Didn't

mean t'come up in white folks territory an contaminate y' family and y' fine criiib. Want me t'move my rattletrap out y'driveway" (38).

Teal causes Frank to confront his double life head-on by awakening him to the fact that the life he has built for himself is not normal. The pair converses about their own business dealings (which are separate from Frank's landscaping venture), and the audience learns that they are planning illegal activities. Frank is obviously nervous: "All I've ever done is play by the book. Be a good citizen—law abiding, responsible, hard working. Didn't miss a day...I always saw the potential in this country. Had a lot of faith in it" (39). Teal then Signifies on Frank to point out the ridiculousness of his statement. He ridicules Frank for being part of DuBois's "Talented Tenth." He calls Frank "the Intellectual," mocking that he was "quicker—than the other niggahs" (39). Teal as a member of the Black underclass inverts DuBois's concept by educating Frank. By "leading through example" (DuBois 206) as a member of the "Talented Tenth" would, he helps Frank understand that his delusions about the American Dream are not a normality, but an abnormality. For Teal, Frank is nothing more than an Uncle Tom:

TEAL: You gon paw the ground f'twenty-five years. Hustle t'outdo everybody else, that's black, on th'job. Prove you the 'different' niggah t'be boss. Yas suh! Watchu want done next, suh? Sheiit. Twenty-five years a'that and you don't lose no dignity? This is Teal, baby. You tell t'some them white psychiatrists. What you just described is normal niggah, repeat, niggah behavior. An anybody white will convince you it's in your best interest to be considered normal. Now me. I ain no normal niggah. I may hustle and lie—but I don't shuffle and whine. I look

Black. I got me a Black wife. I sound Black...and it's beginning to look like ain none a that normal. (40)

Teal defines for Frank what it means to be an African American man free from the indoctrination of internalized racism. When he says “I may hustle and lie—but I don’t shuffle and whine” (*Stations* 40), Teal argues that he may fit the stereotype of a dangerous Black man, but he would rather be stereotyped as a menace and be true to himself and his culture than ingest and regurgitate White ideals as Frank has done all of his life.

Teal embodies Llorens’s adaptation of Fanon’s concept of the Fella. Fanon defines the Fella as “the unemployed man, the starving native [who does] not say that [he is] the truth, for [he is] the truth” (qtd in Llorens 169). Llorens notes that Fanon’s view of the Fella as “the truth” is really “the truth—*about the rest of us!*” (Llorens 176). The Fella calls the Chosen Ones and Guardians to realize that they are entwined in a “fraternity of hypocrisy and self-deception” (176). Since Teal is an internally colonized subject of racist America, he calls the audience to testify that the American Dream is an illusion. Yet, the Guardians and the Chosen Ones “attempt to avoid him, to not see him, and upon seeing him” pretend to have not (Llorens 170). He mentions that it has “been so long since [he] had a job the unemployment people don’t even have no record a [him]” (*Stations* 44). He is underrepresented, unpaid, and invisible to the majority of the American public because he does not fit their ideal of the proper citizen.

Teal forces Frank, the other Chosen Ones (“The Lords and Ladies of Distinction”, and the Guardian (the White characters mentioned in the piece) “to look at him, to see him” (Llorens 170). Because he is a drug dealer and runs illegal side businesses “he has made it increasingly difficult for [the Chosen Ones and Guardians] to deny his presence and his condition” (170).

Although Teal explains to Frank the vital need to confront his situation in America, Frank remains torn: “I got two minds. I want to throw in with y’all—need to t-throw in with y’all. An it’s my idea but I can’t seem to do it” (*Stations* 42). He believes that he can keep his street life and home life separate, combating racism while still maintaining the ideals of his social status he achieved by following the rules. Teal calls this action “a serious case of conscience” (42): Frank is thrust into the same position as his employers at Bascom Combs when they decided his fate at the company. Will his loyalties lie with the “Lords of Distinction”, or will he risk his home, his family, and even possibly his freedom to accept the life of the street? Llorens notes that “the Chosen Ones experience a vicarious orgasm of the soul when the *fellah* rebels” (171); however, “the Chosen One is [rarely] allowed to act like a *fellah*” (172). Frank must accept the reality of the contemporary racial project: his status and credibility as an honorable citizen do not exist in 1980s America. Frank has few options: 1) he may be an Uncle Tom, or 2) he may act like the Fellaah and be stereotyped by Americans. Regardless, he must be willing to put himself at risk. After a heated discussion, Frank agrees to cross the imaginary divide, leave his life as a member of the Chosen Ones, and become a Fellaah by stealing money from an armored truck to survive.

As time elapses, Frank comes to the understanding that he cannot start his own legitimate business and must play the trickster, stealing and dealing in order to survive. He realizes that the unemployed, overqualified, and uneducated African American of the 1980s cannot be economically mobile because there is no way for him to control his own business without borrowing funds or receiving support from hegemonic forces. Evans relays this sentiment in her essay “Clarity as Concept”: “What *is* at issue... is the fact that we neither manufacture, own, nor control to any significant degree any of the products. It is their corporations, the places where we merely work that enjoy the billion-dollar profits at the end of each fiscal year” (75). The Ethos of

African American man or woman who starts a business in the 1980s shapes whether these men and women will be profitable and, in all truth, whether they will survive because completely independent funding is nearly impossible. Even when individuals and small groups like Frank, Teal, and their friends work illegally to break from the grasp of White corporate America, they cannot make a dent in the current racial formation of the economy.

However, Frank's ideals will haunt him well to the end of the play. While the Dream shatters before him, Frank sets out to learn what freedoms African Americans can have in a land that doesn't regard them as trustworthy and credible citizens. He begins to test his "freedom of movement" as a citizen of the Racial State in the hope of finding some semblance of peace.

Understanding the Limits of Spatial Mobility in *Stations*

Testing the Limits by Crossing Racial Boundaries

Mari Evans makes an excellent argument during the first half of *Stations* that the American Dream seems more like a pipedream for many African Americans, and she contests the widely held belief that America succeeded in achieving economic equality by the early 1980s. However, Evans's central focus of *Stations* is spatial and geographic mobility (i.e. freedom of movement) for oppressed African Americans. She writes the premise of the play as the following:

Freedom of movement may be the only real freedom left to a colonized people within the structure of the state. Even that, as physical process, is being threatened by socio-political developments across the country (the cordoning off of neighborhoods; selective, arbitrary de-limiting by police and militia, etc.).

Freedom, implies choice; an understanding of the relationship of colonization to freedom...a willingness to be ‘at risk’, and a commitment to sharing responsibility for oneself and others (*Stations* “Preface” a).

Evans believes that spatial mobility for the African American citizen was under threat of being destroyed during this period of American history. In order to communicate this idea, Evans has Frank exhibit a “willingness to be ‘at risk’” by having him exercise his freedom of movement. At first, Frank believes his freedom to be real. However, his downfall at the end of the piece provides evidence to show that the citizen of this time had no spatial mobility due to the racial profiling of the Racial State and dominant culture.

Frank’s biggest moments of subversion against the dominant discourse are in the final half of the theatre piece. He is in many ways still stuck in Stage Three of Smith’s “5 Stages of Black Manhood¹⁴.” Frank has mostly given up on his chances of becoming economically mobile, but he still bargains by attempting to exercise the freedom he believes he still has: the ability to traverse geographic space. He decides to move into traditionally “unsafe” spaces for African Americans and becomes increasingly bold and hostile as he moves from the first space (Norman cathedral) to the second (the greasy, White-trash cafeteria) in order to test how long he can be free from physical harm. These “unsafe” spaces are parts of Philadelphia that remain segregated in a post-Civil Rights society due to urban revitalization and the White flight phenomenon of the 1960s and 1970s. This form of de facto segregation “moved from the rural South into the cities” creating invisible borders between racial pockets, “making it difficult to sustain a vision of the

¹⁴ Frank never has a defining moment where he enters Stage Four (depression). The audience sees glimpses of Frank’s depression throughout the plot, though it is never overt. Smith notes that “this stage isn’t always visible. In part it has to do with Black men going to great lengths to conceal their emotions.” However, Frank spends a major part of the latter half of the play bargaining. His depression would not occur until after the curtain falls.

city as a promised land of opportunity” (Dubey 5). As Evans shows in *Stations*, the city of Philadelphia in the 1980s is as divided as many other areas of the country. By crossing into these segregated spaces, Frank will be automatically suspect because he is “out of place.”

Frank’s first trip is to Norman Cathedral, a predominantly White Catholic church in the heart of a predominantly White Philadelphia suburb. He enters the church in order “t’get rid of some invisible binding” (*Stations* 51), i.e., to assert authority in a space where he is unwelcome as an African American. Frank chooses to enter this space because he knows that he will be one of the only African Americans in the building, making him visible to all who enter. After going to the cathedral, Frank describes his journey to Lorelle, commenting on its ironic architectural features:

Its white. An it’s all theirs... (Laughs a bit cynically.) An its breathtaking. Been here all my life, pass it 3 or 4 times a week. Always aware of it—but ain’t never been in it cause it was theirs, an I knew it was theirs and knew I didn’t have no relationship to it. Everything in it was about them, you know” (*Stations* 50).

Frank’s comments on Norman Cathedral reveal not only his cynicism but the wide gap in wealth between Norman and other predominantly African American parts of Philadelphia. One can also conclude that everything inside the cathedral reflects White identity, including the icons, stained glass windows, and statues depicting the lives of the Holy Family and the saints. Black identity has been stifled in this church, demonstrating that the Church functions as what Althusser calls an ideological state apparatus. Althusser defines an ideological state apparatus as “the realization of an ideology (the unity of...different regional ideologies – religious, ethical, legal, political,

aesthetic, etc. being assured by their subjection to the ruling ideology)” (695). Norman Cathedral as an icon of the Catholic Church presents an ideology of holy, just, and perfect life. This ideology manifests itself as a White ideal (holy + just + perfect = White) and thus helps parishioners internalize racist conceptions of what an ideal citizen should be. Althusser notes that at one time the Catholic Church was the “*one dominant Ideological State Apparatus...which concentrated within it not only religious functions, but also educational ones, and a large portion of the function of communications and culture*” (151). It is particularly interesting that Evans has Frank visit Norman Cathedral because the Church is the historical site of an ideology that “Others” African Americans. Frank cannot form any relationship with the people of the church or the Church itself because he is a cultural outsider.

Because Frank is able to relay his story to Lorelle, the audience realizes Frank returned from Norman Cathedral unharmed and unchallenged; however, as Althusser might have predicted, Frank was subject to racial profiling by members of the church community. He describes his presence as “hostile as hell at first” (*Stations* 51), but admits “that the security guard stayed right on my tail the whole time I was there” (52) afraid that Frank was going to take “anything that wasn’t nailed down” (52). The security guard exercises the first step of what would be considered racial profiling¹⁵. The police officer monitors Frank because he stereotypes Frank as an untrustworthy person of color. When Frank tells Lorelle his story of the Norman Cathedral, the couple begin to reconcile their relationship. Lorelle’s immediate reaction to Frank is to reveal that she has felt a similar alienation when traveling to conferences in “opulent” hotels in White areas. She sometimes even questions her reasoning for “want[ing] t’be [t]here”

¹⁵ Ronald Weitzer and Steven A. Tuch define racial profiling as “the use of race as a key factor in police decisions to stop and interrogate citizens” (435). Racial profiling most commonly occurs when an African American or other minority is targeted for traffic violations or when s/he is suspected of being prone to illegal activity.

(*Stations* 51). However, she becomes exasperated when Frank presses her on the issue by asking how she reacts to the “opulence.” She responds, “Enjoy it, baby!” (*Stations* 52). Lorelle “retreats” from this momentary connection with Frank, so she may remain enchanted by the ideal of the American Dream. Frank admits that he made the trip in order “prove something,” but Lorelle does not understand that Frank is testing to see what freedoms he has an African American.

Frank intends to prove that African Americans can move into traditionally White, hence unsafe, spaces and be safe because he hopes that he has some credibility as a citizen. Although Frank’s safety is never questioned in the Cathedral or his next traversed space, this is only because he does not become confrontational in these spaces. Three days after Frank’s trip to Norman Cathedral, Lorelle admits at a dinner party that Frank went to Norwood, a predominantly White, lower-class, gang ridden, and racist section of northern Philadelphia, in order to eat at a “home style cafeteria” (*Stations* 59). Frank’s family and guests (including Teal) gawk in disbelief at his attempt to cross racial barriers. When asked by Lorelle what happened on his trip, Frank attempts to explain his experiment to her again in front of the others: “Nothin, really. (Pauses.) Same thing. Some o’them looked n’ then glanced away like they knew why I was there. Testin; you know. Cool. Very laid back. Colder really than those who turned around, gave me their up north down south stare. Almost had me pinchin myself” (60). Frank’s trip harks back to the lunch counter sit-ins of the Civil Rights era. Instead of being physically attacked like the non-violent protestors of the 1950s and 1960s, he receives covert, non-violent signs that he is unwelcome. Peggy Phelan notes that this anxiety—the type these cafeteria customers are experiencing—produces a marking of the visible Other. Phelan writes that “to acknowledge the Other’s (always partial) presence is to acknowledge one’s own (always partial) absence” (149).

The “unmarked” customers are forced to notice Frank, but they must remain non-confrontational as well. Ordinary citizens of the current Racial State are not allowed to commit violent hate crimes legally but communicate their distaste in “color-blind” ways. When Frank ignores their presence, he destabilizes some of their agency.

Frank believes that he must be willing to put himself at risk as a visible, marked threat when he states the following: We’ve always abided by that unspoken “y’all aint welcome.” So today I went. It’s y’all’s town; its mine too—if I chose...Don’t y’all see its one of the few freedoms we have left? We can cross state lines and city lines and area lines—and we don’t need a pass...” (*Stations* 61). Frank chooses to put himself at risk and assert his authority as a citizen that is equal to all others in the United States. He still remains hopeful that the Ethos of the African American citizen can be formed, altered, and controlled without stereotypes once African Americans claim the freedoms they have in the United States. Frank appears to be singing to the tune of James Brown’s hit “Say it loud: I’m Black and I’m proud!” However, once again, Teal tries to root Frank’s idealist dreams in concrete reality when he states, “Freedom of movement? You outa y’ mind. That’s just a idea” (61). Just as Lorelle cannot understand Frank’s realist perspective on economic mobility, Teal cannot understand why Frank would risk his safety to prove a moot point (that the freedom of movement is mostly non-existent).

The Real Limits of Spatial Mobility

Frank’s experiment to discover the freedoms of the African American citizen remains positive until it is squashed in the final scene of the theatre piece. He may have exercised spatial mobility during his two trips in Act II, but the actions at the end of Act III prove that spatial mobility is not just in danger; the African American citizen of the 1980s has no “safe” space. Act III takes place on Thanksgiving Day, 1984, six months after the last dinner party with Ann and Roy McKinney, and Teal. Frank and Lorelle have invited the McKinneys over for Thanksgiving

dinner. After they arrive, Lorelle notices that a few Black men have entered a neighbor's house and are removing items and putting them in a truck. Lorelle is visibly uneasy. Frank teases, "If Lorelle had her way she'd station a cop at each end of th'block. She ain 'fraid a'them. She's 'fraid of Black-on-Black crime" (*Stations* 76). Lorelle decides to call the police against the wishes of everybody else in the house. The audience realizes that Lorelle has reached a level of *internalized racism*—"the psychological programming by which a racist society indoctrinates people of color to believe in white superiority" (Tyson 383). By indoctrinating the White practice of racial profiling, Lorelle exhibits qualities of *intra-racial racism* (Black-on-Black racism). She is not enacting the "color-blind" discourse she pretends to live by and instead racially profiles the men. Roy, Robbie, and Frank try to deter her from calling the police. Robbie states that Lorelle and her friends "don't know who they real enemy is" (*Stations* 77), hinting that bringing the police into their space will create more problems than just letting the men get away with their possible robbery.

When Lorelle calls 911 and speaks to the operator, the operator racially profiles Lorelle:

Lorelle: Yes. Thank you. I'd like to report what seems t'be a robbery in progress.
(Pause.) My name? Look. They about t'leave—do you want the address or don't you? (Turns to the men.) Y'all get the license number! Are you gonna send somebody out here a'not. (pause.) I don't have t'give you my name first; I'm a citizen reporting a crime—that's all you need t'know. I know that much about th'law. (Pause.) Where do I live? Don't matter where I live. Robbery's not at my house...Look, Bitch. The address of th'house that was probably being burglarized while you worrying about my name, is 1807 Circle Drive. Now you gonna send

somebody out a'not? (Pause.) Naw. There ain't nothing you can do t'me—I want your name. You can b'lieve I'm gonna report you! (*Stations* 78-79).

Two aspects of Lorelle's heated conversation with the 911 operator are important. First, Lorelle starts off the conversation mostly in Standard English. As she becomes more distressed and upset with the operator, her language reflects the distress in her use of profanity. The operator reacts to her change in language and tone in a demeaning way by racially profiling her. Second, Lorelle expects to be treated under the guise of "color-blind" rhetoric. She believes that she exhibits trustworthiness and maintains value as a citizen because she is responding to the "hail" of the ideological state apparatus of the law. According to Althusser, "the individual *is interpellated* [i.e. hailed] *as a (free) subject in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection*" (182). Lorelle responds to the ideology that an upright, free citizen must do her duty to report a crime, proving that she is hopelessly indoctrinated into the rhetoric of the Racial State. However, she feels she should not have to go through the red tape of bureaucracy (giving her name to the operator) in order to prevent a crime from occurring because the operator would assume the report legitimate if she was White. The operator's reaction is to threaten Lorelle by sending the police to the Winters' residence.

By finally experiencing the treatment Frank does, Lorelle understands why Frank is so angry at hegemonic society. Shortly after Lorelle calls 911, the police knock on the door, leading to the climax of the plot: the culmination of the racist project against African Americans, as manifested in the experience of the Winters family. Frank answers the door for two police officers, one who is White and the other Black. The Black officer, Barlow, hails Frank and his family, expecting them to respond respectfully to the law. Barlow operates under the assumption

that Frank and Lorelle will respond to the ideology of how one should respect the repressive state apparatus of the law. Althusser writes: “The (Repressive) State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly *by repression* (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology” (145). Though RSAs normally operate through repression or violence to maintain order, Barlow operates first under the assumption that Frank, as a citizen, will cooperate without being subject to repression.

In order to show the police officers they are unwelcome in his home, Frank rejects Barlow’s hail by refusing to give him his name. Frank operates under the assumption that since he is located in the private space of his home, the police cannot harm him or his family if he does not cooperate with them. Chenowitz, the White officer, is immediately hostile toward Frank, stating “What’s your name? (As an afterthought)...Sir?” (*Stations* 86). Lorelle, who is already exacerbated, joins in on Frank’s hostility, and they both yell obscenities at the officers. Frank knows that the “(Repressive) State Apparatus belongs entirely to the *public* domain” (Althusser 144), so he asserts what little authority he has as a private homeowner. He tells Barlow “an [tell] ‘th cracker to get out my house...” (*Stations* 87). Chenowitz, having already formed an opinion of Frank and his family based on racist assumptions, responds with hostility: “Oh you’re one of the smart...” (87). As the situation escalates, the police threaten to arrest the family. The family does not realize that RSAs escape “the distinction between the public and the private...because the [State] is ‘above the law’” (Althusser 144). As an RSA, the police are given the privilege to bend the rules of legality if they feel they are being threatened. However, they must have just cause for not following protocol. Officers Chenowitz and Barlow overstep the bounds of public authority by entering the private space of the home without a warrant, which incites the family to react in a defensive manner. The officers’ presuppositions of how the family will react at the

beginning of the encounter cloud their judgment as to how to respond to the altercation. Since Barlow and Chenowitz have the law on their side, they are able to use deadly force unjustly without reprimand.

The final moments of the theatre piece prove that the police can abuse their authority through acts of brutality without legal repercussions. Barlow tries to arrest Frank, but Lorelle moves to grab the handcuffs from him. Chenowitz overreacts, grabbing Lorelle and manhandling her in self-defense. Robbie, hearing the noise in the living room, springs to Lorelle's aid, leading to a final series of devastating events. Chenowitz grabs Robbie and holds him in a chokehold, firmly tightening his grip. Barlow warns Chenowitz to "ease up" on his hold. Then, the unthinkable occurs:

Frank looks at ROBBIE who is still struggling; hesitates, raise his hands, palms out just waist high, eyeing first BARLOW, then ROBBIE and CHENOWITZ. LORELLE ignores BARLOW, runs to CHENOWITZ who tries to move both himself and ROBBIE in the other direction, tightening the choke in order to maintain his control of ROBBIE. ROY moves toward the struggling men just as FRANK makes his move on BARLOW, who has been distracted. BARLOW's gun goes off in the air as FRANK jumps him. Ann, hearing the gunshot, picks up an [item] which is lying close and strikes CHENOWITZ on the back of the neck. He grabs for the pain, reaches for his gun, and in the process releases ROBBIE whose body falls, lifeless, on the floor. (90)

The theatre piece ends with Lorelle and Frank speechless, on their knees holding Robbie's limp body. This final moment awakens the audience to the harsh reality that Frank does not have any freedoms and probably never did. Frank is never able to reach Smith's final stage of Black Manhood because acceptance is not possible. He does not accept that he and his family have no freedoms as citizens of the Racial State of the 1980s. Frank and his family are marked as untrustworthy, not credible, and without value in the eyes of the State. The audience can only assume that this act of police brutality will go unprosecuted as other acts of a similar nature did during this time period.

Conclusion: A Justification for Revisiting Evans's Work

Evans's powerful ending leaves the audience pondering the fate of those operating with an African American Ethos in the 1980s. During this time period, various acts of police brutality against African Americans, illegal immigrants, and homosexuals went unprosecuted. Reports of police brutality came from across the country, particularly in St. Louis, New York City, Oklahoma City, Chicago, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia. Two of the most notorious acts of police brutality occurred in Philadelphia in 1978 and 1985, not long before and after Evans wrote *Stations*. On May 13, 1985, Philadelphia police attacked a mostly African American alternative living movement called MOVE. Like the final scene of *Stations*, the situation between a normally peaceful group of people and the Racial State escalated and erupted into devastation. The MOVE members believed they were safe in their private residence. During the second attack, which was the most brutal, the police "shot 10,000 rounds of ammunition in a 90-minute period from automatic weapons, machine guns, and antitank guns. Finally they dropped a bomb from a helicopter, starting a fire that incinerated five MOVE members and six

children” (Assefa and Wahrhaftig 4). The Philadelphia Police overstepped their bounds of authority as members of the Repressive State Apparatus and attacked people in what should have been a safe space. Like the Winters family, the members of MOVE posed no real threat to the city, and they were unfairly treated.

Although it is not clear whether Evans wrote *Stations* with MOVE in mind, she definitely responded to incidents of police brutality that had begun to escalate in the latter twentieth century. Her poem “Alabama Landscape” (1987) is dedicated to Michael Taylor, a 17-year-old boy who “police said shot himself in the head while he was handcuffed in the backseat of a police car” (*Indianapolis Star*), and to “all the Black victims of ‘police action’ lynchings throughout the United States” (*Continuum* 24). The poem is set to three movements. The first shows an image of a male slave running to freedom, the second details the turbulent 1960s, and the final returns to the Black man running. Evans writes that “the Truth is clear: / Until we stand, until we act / the murders, the oppression still / the unabated war / we seem unable to define / goes on” (25). Evans makes it clear for her audience that the “war for the black mind” and body continued on well into the days of the Reagan administration.

As we move into 2014—thirty years after *Stations* was penned—I challenge critics to (re)examine the theatrical writing of Mari Evans. *Stations*, in particular, remains relevant to contemporary society in its connections with recent actions of the racial state against African Americans. The violent, unjust deaths of Kenneth Chamberlain, Sr., a longtime war veteran, in New York, and Trayvon Martin, a teenage boy in Florida, at the hands of the police and everyday citizens are an important reminder that the racial state is still completely unjust. The State still exercises its power unfairly over its citizens. African Americans and other minorities are still targets for discrimination. Madhu Dubey reminds readers that “racial status still

significantly determines material life-chances for a vast majority of African-Americans” (30). Many African Americans have little to no chance of becoming economically or spatially mobile in their lifetime. The biggest obstacle facing the achievement of equality is “a distinctive cultural ethos” perpetuated by the Racial State that prevents citizens from achieving individual economic, political, and social success. Evans call her readers to realize the nature of their current oppression by racist institutions and move to action:

The oppressed, and we are oppressed, are crisis-oriented. We can summon a great cohesiveness in times of extreme sadness or joy. Or trouble. For it is then that we understand on an acutely self-conscious level, our national ‘family-hood.’ We are a mystical people, moving instinctively when the drums announce danger. Or dance. And we appear, magically, without announcement or arrangement, in the same place at the same time, charged by the same impulse. In-bond...It is a compulsive ‘comingtogetherness’...that empowers our resistance and enables us to demonstrate strength in the face of continuing adversity. (“How We Speak” 45)

Theatre pieces such as *Stations* bring the community together. When an author’s politically charged dialogue is transformed into oral performance, her/his audience is awakened to the oppression others experience. Theatre allows us to “appear, magically...charged by the same impulse” (45) to recognize the reality of one’s subjectivity. However, Evans reminds her readers that “it is not enough to call for change” (*Continuum* 135). The awakening is only the first step. The African American Ethos will be legitimized when collective mobilization occurs.

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