

A BLACK PROMETHEUS AMONG THE GODS: ILLUMINATING AFRICAN
AMERICAN LITERARY TRADITION IN SAM GREENLEE'S *THE SPOOK WHO
SAT BY DOOR*

By

Kenneth Leon Rainey III

A Project Presented to

The Faculty of California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in English: Literature and Cultural Studies

Committee Membership

Dr. Christina Hsu Accomando, Committee Chair

Dr. Ramona Bell, Committee Member

Dr. Janet Winston, Program Graduate Coordinator

May 2023

ABSTRACT

A BLACK PROMETHEUS AMONG THE GODS: ILLUMINATING AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERARY TRADITION IN SAM GREENLEE'S *THE SPOOK WHO SAT BY DOOR*

Kenneth Leon Rainey III

In his hard-hitting novel *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* Sam Greenlee aims to help his target African American audience to succeed and thrive as their true selves with the novel functioning as a guide to resisting the ever-present physical and spiritual threat faced daily. On the one hand the novel functions as a manual for civil uprising, but underneath that surface, Greenlee argues that true African American resistance comes through nurturing self-determination, self-love, and self-esteem. This project also argues that *Spook* ought to be located closer to the center of the African American literary canon and provides comparisons to widely read and valued African American literature. This project argues for the canonization of *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*. This project claims that Greenlee views self-determination as a path to resistance and success for African Americans.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Christina Hsu Accomando for sticking with me over the course of this project from conceptualization to implementation. You have helped me move beyond the frontier of my capabilities. Thank you to Dr. Ramona Bell for introducing me to texts that have inspired my awakening. Thank you to my mother Katheen O'Rourke Rainey for teaching me the value of education. Thank you to my wife Cora Vay Rainey for your emotional support and for always taking care of me. Thank you to my babies Ava Vay Rainey and Kenneth Leon Rainey IV to whom I have dedicated my life. Thank you to Nate Capron, I finish the degree he never had the chance to pursue. I miss you buddy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
My Positionality and Motivations	1
Note to the Reader.....	4
His Name is Freeman, Sir	9
Who Appointed You the Savior of Soul?.....	10
CHAPTER II: CORE ANALYSIS	13
Drop Those Names: <i>The Spook Who Sat by the Door</i> Rooted in Tradition.....	13
You’ll Recognize That Concept As Your Own: <i>The Spook Who Sat by the Door</i> and Its Contemporaries	21
Constantly Borrowing from Each: Greenlee’s Novel and Film in Concert	28
Reading the Handbook: Integration is not the Goal.....	31
A Multitude of Masks	33
CHAPTER III: CONCLUSION	38
BIBLIOGRAPHY	39

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

My Positionality and Motivations

I am a white man and my view of the world has evolved as such. I believe the evolution of my world view has largely been due to the way society has treated me rather than some naturally evolved feeling, meaning that my white identity is not genetic or physiological in any way but is rather a perspective that is learned through education and social interaction. I am white because the power structure tells me I am white. My subjectivity has been granted and as I have grown into a man, I am confounded by the fact that the same is not true for others. It has been through my study of African American literature that I have learnt the true nature of this country, “our” United States, more so than I ever have in my lived experience as a white man.

It is with caution that I embark on my project. Molefi Asante warns me against the assumed objectivity of European culture and I must acknowledge that my own perspective is *not* completely objective. I have lived and learned my entire life from a white male perspective which has evolved from a Eurocentric point of view. I cannot shake the influence this has on my psyche. However, I have spent the bulk of my post-secondary education working to decolonize my own mind and to understand this world from a perspective other than my own. For a white man to decolonize his own thinking takes humility and the willingness to look in the mirror and admit that which many white men in America have no interest in admitting: that I have benefitted from a patriarchal

white supremacist political system that is built on the practice of not only otherizing, but also terrorizing the other.

It is dangerous, still, to have this philosophical and political perspective because I run the risk of inadvertently reinforcing the same subject-object dichotomy that exists behind every “color blind” rationale. If I aim to write about experiences of a group to which I do not belong, then I must put in double work to ensure that my words are not perpetuating an imbalance of representation. In her article “feminist scholarship: ethical issues,” bell hooks states that

even if perceived “authorities” writing about a group to which they do not belong and/or over which they wield power, are progressive, caring, and right-on in every way, as long as their authority is constituted by either the absence of the voices of the individuals whose experiences they seek to address, or the dismissal of those voices as unimportant, the subject-object dichotomy is maintained and domination is reinforced. (hooks 42)

I aim to avoid this error in approach by formulating my knowledge of an African American perspective from African American writers themselves. The voices of those whose experiences I seek to address are the core of this project, and my education. What I assert about African Americans in the project that follows comes from what African American writers have told me about themselves through *their* work. I aim to center the voices of the individuals whose experiences I seek to address and any authority I may assert of the literature, in the course of this project, should be based only on my having

studied the texts and not based on the notion that my white maleness comes with any natural insight into anything (except, perhaps, being white which in itself is a positionality formulated and dictated by the elite and passed on to me in the form of a psychological wage).

My motivation for studying this country, and its historical phenomena, from the African American perspective is to uncover the truth about what Nathan Wright, Jr., a civil rights and black power warrior, named as the “gross malfunctions” of this nation: To understand the true nature and cause of the injustices that take place every day and at every moment in America.

Even though I believe my heart and efforts to be in the right place I will, inevitably, expose my “blindspots” as hooks calls them. I can read all day about African American experiences but there are just some things I will *never* understand, and I likely won’t even realize the things that I am mis-understanding. This is because, honestly and truthfully, I am a white man. No doubt about it, and I won’t ever forget it.

Do not *mis-understand* me though, reader. I enjoy being who I am. It is not wrong of me to have cultural and political blind spots in this project as long as I work in earnest to acknowledge and address those blind spots. Diversity and difference ought to be celebrated and everyday folks ought to be able to talk about our differences as a loving community. One can never fully understand what it is like to *be* someone else, but we can, and should, make efforts to learn about, appreciate, and value each other. This work is necessary because I want neither to live, nor raise my babies, in a white power world.

Note to the Reader

Dear Reader,

This project centers on Sam Greenlee's badass novel *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, which is not widely represented in literary criticism, anthologies, or course syllabi, even those that center African American literature. I first encountered this novel, which also exists in a film version, in Dr. Ramona Bell's ethnic studies course on African American cultural history at Cal Poly Humboldt. I am grateful for the opportunity to have been in Dr. Bell's class and study this text. My only regret is that this novel did not appear anywhere in the undergraduate or graduate curriculum of my major discipline of English at the same university.

Because I will often be referencing *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* numerous times throughout this project, I will follow the common practice of shortening the title to *Spook* for the purpose of brevity. I choose to use the word "spook" because it carries the most weight of any other word in the full title. As Greenlee himself explains "'Spook' [is] a more clever title because it's a play on words. Spooks are black people who allegedly are afraid of ghosts, and CIA undercover agents are called spooks" (qtd. in Martin et al. 35). The protagonist in the novel, Dan Freeman, is black and becomes a CIA agent. The play on words in Greenlee's title becomes especially clever here because Freeman's motivation for joining the CIA is to gain intelligence of United States military operations and functions in order to raise a black American revolutionary guerrilla force to topple the US government. To abbreviate the full title with *Door*, or *Sat*, simply doesn't do Greenlee's clever play proper justice. Reader, I am working to justify my use

of *Spook* as the abbreviated title name precisely because writing the word brings me discomfort. The historical racial connotations of the word cannot go entirely unaddressed in this project. While using the word “spook” brings me discomfort I find justification in its employment because I am referring to a work of art and honoring Greenlee’s intentionally clever use of the word. Under normal circumstances such a term would never pass my lips.

This project, completed in Cal Poly Humboldt’s Literary and Cultural Studies program, is an endeavor to make a case for moving Sam Greenlee’s novel more firmly into the African American literary canon of classic works that should be read and valued widely. If the focus on this project is so much around a canonization of Greenlee’s *Spook*, then, I must work to define not only what I mean by “canon,” but also what it means to be a part of the African American literary canon. I define a literary canon as a compilation of texts that are generally accepted as a standard not only within the discipline but also among mainstream readership. To reinforce my musings on this topic I look to Henry Louis Gates, Jr., a leading scholar of African American literature, but also often seen as a gatekeeper. In his introduction to Penguin Classics Anthology *The Portable Nineteenth-Century African American Women Writers*, a text he also edits, Gates openly ponders what it means to be a “classic,” and, as a matter of course, “what it means to be an African American classic” (xiv). In his meditation Gates provides his own definition of a canon suggesting it is a group of texts “that a truly well-educated person should have read, and read carefully, at least once” (xiv). With both Gates’ and my definitions of a canon I can surmise that a canon, at least, is made up of more than one

text that not only commands readership and attention but has influence over future literary works. Gates admits that in his work to edit the anthology he was forced to stop and consider what indeed “constitutes a ‘classic’” (xiv). Gates provides four concrete elements that, for him, define a classic but there is one that resonates most with the scope of this project. Gates contends that a classic is “a work somehow endlessly compelling, generation upon generation,” (xiv). Citing W.S. Merwin, Gates moves his ponderance into the context of African American Literature as he determines “classic works by black writers are works that one imagines should be common knowledge among the broadest possible readership but that less and less are...” (xv).

It is the aim of this project to demonstrate how Sam Greenlee’s *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* is the embodiment of an endlessly compelling work and is not, but ought to be, considered a classic/canonical text. *Spook* is indeed a text that a truly educated person should have carefully read and is intergenerationally compelling. Yet, it is Gates’ definition of an African American classic that fits most into my conceptualization of the relationship between Greenlee and a canon and that is: when I first read and truly began to study *Spook* I felt that this text ought to be “common knowledge among the broadest possible readership,” but is not. I view *Spook* in this vein because of the purposeful accessibility of its message: a true love and appreciation of one’s own self; the freedom to define one’s own self; and the ability to use that intentional self-love as a shield against forces that wish to do harm.

Among the many beauties of the novel *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* is its insistence on self-determination. By self-determination I am referring to the notion that

author, and text, aren't simply appealing for a seat at the literary and cultural table but rather, that a seat at the table of others is wholly unnecessary. With such a claim Greenlee inserts himself into an existing conversation within African American literary tradition. In his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Langston Hughes sets up his reader with a striking difference between what he describes as an "urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible" (32), and those artists that "hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations" (33). When, in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Hughes describes a young aspiring black poet who states that he wants "to be a poet - not Negro poet" (31), he critiques a sort of seat-at-the-table notion where the young poet desires a seat at the *white* poets' table rather than poetically insisting on the value of self-determination. Hughes is arguing for Americans who self-identify as black or African American to exist in the world as unapologetically true to themselves rather than yearn to align with some "American standard." I acknowledge the tension between this assertion and my insistence that Greenlee be galvanized among widely read African American literary gods. While I argue for Greenlee to be more widely read I insist he ought to be more widely read as himself free of any standardized lenses. While *Spook* exists unapologetically as its true self, it also works to showcase Greenlee's knowledge and appreciation for foundational African American texts.

In this project I argue that *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* closely follows an African American literary tradition that emphasizes the politics of self-determined

identity, misdirection for the purpose of resistance to a patriarchal white power structure, and resistance to the notion that integration is the key to racial justice and civic triumph of black Americans.

While following in the literary traditions mentioned above, Greenlee simultaneously creates a text that is accessible, empowering, and positively subversive. This text is an educational tool that works to both instruct the reader and to position itself in an African American literary tradition.

Much of the artistry of *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* lies in the showcasing of African American literary traditional knowledge while simultaneously working to carve a new path forward. Greenlee could have easily crafted a text that would have pleased the literary canonical gatekeepers; a text that would have the FBI uninterested in surveilling him; or a text that would appeal to a sympathetic white reader. Instead Greenlee committed his literary moment to the betterment of those whom he viewed as his people. Greenlee devoted his artistic efforts to the improvement of the situation not only of black Americans but of all disenfranchised cultures and peoples of the world. This project is intended to honor that devotion, to honor the African American literary traditions embedded in this text, and to recognize that *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* asserts that the success and well-being of black Americans does not hinge on acceptance by a white power structure but instead depends on self-determining one's own value and worth.

His Name is Freeman, Sir

In Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, protagonist Dan Freeman leads a revolutionary force against the agents of the white power structure. In the novel, Senator Hennington, aiming to gain clout amongst black voters, devises a ploy to create a false optic of integration within the CIA. The agency, in an effort to put on an integrationist face to the public, recruits a group of "elite" black draftees who would, in theory, be qualified for the job. Each of the recruits are put through a series of physical and academic tests. Forced out one by one, each of the recruits are subjected to designed disqualification. Freeman becomes the lone graduate feigning subservience and playing the "Tom." Freeman survives being cut from the program because, while he is excellent in every challenge, he also performs a phony humility and presents the CIA with exactly the kind of black man they would hire: one that can do any job, does the job with a smile, and never complains. Freeman is rewarded with the title of "Chief Reproduction Officer" of the CIA headquarters, essentially relegated to the copy room. Working quietly at the agency for 5 years playing up his "phony humility" before resigning and returning to his hometown, Chicago, Freeman is able to succeed in the CIA, where the other recruits have failed, "by playing 'the spook' (i.e. the subservient black person)" (Reich 325). By employing this guise, Freeman is able to infiltrate deep into the CIA, gather sensitive intelligence, and learn spy-operative level skills including how to wage guerilla warfare. He takes his new-found knowledge back to Chicago, where he recruits, trains, and

organizes members of the South Side gang The Cobras into a guerilla army, and leads a militaristic rebellion upon the streets of Chicago.

While this project aims to showcase the deep literary tradition present in *Spook*, the novel itself insists that the safeguarding of a self-determined black consciousness is vital to successful resistance against the violent oppression of racial injustices in the United States, because that is precisely the aspect of African American consciousness that is under constant assault by the white supremacist patriarchal society.

Who Appointed You the Savior of Soul?

I use the term “self-determined black consciousness” in this project to refer to the elements upon which an individual hinges their personal sense of “blackness.” My positionality—a white man in America—excludes me from ever understanding what those elements may be. I do not claim to assert what *is* or what *isn't* blackness and this project does not intend to engage in a conversation on the authenticity, or definition, of blackness. Though I cannot draw on my lived experience when discussing blackness as a self-identifying term I am lucky enough to have beside me now stacks of books classified as African American literature, which contain discussions of black American experiences as unique as each author. I know blackness exists because these authors are telling me it exists and shape its meaning through their prose. Though it is outside the scope of this project to determine the composition of authentic blackness, that does not suggest that Sam Greenlee doesn't argue *his* definition of such consciousness in *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*. A discussion on Greenlee's insistence on the existence and definition of

blackness is paramount to this project because, at the heart of *Spook*, is the argument that blackness itself, that is, self-determined black consciousness, is under assault from a white power political system and subversive offense is the way to defend against this assault.

A salient textual example where Greenlee shapes his notion of blackness can be found in Freeman's exchange with one of his Cobra recruits, Pretty Willie. Willie is the only member of the Cobras who is actively enrolled in a university, claiming to do so only to appease his mother. When Freeman encourages Willie to take his studies seriously and earn a degree Willie balks and wonders "[w]hat for? What kind of job could I get with it? I hope you're not suggesting I pass" (126). Through Freeman's response to Willie's question Greenlee seeks to instruct his audience on his perception of an authentic blackness. Freeman responds to Willie by insisting he doesn't "know what people mean by 'passing.' Being black or white in this country is a state of mind. You're black because you think black, feel black and act black. I know people who look like charcoal who are more white than whitey" (126). Willie has much lighter skin than the rest of the Cobras, which is a point of tension for him throughout the novel. Up until this moment in the text Willie's sense of blackness is complicated by what he perceives as a deficiency in outward light-skinned appearance because he is hinging his sense of blackness on the amount of pigmentation in his skin, rather than a state of consciousness. The tension is eased after Freeman provides Willie with a new scope of blackness and proclaims "don't worry about not having enough pigment. As far as I'm concerned, you're one of the blackest cats we have" (129).

For Greenlee, authentic blackness is a self-determined experience that comes from within. It has to do with one's *soul*, rather than how one is defined by another. When Freeman states he knows of "people who look like charcoal but are more white than whitey" (126) he is saying that being black is independent of skin tone and is instead hinged upon one's state of consciousness. Later in the novel Freeman devises a plan to rob a bank with Willie leading the heist because he has the lightest skin and can allow witnesses to believe they saw a white man. Willie is resistant to the idea because he "ain't white" (139) but the Cobras reassure him insisting that "although your soul is black your skin is white" (139). Just because the witnesses in the bank will perceive Willie as white does not make it so. It is Willie's motivations, experiences, and political situation that inform his self-determined sense of blackness.

CHAPTER II: CORE ANALYSIS

Drop Those Names: *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* Rooted in Tradition

In the following pages I will work to demonstrate the ways in which *Spook* follows and at-times reimagines African American literary traditions. I will exhibit how the novel is in conversation with heavyweights of classic African American literature such as Harriet Jacobs, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, and W.E.B. Du Bois, discussing the literary trope of masking and notions of double-consciousness. I also position Greenlee in the context of two of his contemporaries, Dr. Joseph D. Jackson, and John A. Williams, both of whom crafted novels with similar backdrops of armed resistance against white power America.

The Spook Who Sat by the Door works to instruct the reader and has its bearing in the literary tradition established by some of African American literature's most widely read authors. In the introduction to *Early African American Classics*, an anthology he also edited, Anthony Appiah points out that "the major goal of these authors [Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Booker T. Washington] was to speak for black Americans, to America and, in particular, to white America" (ix). For example, when Harriet Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by herself* accounts the practice of "hiring-day" where "slaves are expected to go to their new masters" the narrator directly appeals to the reader. "O, you happy free women, contrast *your* New Year's day with that of the poor bond-woman!" (Jacobs 18). Here the "happy free women" are Northern white women with whom Jacobs aims to share insight into an enslaved black American

experience. The purpose of invoking the conscience of the reader, as Appiah states, is to speak to white America from the point of view of the author's own experiential knowledge aimed at an appeal to end the institution of slavery. In the context of the literary tradition later followed by Greenlee, Jacobs is writing with instructive intent because she is directly working to inform white America of the horrors of enslavement. Both Jacobs and Greenlee, writing a century apart, are working to inspire actual change in real American life.

While I contend Greenlee continues in this vein of literary tradition, by intentionally writing with instructive purpose to a primary audience, I also argue that Greenlee does so with a different primary audience in mind. In the case of *Spook*, Greenlee's intention is to speak to and instruct, however, he is not writing to primarily speak on behalf of black Americans but rather to primarily speak *to* them. *Spook* does not work to "refute the slanders of racism," as Appiah describes as the project of its predecessors (ix). By the time of its publishing in 1969 that work had been vastly addressed and the slanders logically dismantled, and Greenlee's intended audience does not require a plea for equity and integration. In her article "Subverting the System: The Politics and Production of *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*" Christine Acham quotes Greenlee as he describes the book as "a deliberate departure from traditional black protest novels. Those books were meant to appeal to the moral conscience of white America. I don't do that. My book is for black people" (qtd. in Acham, 127). This is not to say that Jacobs et al. wrote *exclusively* to the appeal of white America, but rather that Greenlee put a twist on the tradition by writing to instruct an exclusively black readership. In his

deliberate departure from the classics Greenlee is standing on the shoulders of giants. Traditions, for Greenlee, are the foundation for his work and he builds upon them with his purposeful departures.

In keeping with classical African American literary tradition, though, *Spook* employs the trope of the mask. In his article “Literary Subterfuge: Early African American Writing and the Trope of the Mask,” Daniel P. Black argues that masking and misdirection are essential tropes found in early (pre-twentieth century) African American literature. Black contends that because their work was necessarily compromised “in order to weasel their way into a literary tradition which rejected the notion of black subjectivity” (3) early black writers such as Phillis Wheatley and Paul Lawrence Dunbar “devised a method whereby to disguise their truth and remain undetected in a hostile literary environment while still hoping black readers would be able to read beyond the mask.”

Demonstrating a reading beyond the mask in Dunbar’s poem “When Malindy Sings,” Black asserts that the “humor and black dialect in the poem is meant to distract the hostile reader away from messages of freedom and black self-love disguised in their texts” (4). For Black the surface reading of comedy and vernacular function as the textual mask. Unmask the text, however, and he finds that “the poem celebrates black musical talent as a natural divine gift that whites simply do not possess” (5).

According to Black these early writers had to veil their message to black readers due to the political climate. I assert that the political climate was nearly as dangerous in the time of J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI where the hostile readers were actively seeking out

subversion in African American literature. Hoover's "ghostreaders," federal agents that were assigned to comb through contemporary African American literature, were searching for subversive messages that might incite armed rebellion within the African American community. I argue that Greenlee employs images of warfare and revolutionary violence to distract the hostile reader while the true messages of black self-love and determination exist behind the mask. The trope of masking is often employed to cloak revolutionary motivation behind docile or seemingly harmless (harmless to a white power structure!) performances. Greenlee's images of warfare function as a distracting cheese for the ghostwriting rats because black armed resistance can easily be crushed with the military might of the U.S. government. A far more acute threat to a white supremacist patriarchal power structure is the prospect of positive black self-esteem which is why it must be masked in *Spook*.

Bridging the narratives of early African American literary legends and Greenlee is the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, specifically his essay "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" in which he argues the existence of an African American "double-consciousness" characterized as

...a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. 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. (Du Bois 2)

In *Spook* Greenlee works to flip the rail on Du Bois's notion of double-consciousness by employing the duality of African American experiences as a "survival tool," rather than "a disease" (Martin et al, 3). In his article "Dogged Strength Within the Veil: African American Spirituality as a Literary Tradition," Josiah Ulysses Young III analyzes Du Bois's notion of African American "two-ness" arguing that "one part of this two-ness, 'Negro-ness'—that is blackness—concerns the dim memory of the African heritage," a memory Du Bois refuses to "abandon" (91). For Young, "Negro-ness" is the part of the two-ness that is inherent in an African American consciousness, a piece of a common experience that exists permanently, simultaneously grounds African American consciousness in authenticity and homogeneity, *and* makes him a "problem" within the American political system. It is what Du Bois characterized as his "Negro Soul" an inherent state of consciousness that exists independent from a constructed American identity, a state of mind that is felt from within. The other part of the two-ness is the half that must solve the puzzle of being black in America. "*That* is the half of the twoness [Du Bois] must manage lest it break him" (Young 91). How does one "hold it together?" How can "African Americans overcome the bias of the other world" which is specifically designed to destroy black bodies and souls (Young 91)?

For Greenlee the safeguarding of an inherent self-determined sense of blackness is vital to successful resistance because that is precisely the aspect of African American consciousness that is under constant assault by the white supremacist patriarchal society. *Spook* argues that for African Americans to successfully *thrive* they must successfully *resist*. One major tool of resistance against this assault is to play the "spook": to "become

what will make whites comfortable when you're in their purview" (Martin et al, 37), to mis-direct the dangerous attention of whites so that black folk can safely return home to participate in a self-determined authentic consciousness. This move by Freeman contrasts with the overarching moves by Greenlee in the novel because, according to Greenlee, there are different moments in which one must employ different masks. In a scene where Freeman meets with the board executives at his non-profit social work office (referred to as the foundation) just after a major protest—referred to as a “riot” by the police and as “this thing” at the foundation—the board of directors threatens to shut down the foundation because, after all, they were supposed to be working to subdue street-gang activity and a riot of this magnitude signaled an ineffective strategy. With everyone at the foundation in distress they looked to Freeman to reassure the board that their efforts have indeed had a positive effect. Faced with this situation Freeman “thumbed through his masks and chose one of smiling confidence” (Greenlee 182). It is significant that Greenlee portrays Freeman as “thumbing through his masks,” because this indicates that Freeman has multiple masks in his arsenal and, depending on the circumstance, has fostered the ability to cycle through and select a particular persona to achieve a desired outcome. In this scene, the desired outcome is to tranquilize the sacred white folks so they won't pull the plug on the foundation effectively blowing Freeman's cover. Greenlee crafts *Spook* behind a mask of violence and rebellion in order to veil the true messages of positive self-esteem and black self-determination. By depicting Freeman thumbing through this arsenal of masks, and choosing one that performs docility,

Greenlee demonstrates to the reader that it is necessary to have multiple masks and to know when to employ a particular variation.

More than simply misdirecting the dangerous attention of whites, *Spook* argues black folks must take resistance a step further. Freeman's participation in the CIA integration program and his subsequent employment is nothing more than a cover allowing him to gain access to intelligence and training that can help him plan his guerilla war. While at the CIA Freeman plays the part of what he refers to as the "Tom" by incorporating stereotypical behavior into his mask and convincing "Mr. Charlie" (the white patriarchal power structure represented in the novel by white male government officials) that he would be a safe token of integration. Once promoted to the position of "special assistant to the director," Freeman "couldn't have been in a better position for what he intended to accomplish," because he has gained "access to most of the general's briefings," and "attended many of his meetings" (*Spook*, 47). The end of his tenure at the CIA comes when Freeman decides to "stop procrastinating," and that it is "time to do what he had to do" (64-65). What Freeman intends to accomplish is to become "a black Prometheus among the gods, who had stolen the secret of fire from Olympus by the Potomac and was teaching its use to his people" (91). Freeman takes the intelligence he has gathered at the CIA and delivers it to the Cobras for the purpose of resistance. While Greenlee employs images of warfare to misdirect the hostile reader the same images of armed resistance function as a call to the *intended* reader. Freeman learning the secrets of the CIA and sharing the knowledge with his guerilla army is what the intended reader ought to do with his or her own discovery of positive self-esteem. Once accomplished

one must bring that knowledge to the community because survival is communal not individual.

This project does not contend that safeguarding self-determined black consciousness is an idea original to Greenlee, only that it is the primary instructional aim of the novel. Greenlee's engagement with notions of "two-ness" in *Spook* continues the literary tradition of the early classics and Du Bois, but is also situated within a greater body of contemporary literary work that argues the existence of, and a necessity to protect, authentic black consciousness.

In "My Dungeon Shook: Letter to my Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation," James Baldwin immediately illustrates the dangers of a failure to resist white supremacist attacks on an authentic black consciousness when he describes his late brother as having "had a terrible life," and "was defeated long before he died because, at the bottom of his heart, he really believed what white people said about him" (4). Here Baldwin warns his nephew James against allowing the biases of white supremacist patriarchal society to influence his self-determination. Baldwin argues that his brother's sense of blackness had been under siege for so long that he had finally lost the battle. Once the bias of the white world creeps into the space where authentic black consciousness is nurtured, that consciousness is at risk of destruction. Baldwin and Greenlee are in conversation here. Where Baldwin warns his nephew against the failure to resist, Greenlee takes things to the next level and instructs readers on how to strengthen and deploy tactics of subversive offense to protect precious inner consciousness.

You'll Recognize That Concept As Your Own: *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* and Its
Contemporaries

In addition to Baldwin, *Spook* is in conversation with other contemporary texts that invoke the trope of masking as a form of resistance, warn of the failure to resist toxic biases of the white world, and set their instruction against a backdrop of impending black armed rebellion. A review of broader criticism that organizes these texts together reveals that the trope of masked resistance was actively employed by Greenlee's contemporaries. Two such texts that are often analyzed together with *Spook* are John A. Williams's novel *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light* and Dr. Joseph D. Jackson's novel *The Black Commandos*. In this project I will refer to the author Joseph Jackson by the pen "Julian Moreau," under which he first published.

John A. Williams's *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light (Sons)* follows the act of Eugene Browning, a sociology professor turned civil rights worker, who employs the Italian mafia to assassinate a white NYPD officer who killed a black teenager. Browning, exhausted by the apparent lack of progress made by civil rights movements, takes matters into his own hands, and initiates the hit. The character's self-declared motivation is "an eye-for an eye, a cop for a kid" but his actions spark a nation-wide race war. The novel ends with Browning having been consumed by the deed. His marriage and family are in shambles and his pointed act of vengeance tossed a match in the kerosene bucket that is a racialized America. Browning's authentic consciousness (the space behind the veil) becomes infected by the horrors of living in a white racist American society. What little (or feigned) peace Browning has early in the novel is shook. He grows weary from the

lack of structural change he is able to effect from his civil rights work. Browning falls victim to what Richard Yarborough describes, in his foreword to the novel, as “the burden of empathy, the struggle for communication across racial, ethnic, gender, and generational lines, and the search for moral coherence” (vii). Such a burden can only truly exist for someone whose consciousness is directly affected by these struggles. *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light* argues that the burden to heal the open wounds of racial division in the United States falls directly on the willingness of African Americans to risk their bodies, souls, families, jobs, and lives but also that the precious space behind the veil, where an authentic African American consciousness can be nurtured, will never be safe from the biases of white racial society.

Another contemporary text that advocates for the protection of African American souls that is set against a backdrop of armed rebellion is Moreau’s novel *The Black Commandos (Commandos)*. *Commandos* portrays a superhero-like character named Denis Jackson who creates and leads an army of super-men against the villainous white power structure of the United States. Having witnessed, as a young boy, the killing of his father and the heinous murder of his friend by racist white police, Jackson dedicates his life to battling the agents of a racially oppressive system and freeing his race from the grips of mental and physical oppression. Jackson grows into a mysterious mega rich elite scholar who possesses unmatched athletic and martial arts abilities. With the backing of the nation’s most wealthy and prominent black citizens, Jackson builds a secret military organization based on a secret island. By employing the nation’s top black scientists and engineers he invents super technology that far surpasses any the United

States military has ever experienced. Jackson's organization, dubbed The Black Commandos, recruits the most vicious black American psychopaths and murderers, puts them through what the novel refers to as intense brainwashing, then leads them in battle against the Ku Klux Klan, local police forces (whose ranks, in the novel, are comprised of the same individuals), and the national guard. Having achieved utter military victory and with "no real wish to destroy the country or any innocent person, black or white" (217), Jackson meets with the President of the United States. The only demand Jackson has for the President is that amnesty be granted to him and his army.

Though overtly fantastical in its futuristic and superhero-like backdrop *Commandos* strives to emphasize, to the reader, that the true villain of racial injustice and inequality in the United States is the dominant white supremacist patriarchal political system rather than iterating that white folks themselves are inherently evil. Dr. Jackson and his Commandos do not aim for a genocide of white Americans but rather to eradicate the heinous system that allows for such horrors. In *Commandos* Moreau creates an invincible black army whose capabilities are beyond those of any earthly nation. Even with that invincibility, however, the Black Commandos stop short of total-destruction. Once defeated, the United States is spared because the true victory, according to Moreau, is the re-balancing of power. With the United States racist political system, and with it the white power structure, defeated, black Americans no longer had to contend with the horrors of racism. The status quo has disintegrated because the foundation of racism's power is fear. The victory of the Black Commandos took away that basis of fear by reshaping the balance of political power in the United States.

When analyzing *Spook* in context with *Sons* and *Commandos*, I argue that lessons of mis-direction, for the sake of survival, are more than just a message for readers. It becomes a practice the authors themselves must deploy in their own literary careers. In his book *F.B. Eyes*, William J. Maxwell contends that the FBI, while under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover, closely surveilled African American literature and authors during much of the 20th century. Some of Hoover's favorite targets were Richard Wright and Chester Himes. Being fully aware of the surveillance, these writers began to develop what Maxwell refers to as "antifiles," a "genre of novelized counterinvestigation that recoded known forms of FBI rhetoric" (23). Later, in the 1960s and 70s, Afro-modernists such as Greenlee and Williams continue the tradition of punching back against those omnipresent "FB Eyes." What Maxwell's analysis does for this project is establish not only that Greenlee's and Williams's texts were closely monitored by federal agencies for any signs of subversion, but also that these writers knew they were being surveilled. Maxwell's notion of the antfile shows that these authors did, at least to some extent, consider this surveillance when crafting their work. The anatomy of these texts, then, is complicated by a blend of intended audiences. I contend that these novels are instructive. They intend to teach the reader about both masked and unmasked resistance. Part of that instruction is knowing what information can and should be revealed to the enemy. Maxwell's argument reveals that the authors were actively showing their proverbial cards to federal ghostreaders, only the card is the Joker rather than the Ace.

To conceal the Ace, metaphorical masks and misdirection must be employed. Masking one's authentic self is a necessary survival tactic for many people of color in

America, not only for the protagonists in these novels but in the authors' real lives as well. In each of the novels the protagonists are able to devise and execute plans aimed at counteracting institutional racism because they are able to keep those plans concealed.

The key to concealment, however, is not simply to keep one's plans secret, but to veil one's own identity. In an article discussing the contemporary experience of women of color in higher education institutions, Dalia Rodriguez asserts that "masking ourselves can serve the need to conceal part of our identities, essentially serving our need to survive in a racist and patriarchal world" (1068). For Rodriguez, masking one's identity is "an integral strategy for survival," not only on campus but also while navigating a "racist White supremacist society" (1069) in one's daily life. The core of her argument is that "[w]ith the ascribed marginal status, students of color have developed critical resistant navigational skills to succeed in higher education," and that these skills "emerge from resistance to domination and oppression in a system that devalues our experiences" (1082). For Rodriguez, the necessity of masks is born, not out of a desire to conceal, but out of a need to survive, and survival is based on the ability to successfully resist. Resistance, for Rodriguez and her colleagues in higher education, is the maintenance of self-esteem in the face of unrelenting attacks. Invoking bell hooks, Rodriguez describes self-esteem as "the confidence in our ability to think," and, to feel "entitled to assert our needs and wants, achiev[e] our values, and enjo[y] the fruits of our efforts" (1068). Rodriguez claims that the use of masks is meant to deflect that which may be damaging so that what exists behind the veil can be free to thrive, and masking is necessary because of marginalization, and racialization, of consciousness.

For the protagonists in *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, *The Black Commandos*, and *Sons of Darkness*, *Sons of Light*, masking is employed as a way to shade, from public view, their true identities so that their resistant acts can be successful. Rodriguez's argument reveals that, for many people of color, the skill of masking is necessary just for the sake of survival. For Freeman, Browning, and Jackson, the employment of masks was not created specially to carry out their revolutionary plans, but is a tool they've had in their box their entire lives. These characters are well practiced in the art of masking, for the purpose of preserving self-esteem, because it is a necessary component to survival. In Rodriguez's example, student and instructor are able to use the emotional and intellectual freedom behind their masks to find success in an oppressive environment. Again referencing hooks, she reminds us that marginal spaces, while oppressive, can be sites of resistance, and it is precisely within these spaces that the characters in *Spook*, *Sons*, and *Commandos* are able to nurture their revolutionary fantasies, and devise and carry out their acts of resistance. The same is true for the authors of these novels. As they present a cover to their ghostreaders, in the form of recoded messages for instance, the true work of instruction and resistance takes place in the space behind the cover. The ghostreaders are left so busy worrying about depictions of guns and bombs and decoding secret messages that they miss the true acts of resistance occurring within these texts.

If the protagonists in these novels use veiled spaces to nurture resistance, then so too do the novels themselves. Charles D. Peavy argues that *Spook*, *Sons*, and *Commandos* should be categorized as "contemporary black revolutionary" novels that are "actually a continuation, after a seventy-year hiatus, of a seminal work written in 1899 by Sutton

Griggs” titled *Imperium in Imperio* (Peavy 180). In his essay Peavy claims that *Commandos*

represents the first attempt to incorporate the standard devices of pop culture manifested in comic books, television, science fiction, and spy-thrillers as a vehicle for black consciousness. For instance, the stereotypic pop culture hero is immediately perceivable in the protagonist of the book, who is described as extremely handsome, fabulously wealthy, immensely strong, and extraordinarily intelligent. (Peavy 182)

Though Peavy’s claim that *Commandos* is the “first attempt” at using cultural symbols to portray black consciousness is dubious at best, his analysis helps reveal the duplicity at work in the novel. The surface view of *Commandos*, as a sort of quirky superman comic, is the mask with which the text veils its true self. As in Rodriguez’s example, the space behind the mask is where consciousness is actualized, and resistance nurtured. Moreau’s pulp/comic style prose reads more like a science-fiction novel, complete with laser weapons and flying saucers, rather than an instructional text on resistance (Tal).

However, Moreau purposefully used this mask of adventure to misdirect so that the text could deliver his message of self-respect and dignity safely to his readers. Moreau “believed that this message could only be internalized if the people felt safe and secure in having this belief without fear of retribution” (Julian Jackson, x). Though not considered to be on either Maxwell’s roster of prolific Afro-Modernist writers or (ostensibly at least) the FBI’s persons of interest list, Moreau is aware of the dangers of authoring a text that

aims to inspire and empower the black community. That is why, I contend, that Moreau intentionally uses accessible prose and farfetched science fiction themes. He is purposefully misdirecting from the true intent of the text, which is to empower self-respect among black readers.

The value of complexity of the novels *The Black Commandos*, and *Sons of Darkness*, *Sons of Light* offers lessons that are useful and relevant today. If these texts are read more carefully, lessons of misdirection and resistance can continue to be used to combat systemic oppression. However, the value of this study also goes beyond practical application. This project aims to prove that something considered less-than-scholarly can, in fact, be read as such allowing readers to expand their definition of what is considered to be intellectually worthwhile.

Constantly Borrowing from Each: Greenlee's Novel and Film in Concert

Though often read in conjunction with other similar novels, some of the criticism of *Spook* focuses on analysis of Greenlee's film adaptation. In *Race and Revolutionary Impulse in The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, editors Michael T. Martin, David C. Wall, and Marilyn Yaquinto publish a lengthy interview with Sam Greenlee discussing development of the novel and the subsequent film adaptation. What complicates Martin et al., in the context of this project, is that most of the critical analysis within focuses on the film adaptation. While the scope of this project does not include any form of film studies or cinematic analysis, some analysis of the film is applicable to my analysis of the novel. In Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto's interview with Sam Greenlee, he reveals that,

while living in Greece, he was laboring to complete both the novel *and* the screenplay for *Spook* at the very same time. In the interview Greenlee is asked “In what ways are the narratives different?” to which he responds “There are no significant differences between the novel and the screenplay, but I was able to deal with the main characters in more depth in the novel” (43). The significance of Greenlee’s analysis of his own work is that it acts as a bridge between the novel and the film where criticism of one can more easily be relocated to the other. Not every analysis of the film is applicable to the novel, however. If a film critic is making an argument about camera angles in the film, for instance, that will not be critically applicable to the analysis of the novel. Greenlee’s statement does, however, provide this project with at least one leg to stand on when locating criticism about the film in the context of the novel.

Though Greenlee insists there are “no significant differences” between the narratives, there are enough to draw a clear delineation between the two. For instance, in the opening scene of the novel (which is discussed in more detail later) Senator Hennington’s only black staff member, Carter Summerfield, is not employed for his opinion or analytics but rather as a campaign token. In the film adaptation, Hennington’s black staff member, Willa, is instrumental in his decision to coerce the CIA into integration and is a key part of his campaign strategy. To have Hennington appreciate Willa’s strategic analysis rather than view her as a campaign token betrays the essence of Hennington’s public facing mask. The novel Hennington doesn’t have any investment in racial integration while the film Hennington is actively integrating his campaign staff because he incorporates Willa’s advice into his campaign strategy. Not only does he

incorporate Willa's perspective, but, Hennington also does *not* tout his seemingly progressive consideration and implementation of his diverse campaign staff ideas. Novel Hennington would have touted his forward thinking integrationist to his voters in a moment's notice. The entire thematic purpose of the character of Hennington is to expose the hypocrisy of the white capitalist system that publicly endorses integration and equality while not caring about it in private. The critical differences between the film and novel discussed above work against Greenlee's assertion that there are "no significant differences," however, there are moments in which the film does sync with the novel. While training at the CIA facility early in the narrative Freeman squares off against one of the Agency instructors for new spy recruits named Calhoun.

Calhoun and Freeman are both masters of Judo and thus have a level field on which to spar and assert dominance. Calhoun's sentiment and thematic purpose is the same across both the film and the novel. Calhoun is one of the few characters in the story that is (at least partially) able to see through Freeman's mask. Calhoun understands that Freeman is more intentional than he lets on and is an obvious cut above the other recruits. In both the film and the novel Calhoun states that he doesn't like Freeman's "phony humility" and doesn't "like his style (Greenlee 23)." Though he does not truly understand the vehemence behind Freeman's mask, Calhoun reveals to the audience that Freeman does indeed have holes in his mask and establishes Freeman's vulnerability as a hero.

Reading the Handbook: Integration is not the Goal

In his interview with Martin et al., Greenlee declares his “‘project in writing *Spook* is to make a handbook.’ This is how you do it [make armed struggle]. You can set up underground cells tomorrow based on how much of the information I provide in *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*” (Martin et al, 32). Though Greenlee explicitly states the novel is meant to serve as a handbook and (more specifically a handbook for urban guerilla warfare), I contend that he doesn’t necessarily suggest everyday black Americans engage in literal armed struggle with the government. The reality of such an act would be quite dangerous (and could theoretically provoke the US Government’s “plan B”). Greenlee does not advocate for death and sacrifice as much as he does for resistance and defense of consciousness and self. That is not to say, however, that he insists black Americans focus on simply eking out an existence. Rather, Greenlee wants his audience to succeed and thrive as African Americans with *Spook* functioning as a guide to resisting the ever present physical and spiritual threat African Americans face on the daily. *Spook* argues that African Americans can resist by reconstituting skills —developed out of the necessity to safely navigate the pitfalls of a racist American society— as weapons for subversive offense, and redeploying Mr. Charlie’s own tactics against him. The purpose of redeploying elements of oppression as weapons against the oppressor is not to open the door of integration, or to merely get vengeance against white folks. Rather, the purpose, according to *Spook*, is freedom from the degradation and violence administered by the white supremacist patriarchal society. At the climax of the novel Freeman’s plot is

uncovered by Sgt. Dawson. Before the two engage in mortal combat Freeman lays it plain:

I don't want to change the system, just get it off my back. I'm no fucking integrationist. Integrate into what? Whitey's welcome to his chrome-plated shit pile. I dig being black and the only thing I don't dig about being black is white folks messing with me. (Greenlee 243)

Freeman's desire to shed the weight of the oppressive system, rather than work to integrate into it, is in line with what Robert L. Allen in *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* identifies as the "intellectual framework for revolutionary black nationalism" (246). Allen contends that "the basic ideological foundation of the militant black movement was laid by Malcolm X" (246) who was "an unrelenting opponent of the white, capitalist power structure and its political vehicles, the Democratic and Republican parties. [Malcolm X] identified this power structure, rather than the white population, as the primary agent of black oppression" (246). Allen continues to explain that "[f]inally, Malcolm identified the condition of black people in the United States as domestic colonialism..." (246). Similar to Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael employs an ideological framework that underscores an oppressive systemic power structure as the true enemy rather than white folks as a group of people as he argues

The struggle for black power in this country [the United States] is the struggle to free these colonies from external domination. But we do not seek to create communities where, in place of white rulers, black rulers control the lives of black

masses and where black money goes into the pockets of a few blacks: We want to see it go into the communal pocket. The society we seek to build among black people is not an oppressive capitalist society —for capitalism by its very nature cannot create structures free from exploitation. (qtd. In Allen, 248)

Freeman, like Malcolm X and Carmichael, is no “fucking integrationist” because he too views Black America as a colonized mass whose best chance of survival is not “equitable” access to the capitalist system but rather the dismantling of the entire systems all together. Only then can an authentic self-determined African American consciousness thrive.

A Multitude of Masks

Freeman isn't the only character in the novel to employ masks. All of Greenlee's characters employ a guise to hide their inner selves. In the opening of the novel, United States Senator Gilbert Hennington, after realizing that his popularity with the black vote is down, devises a plan to present himself to his African American constituents as their most ardent advocate in Washington. “The Negroes!” he exclaims, “Why I have the best voting record on civil rights on Capitol Hill” (Greenlee 3). He calls in Summerfield, his “special assistant on minorities and civil rights sit-ins” to engage in a think session to figure out how best to remedy the situation, since there are elections coming up. After going round the table, Hennington eventually settles on the idea to shame the CIA into becoming integrated.

In this case, Hennington's outward constructed identity performs sympathy toward the civil rights venture of integration. The audience he is performing for is the American public: slapping them in the face with the sham of integration and equality. He devised a ruse to create an image of himself for the purposes of personal gain for at the same moment Hennington labors to insist on integration, he reveals his true character in his rhetorical description of his "special assistant" who *happens* to be black. Hennington views Summerfield as a tool; a black face to present to the public with the intent to further the illusion that he believes in the competence of African Americans, and that he is truly an advocate for their well-being. At the same time he is perpetuating this facade, he reveals his true identity when he admits his dissatisfaction with Summerfield: "I'm beginning to have serious doubts about Summerfield, he hasn't come up with a fresh idea since he joined us, and I don't expect anything other than tired clichés from him today" (Greenlee 3). His campaign manager validates Hennington's concerns by explaining that Summerfield is "fine in a campaign," but "I don't think you should rely on him for theory." The campaign manager speaks from a place within Hennington's true consciousness, one where black bodies are profitable, while their intellect is useless; "Perhaps you're right," Hennington concedes, "I guess it's not his brains we're looking for in him anyway" (Greenlee 3).

Senator Hennington is the first character to appear in the novel. From the outset the audience is faced with the duplicity of identity; one constructed for the public for the use of personal gain, with another living beneath the surface acting as the true operator of action and the author of motivation. Though Hennington's use of masks is proposed only

for his political survival rather than literal physical survival it is still an effective teaching method that contributes to Greenlee's overarching concern. Greenlee emphasizes that the Man is using guise and misdirection to fool *you* and readers ought to take notice and turn the enemy's ruse back on him. Greenlee establishes the arena of masks and teaching readers of the most valuable weapons in the white power arsenal. With this scene Greenlee argues the oppressive tactics of white racist society are nurtured and devised behind a mask of deceptive rhetoric and veiled action. Hennington and his campaign manager outwardly project a desire for integration while plotting deception behind their rhetorical mask with the intention of misdirecting his constituents while he pursues his true intention of maintaining political power.

Part of what CIA Chuck expects to see from Freeman is the trope of a hypermasculine black man. To oblige, Freeman incorporates elements of patriarchy into one of his masks. There are very few instances in the novel where aspects of Freeman's true self are revealed, and his most patriarchal behaviors are more production than revelation.

Freeman sketches his masculine mask in his relationship with Dahomey Queen. Dahomey works as a prostitute who engages with Freeman during his time at the CIA in Washington. Freeman, having been "convinced that in addition to being bugged for sound, the rooms were monitored by closed-circuit TV," knew he and the other black recruits were being surveilled by the officials at the training school. One sure-fire way to get cut from the program was to be identified as homosexual -- a notion proved because two men Freeman suspected of being homosexual had been eliminated "although their

grades were among the highest in the group” (19). To conform to the image desired by the white CIA officials, Freeman establishes a relationship with Dahomey Queen. The novel does not initially introduce Dahomy with this name. Only after Freeman inspires her to research her African heritage does Dahomy choose this name and is thus referred to throughout the rest of the novel. Although Freeman does help Dahomey connect with her “African roots” by encouraging her to wear her hair in the natural style, the initial purpose of this relationship is to present an image of hetero-masculinity for those who are watching him. While the CIA does not necessarily monitor his encounters with Dahomey, they do track her down and question her about Freeman. Her description plays perfectly into The Man’s expectation. “He ain’t nothing but muscle and prick,” she describes with a notable absence of any comment on his intellect. Dahomey does not view Freeman as just muscle. She portrays him this way knowing this is just what the CIA operatives want to hear: Freeman is a sexual beast void of cunning.

Another way Freeman weaves a mask out of patriarchal components is in his first encounter with the Cobras. bell hooks states that patriarchy “encourages males of all races and classes to define their masculinity by acts of physical aggression...” (148). To get the Cobras on his side Freeman must demonstrate his masculinity to them in the form of physical aggression and domination. At their first meeting Freeman challenges the gang and lures them to a dark alley where he showcases his martial art talents. He gives the Cobras a quick lesson in physical domination -- not enough to hurt them too badly but just enough to assert his masculine dominance. By putting a minor beat-down on the gang Freeman is accomplishing two things. First, he is operating within the rules of

patriarchy which dictate that the most physically aggressive man maintains the power in any relationship. Thus, the Cobras acknowledge his power and are more inclined to receive his message. Second, he introduces them to the lesson; in order to obtain freedom from white supremacist patriarchy, you must physically dominate agents of the power structure. Apex male aggression and physical domination is the only language “whitey” will understand. Masculinity is just one among Freeman’s robust index of masks that he must choose when to deploy.

CHAPTER III: CONCLUSION

The aim of this project is to demonstrate the many ways *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* follows established African American literary traditions and deeply warrants canonical consideration. This novel does not simply seek to educate the reader on the injustices daily faced by black Americans; rather, the aim is to empower the reader with a sense of identity that exists independent from a racialized depiction of black Americans that has infected the broader American mind. Greenlee is not asking for a seat at the table, instead encouraging African American readers to forge a table of their own. By showcasing the traditional and complex anatomy of *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* I hope to make a case for the novel to be located closer to the African American literary canonical center.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Acham, Christine. "Subverting the System: The Politics and Production of The Spook Who Sat by the Door." *Race and Revolutionary Impulse in The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, edited by Michael T. Martin, David C. Wall, and Marilyn Yaquinto, Indiana University, 2018, pp 121-132.
- Appiah, Anthony. "Introduction." *Early African-American Classics*, edited by Anthony Appiah, Bantam Classic, 2008, pp.vii-xxvii.
- Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. The Dial Press, 1963.
- Black, Daniel P. "Literary Subterfuge: Early African American Writing and the Trope of the Mask." *CLA Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 4, 2005, pp. 387-403.
- Carmichael, Stokely. *Stokely Speaks: From Black Power to Pan Africanism*. Chicago Review Press, 2007.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Dover Publications, 1994, pp. 1-9.
- Gates, Jr, Henry Louis. "What is an African American Classic?" *The Portable Nineteenth-Century African American Women Writers*, edited by Hollis Robbins and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 2017, pp xiii-xxii.
- Greenlee, Sam. *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*. Brawtley Press, 2012.
- Harris, Daryl B. "The Logic of Black Urban Rebellions." *The Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1998, pp. 368-385.

hooks, bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. South End Press, 1989, pp 42-48.

---. "When Brothers are Batterers" *Essence* magazine 1994. Vol 25. p148.

Hughes, Langston. "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes: Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs*, edited by Christopher C. De Santis, University of Missouri Press, 2002, pp. 31-36.

Jackson, Julian D. Preface. *The Black Commandos*, by Julian Moreau, 2nd edition, Julian Jackson and Commando Publishing Group LLC, 2013, pp. ix-xi.

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. 1861. Penguin Books, 2000.

Martin, Michael T, and Wall, David C. "'Duality is a Survival Tool. It's Not a Disease' Interview with Sam Greenlee on The Spook Who Sat by the Door." *Race and Revolutionary Impulse in The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, edited by Michael T. Martin, David C. Wall, and Marilyn Yaquinto, Indiana University, 2018, pp 28-59.

Maxwell, William J. *F.B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature*. Princeton University Press, 2015.

Moreau, Julian. *The Black Commandos*. 2nd edition, Julian Jackson and Commando Publishing Group, 2013.

Peavy, Charles D. "The Black Revolutionary Novel: 1899-1969." *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 3, No. 2, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971, pp. 180-189.

Reich, Elizabeth. "A New Kind of Black Soldier: Performing Revolution in 'The Spook Who Sat by the Door.'" *African American Review*, vol. 45, No. 3, 2012, pp. 325-339.

Rodriguez, Dalia. "Un/Masking Identity: Healing Our Wounded Souls." *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 6, Sage Publications, 2006, pp. 1067-1090.

Tal, Kali. "That Just Kills Me: Black Militant Near-Future Fiction." *Social Text*, 71, Vol. 20, No. 2, Duke University Press, 2002, pp. 65-91.

Washington, Robert E. *The Ideologies of African American Literature: From the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Nationalist Revolt*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001, pp/ 15-21.

Williams, John A. *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light*. Northeastern University Press, 1969.

Worgs, Donn C. "'Beware the Frustrated...': The Fantasy and Reality of African American Violent Revolt." *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2006, pp. 20-45.

Yarborough, Richard. Foreward. *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light*, by John A. Williams, Northeastern University Press, 1969, pp. vii-xvi.