

Dear Assessment Committee,

Before I began attending courses at Spelman, I was able to excel in my classes without being pushed past my intellectual boundaries. During the first semester of my freshman year, Honors Composition prepared me for the rest of my Spelman career. Rather than hastily throwing together papers with no regard for my intellectual sovereignty, I learned to write papers that were intellectually curious instead of the bare minimum for a grade. In the process, my writing became better and I learned more about myself. I plan to carry this introspection into my writing in future courses. In high school, my teachers taught me the mechanics of writing, but my Honors Composition professor taught me how to *write* by pushing us to ask more complex questions of the text and ourselves. After turning in a paper, the revision process focused more on the development of our ideas rather than the writing mechanics. When I spoke to my professor, we discussed how I connected my thoughts from paragraph to paragraph and what was the importance of my arguments. In class, we talked about the difference between simply critiquing and creating generative work. Before taking Honors Composition, I had never considered the need to balance production and destruction in my work. I thought that only saying what was wrong with the subject of my work was enough, but the exercise of also suggesting solutions for said problems bettered my writing.

I chose my Section B essay because, as my final paper for Honors Composition, I feel that it best exemplifies the culmination of my evolution as a writer during my first year at Spelman. I also enjoyed the prompt as I had the opportunity to explore love and interracial friendships, which felt more personal than my other essays in the course because it touches on experiences I have had in my own life. Due to this, I feel this essay best shows my voice as a writer and analyst. This paper most engaged me as a writer because I felt a need to deeply reflect

and dive into the narrative beyond what was presented. The prompt called for a meditation on platonic love that I found intellectually engaging, which made writing this paper feel less like completing an assignment and more like expressing my thoughts on a philosophical question. Because of the intimate nature of the prompt, I enjoyed the ability to ponder a question that will drive how I navigate friendships with people of other races and protect my inner peace while doing so. I hope the committee notices the authenticity and sincerity of my writing when assessing my portfolio. In this paper, I accomplished a clarity of voice and thought by selecting quotes from a variety of sources to lead the reader to my conclusion. My writing reflects my own view instead of repeating what the authors I've read have already said.

I chose my Section C essay because my ADW 111 paper most clearly demonstrates my ability to weave secondary texts with a novel to illustrate my thesis. I also appreciated the opportunity to reflect on how Black women are treated in the world. Even though my paper features a novel set in the 1600s, I was able to reflect on the modern Black woman while writing this paper, which I believe is an important part of the Spelman education. In this paper, I would like the committee to observe my essay organization skills and quote integration. My essay flows from point to point with topic sentences to connect the paragraphs. I also picked quotes that would set up my analysis and incorporated them into my writing in a way that would not seem disconnected.

The writing skills that I have realized I need more work on are revision and asking for assistance. Before coming to Spelman, I would write my papers, maybe read them once, and never see someone to look them over. When I received a grade lower than the ones I was used to, I knew that my previous essay-writing habits would not be enough and decided to change for the better. I now read and re-read my papers several times before submission. I set deadlines for

myself to finish writing ahead of time so that I have time for revision. In addition, I set regular appointments at the Writing Center when I have papers to make myself more comfortable with others reading and commenting on my writing. I also try to see my professors at least once for a paper whether it be for the initial submission or revisions. Engaging in revision encourages me to deliver my best writing instead of just submitting the first thing I wrote. Getting fresh perspectives on my writing and personal feedback from the professor allows me to pinpoint issues with my writing and learn from that revision for papers in the future. I plan to continue these practices until the end of my academic career.

As an English and French double major, writing and critical thinking skills are paramount. The English major demands strong written and analytical work in order to engage literature, while the French major involves most of the same skills but in a different language. After I graduate, I plan on getting my PhD in English, so I will employ these abilities at an even higher level. I will be writing research papers and teaching undergraduate courses, so I will need a firm grasp on writing and critical thinking. After I graduate from graduate school, I plan to be an English professor specializing in queer theory, which will use these same skills that I am gaining at Spelman. I am grateful for everything that I learned my first year at Spelman because it has prepared me for both my majors and my future.

Best Regards,

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ENG 193: Honors Composition

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Essay Prompt: This semester, you have interrogated various forms of love and this assignment extends that consideration. Thus, you are required to consider friendship through the dynamics of the interracial attempt at friendship between Elizabeth Eckford and Hazel Bryan. The historical context of their encounter and subsequent relationship make it possible for you to discuss the implications of friendship for the state, just as you did with romantic love in a previous assignment. In this case, you are reflecting on friendship as a form of love. Your writing should draw on David Margolick's monograph, *Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock*, in order to explore and engage the issues that arise regarding the potential meaning of their status as friends. Ultimately, your essay must use the lens of Eckford and Bryan *to determine if love is ever too much to ask for*.

Balancing Love



Fig. 1 Hazel Bryant heckling Elizabeth Eckford as Elizabeth tries to attend school

In Little Rock in 1957, Elizabeth Eckford ventured on her own to integrate Little Rock Central High School and Hazel Bryan, along with other white supremacists, hurled racist taunts at Elizabeth. The infamous picture of Elizabeth Eckford and Hazel Bryan (see fig. 1) taught the world about the people's capacity to hate, but their story afterward is a lesson about love.

Elizabeth was always going to carry the weight of this event because the white racists inflicted psychological trauma upon her. In contrast, Hazel would have never thought about her role in the incident had it not been for the photograph's virality and its impact on her life. The nature of photography means that "[a]fter the event has ended, the picture will still exist, conferring on the event a kind of immortality (and importance) it would never otherwise have enjoyed" (Sontag 8). The photo's haunting of Hazel caused her to ask for Elizabeth's forgiveness and love, but was she deserving? Perhaps if Hazel had been able to do the work of owning her racism, she would have been. However, Elizabeth was asked to do the work of forgiving and loving while Hazel only speciously worked on her bigotry. Love is too much to ask when the burden to love is unfairly placed on one person's shoulders.

Before one can love after being wronged, forgiveness must come first. According to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Elizabeth's responsibility was to forgive and love Hazel. King asserts that "[w]hen Jesus bids us to love our enemies, . . . he is speaking of *agape*, understanding and creative, redemptive goodwill for all men" (King and King 47). Forgiveness is for both the forgiver and the forgiven. Elizabeth becomes closer to God because *agape* is the love that God has for everyone. Hazel can move on from her past transgression because Elizabeth's forgiveness gives her permission to do so. As for Elizabeth, she did forgive. Elizabeth "accepted the apology, not just because her grandfather and father wanted her to but because this woman sounded sincere, and so clearly craved forgiveness" (Margolick 156). Elizabeth forgave Hazel, so her emotional labor should have ended there, but Hazel desired the absolution of Elizabeth's love.

When the fame of the picture changed Hazel's life, she felt the world had done her a disservice. Will Counts, the man who took the picture, violated her because "[t]o photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of

them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed”

(Sontag 10). Hazel saw how white supremacy looks, and she did not like what she saw.

However, that is not her problem with the photo; she disliked it because her image was unflattering. To atone and create a more pleasing self-image, she did service work for Black people and apologized to Elizabeth, but her later actions proved her atonement was self-serving.

Excusing her decision to not vote for Barack Obama, Hazel whines, “But *they* hadn’t treated her fairly; *they* hadn’t given her a chance, so why should she give one to them?” (Margolick 276).

This statement proves that Hazel had not critically viewed her white supremacy and resented Black people for refusing to accept blindly her statement that she had changed. Whether she was self-aware enough to realize it or not, Hazel had not erased her bigoted views and instead had learned to navigate the world to display a tolerant façade.

Elizabeth saw beneath the mask of political correctness to the truth that Hazel was not changing, which inhibited Elizabeth's ability to love Hazel. When Elizabeth had initially forgiven Hazel, Elizabeth had believed that Hazel was admitting responsibility, “but that forgiveness, she concluded, had been obtained under false pretenses: Hazel hadn’t fully owned up to her past” (Margolick 236). Hazel did not understand the extent of the work it would be to redeem herself of her white supremacy. Elizabeth expected that Hazel “would dig deeper into herself, wrestle with her racist past, and come fully clean, but that wasn’t happening” (Margolick 232). As a white person, Hazel usually did not have any culpability for her actions because white supremacy legislates and legitimizes the decentering of white people from their racist actions. Black people, on the other hand, are often wrongfully given agency for the oppression that affects them. Even though her past is one of blamelessness, Hazel still has “a moral responsibility to be intelligent” because ignorance is willful and undergirds racist actions (King

and King 39). Elizabeth's frustration with Hazel was that Hazel was not intelligent enough to acknowledge and engage racism on a level deep enough to be meaningful. She thought the band-aid of empty statements of racial solidarity would heal the gaping wound of racism in the United States.

Further, Hazel seeks to divest herself from racism without any of the negative consequences that may come with it, such as familial strife. Contrasting with Elizabeth's real concerns that Hazel's family is racist, Hazel is upset that Elizabeth worries about this at all. Hazel complains, "Elizabeth wanted Hazel to call her parents bigots, to say the Bryans sat around devising ways to torture black people, but it wasn't so. Elizabeth wanted her to disown her own father, but Sanford Bryan hadn't been a Klansman and besides, Hazel loved him and could not and would not turn on him now. Elizabeth was constantly negative" (Margolick 236). Hazel dismisses any notion of mundane racism because she does not want to experience the discomfort of confronting the bigotry of the people she loves. In her mind, racism only involves white hoods and placing burning crosses in front of Black people's homes. Hazel proves yet again that she has not done the actual *work* to learn that white supremacy in America can manifest in ways big and small. How did she think she learned it was okay to act so hateful towards Elizabeth on the day of the photograph? Then she implies that Elizabeth's negativity is a problem without acknowledging the validity of Elizabeth's feelings, especially considering the racist climate. Hazel's unwillingness to learn resulted in an unfair trade with Elizabeth when Elizabeth made an effort to love and forgive Hazel's racism.

The experiment of Hazel and Elizabeth's friendship proved that interracial friendships are impossible if the white person only places the emotional labor on the Black person. The onus was on Elizabeth to forgive, but Hazel did not react well to the pressure to accept responsibility

for her racism and change entirely. Hazel wanted to rely on platitudes, but platitudes do not help systematic racism and the trauma that Elizabeth had to endure. The state ordered integration to occur, but that is only the first step in bridging racial divides. Hard work needs to take place on both sides to begin to form love. It is uncomfortable, like confronting your family's racism, and constant, rather than simply doing a few charitable actions. Otherwise, the white desire for Black love and forgiveness is too much.

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ADW 111

14 September 2020

Essay Prompt: For your critical essay, you are asked to approach the novel *I, Tituba* as a window into enslavement and freedom in Barbados and the northeastern United States in the 1600s. A critical essay requires you to construct an original argument (thesis statement) and back up that argument with evidence. Within the body of your essay, as you provide evidence to support your thesis statement, actively engage relevant ADW concepts and texts (readings and/or films). The specific concepts you engage will depend on your specific thesis and the scope of your paper.

The Commodification of Black Women

Tituba's lack of concrete historical records is a disturbing reminder of the undervaluing of black women and their stories in the transatlantic slave trade. The oft-cited description of Tituba reads as follows, "Tituba, a slave originating from the West Indies and probably practicing 'hoodoo'" (Condé et al. xii). Even this small historical mention only serves the purpose of introducing the story of the village of Salem's white inhabitants, whose stories will see a level of detail that Tituba's has not because those in power, be it white people or men or some combination of the two, have decided that no one needs to know her story. Tituba's story has been lost through time because white people and men could not see how caring about her legacy would be a profitable transaction for them. Through her reclamation of Tituba's history in *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, Condé illustrates the commodification of Black women by people of her same or different race and gender during Tituba's time as an enslaved and free woman.

Beginning with her mother's history of sexual abuse, Tituba grows up surrounded by the idea of transactional sex. While talking about fraternity members who rape girls, Steven Seidman states that "[h]eterosexual sex was seen as a way to display masculine power" (Seidman 51). Although Seidman is making a more contemporary reference, this can be extrapolated to enslavement in the 1600s. Male enslavers forced sexual transactions upon Black women, where the enslavers got to feel powerful by exerting their sexual dominance. Angela Davis also comments on the way enslavers forced enslaved black women to sell their bodies in exchange for minute benefits. Davis writes, "Further, she might be conveniently manipulable if the master contrived a ransom system of sorts, forcing her to pay with her body for food, diminished severity in treatment, the safety of her children, etc." (Davis 123). An enslaved woman must view her body as a commodity valuable to enslavers who will give her better treatment or goods in exchange for rape. That is the reality into which Tituba is born. A white sailor raped her mother, Abena, which resulted in Tituba's conception. Reflecting on her mother's disappointment that Tituba was born a girl, Tituba explains, "It seemed to her that a woman's fate was even more painful than a man's. In order to free themselves from their condition, didn't they have to submit to the will of those very men who kept them in bondage and to sleep with them" (Condé et al. 6). This shows that Tituba was aware of her mother's views of an enslaved Black woman's inhumane truth in 1600s Barbados, which is corroborated by actual historical fact. The ramifications of refusing the sexual transaction is seen when Abena's enslaver hangs her for defending herself against his attempted rape.

Besides their bodies being commodities, anything an enslaved Black woman could do determined her worth beyond her humanity. Audre Lorde underscores this point when she asserts in "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," "In a society where the good is

defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior” (Lorde 114). Black women are the aforementioned group; whites commodify them, which is a form of dehumanization. This is also seen when white male scientists used their privilege in knowledge formation to create reasons why their white female family members should stay home, “[b]ut they did not invoke women’s weakness to protect the long hours poor women worked in the homes and factories belonging to members of their own class nor to protest the labor black slave women were forced to do” (Hubbard 24). Enslaved Black women were not afforded the same leniencies as white, affluent women or just white women in general because Black women are not associated with the fragility of white femininity due to the intersectionality of their identities as Black and woman. This reliance on determining a Black woman’s worth by her potential for profit leads to negative consequences when the Black woman is either discarded or trying to act in *her* self-interest. Tituba is shocked when Betsey Parris accuses her of being a witch and colluding with the devil. When Tituba attempts to confront Betsey about said accusations, Betsey spits, ““You, do good? You’re a Negress, Tituba! You can only do evil. You are evil itself”” (Condé et al. 77). Tituba entertained and cared for Betsey Parris for years, but when Betsey gets new white friends, she feels entitled to turn on Tituba because Tituba is no longer the most profitable option. The novel shows this again with Tituba’s relationship with Benjamin Cohen d’Azevedo. While they are having sex, Benjamin asks what he can do to make Tituba truly happy. After Tituba answers that she wants her freedom, Benjamin sternly responds, ““Never, never, you hear me. If you leave I’ll lose her for a second time. Don’t ever mention it again”” (Condé et al. 128). Benjamin enslaved Tituba, so she is performing the typical housework that the enslaved performed. However, what was more

valuable to Benjamin was the fact that Tituba could reunite him with his dead wife at night. This way in which Tituba benefitted him was more important than her happiness. He even went so far as to become angry when she answered in a way that threatened his gain. Enslaved black women were under constant pressure to be a profitable commodity for their enslavers.

Even though it is clear to see how white enslavers commodified black women, the oppression inflicted by Black men, enslaved or otherwise, cannot be ignored. As Lorde proclaims in "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," "Black women and men have shared racist oppression and still share it, although in different ways" (Lorde 118). Black men deal with racist oppression, but Black women deal with both racism and sexism because of the intersection of their identities. Black men inflict the same patriarchal commodification upon Black women because they have not experienced the harmful effects of sexism. Tituba's relationships with Black men exemplify this. John Indian, Tituba's husband, abandons her when the people of Salem throw her in prison for the erroneous witchcraft charges. He does so because Tituba has become more of a loss than a gain as a result of her abysmal social standing. Tituba experiences this rejection because of a perceived lack of value when she enters a relationship with Christopher, the leader of the maroons. He wished for Tituba to cast a spell on him to make him invincible, but when he realized that she would not be able to do that, he yelled, "'You're nothing but a common Negress, but you want to be treated like someone special!'" (Condé et al. 155). Tituba did not want special treatment -- what she wanted was to be treated like a person instead of a product to be thrown away when it no longer fulfills its purpose. He even called her a "Negress," which echoes the quote stated above where Betsey Parris expressed a similar sentiment. This proves that oppression does not only come from outside one's race but also those within it, especially if the person being oppressed is a Black woman. A

subtler form of sexism from one of the Black men that Tituba has relationships with comes when Iphigene, her young lover, agrees to plan a slave revolt with her. Tituba confesses, “I must admit that once we had both agreed on the idea of a general revolt, Iphigene no longer consulted me on anything” (Condé et al. 161). Tituba is the one that expresses a need for a slave revolt, and Iphigene agrees because he says that the people will rally behind Tituba. However, when the time comes to plan, Iphigene would rather continue in his patriarchal mindset and let the men do the hard work. He uses Tituba as a symbol and then discards her in practice. Black men, especially those in Tituba’s life, were just as culpable as white enslavers.

I, Tituba is an imagination of what Tituba’s life would have been like if it was the story that white supremacy would allow in textbooks and literature. All white people and Black men transformed Black women, Tituba being the primary example, into products to be valued for what the Black women could give and discarded once deemed unbeneficial. Unfortunately, this commodification of Black women continues to the present day. Hopefully Black women’s stories will be told from now on, regardless of how advantageous white supremacy deems them.

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