WRITING WHILE BLACK – EXLORING PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WRITING IN THE $21^{\rm ST}$ CENTURY

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Alma Davis Dixon, "The Duchess."

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In a world where I generally view major aspects of my life through a paradoxical lens, there is one special paradox inherent in my decision to pursue a Doctor of Educational Leadership degree. It is the pursuit of a doctoral degree at the age of 61 back in 2015. Nevertheless, any questions as to why I really decided to complete this doctorate at this late stage rests in the subject matter of my life; how I grew up, me as an adult, raising three children, or making my way through the world with its own unique set of limitations. Perhaps my decision resides there as the fulfillment of an ultimate goal, a dream and/or a personal expectation of my life in that part of the matter that includes the *who I am*, still bourgeoning it seems, even today, in 2018, at 64 years old.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Any writer, I suppose, feels that the world into which he was born is nothing less than a conspiracy against the cultivation of his talent – which attitude certainly has a great deal to support it. On the other hand, it is only because the world looks on his talent with such frightening indifference that the artist is compelled to make his talent important.

— James Baldwin

Writing is one of the most important ways individuals use language to render thoughts and ideas and express those thoughts and ideas to others, second only to speaking. Biographers, philosophers, educators, novelists, essayists, screen writers, journalists, poets and others who make a living through writing shape the various discourses that have existed for hundreds of years as well as today in American culture. Writing has contributed to the successful professional careers of millions of people in the arts and has advanced pedagogy and research, policy and practice in the Academy. Graduates of English and Writing programs at colleges and universities who enter the various fields of writing and journalism have the potential to make countless important contributions within American society.

In order for a writer in America to be considered successful, readers should be interested and engaged in a writer's content, whether it is reporting in journalism, composing fiction and nonfiction literature, writing screenplays or even writing professional, corporate memoranda. The information being presented should be understood by both the writer and the reader. In the United States, one could assume that a writer should have at least a good command of the English language since American English is the language spoken in the United States. A good command of the English language could also be assumed necessary to produce the words, sentences and

paragraphs that will be read by others to ensure that the thoughts being conveyed resonate with relevance and clarity.

This assumption could also suggest that the rules of grammar and punctuation, diction, paragraphing, organization and other factors used in the formulation of written texts should be faithfully adhered to for writers to make sense of their thoughts for the consumption of others.

In higher education, English and writing students may or may not be expected to have already learned that which is necessary to advance in their areas of study. However, these students entering colleges and universities may still be scrutinized heavily in the rules that govern the English language when applied to their written work and that all judgments will be based on established academic criteria for success in their writing courses. Freshmen composition students must write from the position of "membership in an academic community" (Bartholomae, D. 1985). It could be stated that many university freshmen may not ever wish to belong to an academic community outside of the confines of the classroom and that academic writing is different in various ways from other forms of writing. However, as Bartholomae (1985) stated, success at the higher educational level is crowned with the expectation that students will write with the authority and expertise of members of an academic community and will therefore fit into that identity and style (Bartholomae, 1985). This expectation should give one pause when determining which identity one should fit into after completing academic requirements in order to be successful outside of Academia. Indeed, the very notion of fitting into a particular identity is important to consider in terms of writing in American society, within the mainstream or without.

The famed poet, Langston Hughes, wrote, "Will my page be colored that I write? I wonder if it is that simple" (Hughes, L. 1939)? Questions such as those are as poignant today as they were in 1939, in that the suggestion of identity as "colored" or African American might be revealed in his writing. Is it really as simple as taking a pen to paper in 1939 or typing into a computer today, that one's race would become the words on the pages as well? According to Donald Rubin (1995), "essential paradoxes of composing," was essentially that writing is both cognitive and individual in terms of process simultaneously with being social and conventional in practice. Style is a function of a writer's "idiosyncratic identity," as well as being a working part of a social environment where the writer and the writing are both entrenched, and that a reflection as well as the creation of the writer's identity is inherent in the writer's written language (Rubin, p. 3). He further stated that while there is no doubt that a writer's personality determines his or her style or "rhetorical choices," certain "stylistic options may leak clues" that may reveal a writer's social identity (Rubin, p. 3, 4). Writing styles of African Americans, therefore, may in effect, *leak clues* to the racial identity of the writer.

No germane study into the perceptions of African American writing in the 21st century could do without acknowledging Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a background for the historical argument concerning perceptions of African Americans. Critical race theory posits that throughout history and persisting into this century, race and racial discrimination are used against African Americans in all areas of human activity.

According to Golash-Boza (2016), the rationale for understanding the racist societal undercurrent of oppression and the best resolution for purging society of its ravages is the study of a critical race theory. Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) discussed critical race

theory as being a continued, "significant factor in determining inequity in the United States," based on readily available statistics and demographics. While this study does not focus specifically on critical race theory as the overarching basis of the research into perceptions and attitudes of African American writing, the extent to which it holds a contextual basis in formulating the need for such research is clear and should be noted, since an understanding of how institutional racism exists within America must extend to African American writing in entertainment, business, and Academia.

Since the concept presents a relevant basis for the subject of stereotypes, racial biases and other negative attitudes of African Americans, it would be unrealistic to assume African American writers and their writing would be immune from historical beliefs, perceptions and attitudes about African Americans in general. For example, the style of African Americans, according to Kochman (1981), is considered "self-conscious, more aggressive, more assertive and more focused on the individual than is the style of the large society of which Blacks are a part (Kochman, T., 1981). Whether or not this statement was meant to describe African Americans within the context of writing or linguistics is unclear, however, there is a scholarly view of African American "style" as having a specific group identity which may be in conflict with the mainstream.

The subject of African American writing and its value in mainstream culture solicits the question of differences in perceptions, as well as the attitudes that are subsequently shaped by those perceptions. In order to study perceptions of African American writing in the 21st century, the focus should include apparent differences, whether actual or contrived, in language and linguistics, critical race theory, individual experiences, anecdotal references and statements from African American writers, and a

statistical analysis of questions pertaining to race, biases and overall attitudes among the mainstream culture and African Americans specifically, from a historically cultural and contemporary cultural context, as well as from an Academic perspective.

Statement of the Problem

Writing is an integral part of how human beings understand each other and our world. Since writing has the power to influence world affairs as well as to entertain, to enhance overall understanding and to advance pedagogy, it is conceivable that the styles of writing may have the ability influence readers' perspectives, through perceptions of the relevance, importance, interest, validity and value of such writing. There is little research on perceptions and the attitudes that are shaped by such perceptions of African American writing, although American history indicates there were certainly biases and stereotypes associated with African American writers and authors, which may have been extended through an overall bias against African Americans in general. While it is unknown at this time why there is not much research on this topic, perhaps the reasons may lie within the potential racially sensitive nature of the perceptions themselves. Any study where the subject of possible stereotypes and racial biases in America may be involved is certainly delicate and controversial and would include confronting complicated issues of systemic racism and individual biases. Nevertheless, a study of this type has value in terms of understanding the dynamics of what negative perceptions and the subsequent attitudes have in terms of their influence on African American writers.

It is significant to explore whether the influences of the past still permeate 21st century influences of any negative perceptions of what is relevant, important, interesting,

and valuable with respect to African American writing. It is important to understand how negative perceptions may impact the way in which African Americans are viewed in the wider community through their writing and the effect of these perceptions on the potential contributions of African American writers to American culture through the remainder of the 21st century and beyond.

While there may be studies on the differences in writing styles relating to academics, there is not much scholarly research into perceptions of writing styles of African Americans and the subsequent attitudes that may form the acceptance or lack of acceptance in mainstream American discourse. Since there is not much information on perceptions of the writing of African Americans, the context of the study was expanded through a review of critical race theory, African American Vernacular English, in terms of its differences from mainstream English, and issues concerning writing and "correctness," as well as racial identity in written language. The subject of using "racial code switching" in African American writing, including what African American writers had to endure throughout a history steeped in racial prejudice to sustain themselves as writers was also considered. It would be highly disconcerting to discover that there has been no change in attitudes of African American writing based on perceptions that may have been prevalent prior to the 21st century. It would be surprising if no differences were ascertained through this exploration in the 21st century. For these and other reasons, it is also important to explore the impact of negative perceptions that African American writers hold themselves based on experience with racial biases and subsequent attitudes that shape acceptance of their work and their potential for success in writing. It is significant enough to African American Studies in general to determine if there is a link

between the perceived identity of the writer and resultant stereotypes and individual bias of what is relevant, important, interesting, and valuable in their writing and whether the concept of what is considered "correct" may have a significant impact on how African American writing is perceived.

Since there is little in the way of research or studies on perceptions or subsequent attitudes that may shape acceptance of African American writing, one must speculate, absent any other reasonable rationale, that the subject may not be considered important or relevant enough to explore. Indeed, when broached as to a possible dissertation topic, there was a suggestion as to a "so what" factor in deciding on this particular subject.

The potential for argument over the "so what" of this research is incomprehensible and therefore makes it all the more important to explore because there must be reasons why African American writing is not studied for how it is perceived in mainstream American culture for good or for bad and reasons which drive those attitudes that would make the research an unimportant, irrelevant subject in the first place. Why would people "not" care about how African American writing is perceived by the mainstream? Why would people not care about how African American writing is perceived in Academia, where new Black writers are being created and sent into the world to make a positive contribution in business, entertainment and pedagogy?

There should be additional research on these perceptions as well as the attitudes that shape acceptance of African American writing because the information gained through an in-depth study into these perceptions may assist in identifying additional areas for more extensive study and scholarly attention into how negative perceptions impact the acceptance of African American writers within the mainstream.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore perceptions and the attitudes that shape acceptance of African American writing among readers and writers in all areas of writing. There is a suggestion concerning acceptance of African American writing that is contingent on historically cultural differences in English composition, communication and literature and how they relate to racial identity. This study will explore whether the differences in African American writing in these areas are based on attitudes which are influenced by perceptions that stem from personal beliefs, cultural biases and racial stereotypes of African Americans. The study does not intend to solve any problems with regard to perceptions of African American writing, nor does it intend to prove problems necessarily exist because of certain perceptions. The intent of this study is to raise awareness of how important perceptions are to acceptance and efficacy of African American writing and to ignite more scholarly research into the subject of race and African American writing. Moreover, the research attempts to determine whether the possibility exists that perceptions of African Americans in general are what drive attitudes of African American writing, whether perceptions and attitudes from history persist in the 21st century with regard to African American writing and to draw attention to the importance of African American writing in American discourse.

Research Questions

- Are there differences in the way African Americans write than mainstream or Caucasian writing?
- 2. How are African American writers perceived and are perceptions of African American writing based on attitudes that may stem from historical and/or

contemporary racial biases, personal beliefs, social biases and/or racial stereotypes in the 21st century?

3. Does racial identity drive perceptions and attitudes of African American writing?

Need for the Study

It is important to explore the impact of all perceptions, especially those based on stereotypes and individual biases of what is relevant, important, interesting and valuable in African American writing. In addition, the concept of what is considered acceptable may have a significant impact on how African American writing styles are perceived. There should be much more study on these perceptions as well as differences, if any exist, because the information gained through more in-depth studies into these perceptions may assist in understanding the African American culture and provide deeper empathy into its richness and diversity as a whole. Moreover, African American writers themselves would benefit from the knowledge of acceptable forms of writing styles in the mainstream and the understanding of what constitutes acceptable in American culture. As stated in the Introduction written by this researcher:

"Writing is the most important way that individuals use language to render thoughts and ideas and express those thoughts and ideas to others, second only to speaking."

Therefore, *any* person interested exploring perceptions that are held in the mainstream culture in America of African American writing in the 21st century is the perfect audience for the inspection of, reflection on, or interpretation of, the research data collected. It is doubtful others outside of African Americans themselves have probably given much thought to the impact negative perceptions of African Americans in general

have had on the acceptance and validity of African American writing. Therefore, in drawing from another part of the Introduction:

"Biographers, philosophers, educators, novelists, essayists, screen writers, journalists, poets and others who make a living through writing shape the various discourses that have existed for thousands of years as well as today in American culture. Writing has contributed to the successful professional careers of millions of people in the arts and has advanced pedagogy and research, policy and practice in the Academy. Graduates of English and Writing programs at colleges and universities who enter the various fields of writing and journalism have the potential to make countless important contributions within American society."

Definitions of Key Terms

For purposes of this study, the words and expressions are defined according to the popular view of the terms as well as through scholarly references below as follows:

African American: The Smithsonian loosely describes African American as:

"Consciousness of black people in mainland North America—the belief of individual men and women that their own fate was linked to that of the group—has long been articulated through a common history, indeed a particular history: centuries of enslavement, freedom in the course of the Civil War, a great promise made amid the political turmoil of Reconstruction and a great promise broken, followed by disfranchisement, segregation and, finally, the long struggle for equality" (Smithsonian, 2018).

For purposes of this study, in the 21st century, African Americans are individuals who identify as Black and who are the descendants of the Enslavement in the United States.

African American Vernacular English (AAVE): Labov (2010) counted African American Vernacular English as the most widely studied of all nonstandard dialects in history (Labov, p. 15). He explained that AAVE "maintains a fairly uniform sound system, based on a modification of the Southern States vowel pattern and does not

participate in sound changes characteristic of surrounding White vernaculars" (Labov, p.15).

According to Encyclopedia.com (2017), AAVE means:

"Ebonics. English as used by a majority of US citizens of Black African background, consisting of a range of socially stratified urban and rural dialects. The most non-standard varieties are used by poor blacks with limited education, who have restricted social contact beyond their native communities. Standard varieties are influenced by regional norms: black standard English in the South is different from the African-American standard in the North, and each in turn reflects colloquial usage among educated whites in the same areas. Considerable style-shifting occurs between blacks talking to non-blacks and especially on less formal occasions when blacks prefer to use vernacular speech among themselves. The corresponding variation is pervasive, occurring with phonology, intonation, morphology, syntax, African-American slang, idioms, and ritualized verbal confrontations."

African American Verbal Tradition (AVT): For purposes of the study, Williams (2013) describes five (5) aspects of AVT: (1) repetition, (2) signifying and indirection, (3) call response, (4) narrativizing, and (5) sounding (Williams, p. 411).

<u>Bias</u>: In relation to the study, the Dictionary.com (2016) definition is appropriate, as "a particular tendency, trend, inclination, feeling, or opinion, especially one that is preconceived or unreasoned."

Black: See "African American," p. 10.

Caucasian: See "White," p. 15.

<u>Code Switching</u>: Within the context of the study, the sociolinguistic version of the definition as stated by Dictionary.com (2017) is the most appropriate, as "the use of one dialect, register, accent, or language variety over another, depending on social or cultural context, to project a specific identity" (Dictionary.com, 2017). In writing, code switching can be construed to mean changing text structure and content to meet standards

of acceptance by the mainstream and/or to tone down rhetoric for the comfort of the dominant culture. For purposes of the study, racial code switching will be used.

<u>Correctness</u>: The Oxford Dictionary (2016) describes correctness as (1) "the quality of being right in an opinion or judgment, and (2) conformity to accepted social standards." In terms of the study, both definitions will apply in relation to writing styles of African Americans.

Critical Race Theory (CRT): Simba (2014) stated that:

"Critical race theory was a response to the mid-1970s conservative, reactionary attack on the achievements of the civil rights struggle and the failure of liberalism to stave off this attack, both ideologically and in public policy. This response was initially led by scholars of color such as Derrick Bell, Mari Matsuda, Charles Lawrence, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, as well as white theorist Alan David Freeman" (Simba, 2014).

Author Will Oremus explained critical race theory for Slate.com as "an academic movement that looks at society and the law through a racial lens" (Oremus, 2012). Simba (2014) further stated that the theory is based on racism as "a hegemonic, socially and historically constructed cultural force in American society. This racism expresses itself in popular culture by believed myths, stories, legal rules, and the institutional disposition of prestige and power via the concept cof whiteness" (Simba, 2014).

Ebonics: See AAVE definition, p. 10.

<u>Indexical, Indexicality</u>: Davilia (2012) described indexicality as "the creation of semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meanings" (Davilia, p. 183). It can be considered as a state of word positioning or "the kind of word or phrase that you typically make sense of by being around when the relevant person says it" (Tichman, M. 2011, para 2).

Mainstream: Doran, & Littrell (2013) discussed mainstream American culture as being "said to be a 'Western culture' (though this is essentially meaningless), largely derived from societal traditions and values of White European immigrants (Adams and Strother-Adams 2001)" (Doran, & Littrell, p. 263). Describing the fundamentals of mainstream culture as "referent ethniclass" Doran, & Littrell (2013) referred to the mainstream as being:

"...composed of the white male, upper-middle class, European, non-ethnic-minority-identified, protestant amalgamation, has dominated positions of power in mainstream American institutions, and has been the yardstick by which the majority of Americans have measured their success and mainstreamness for over 200 years (Spindler and Spindler 1990, pp. 34–35)" (Doran, & Littrell, p. 263).

<u>Passing:</u> For purposes of the study, passing is the ability to and act of changing racial identity to live as a White/Caucasian person due to the possession of features indicative whites, such as straight, thin hair, thin nose and pale, whitish skin.

Perception: According to Merriam Webster (2016), perception is defined as "the way you think about or understand someone or something" (MerriamWebster.com, 2016). With regard to the study, perception will be the association of views of the survey and interview participants of African American writing styles.

Racism: As referenced in his book, "Stamped from the Beginning," by Ibram X. Kendi, Ruth Benedict, a Columbia University anthropologist, was credited with having brought the word racism into the national discourse. Kendi (2016) stated that in order to work against racism, it had to be defined. Therefore in 1940, Ms. Benedict wrote that racism was the "unproved assumption of biological and superiority of one human group over another. Race: Science and Politics (1940)" (Kendi, p. 211). Bobo & Fox (2003) described racism in the following statement:

"We conceive of racism as a set of institutional conditions of group inequality and an ideology of racial domination, in which the latter is characterized by a set of beliefs holding that the subordinate racial group is biologically or culturally inferior to the dominant racial group. These beliefs, in turn, are deployed to prescribe and legitimize society's discriminatory treatment of the subordinate group and to justify their lower status" (See and Wilson 1989; Wilson 1973) (Bobo & Fox, p. 319).

Clair & Denis (2015) stated that the sociology of racism has at least two "distinct phases" that were delineated by "the changing nature of racism" (Clair & Denis, p. 858). According to Clair & Denis (2015), racism was considered "overt individual level attitudes" stemming from "the late nineteenth to mid twentieth centuries" and from the middle of the twentieth century to today, racism is not considered as just "explicit attitudes" but "also implicit biases and processes that are constructed, sustained, and enacted at both micro- and macro-levels" (Clair & Denis, p. 858). While the previous centuries held the focus on overt racial inequality, the focus today considers the ways in which racism "diffuse relationships between these concepts and the ways in which historical, unconscious, institutional, and systemic forms of racism interact with other social forces to perpetuate racial inequality" (Clair & Denis, p. 858).

SEAE: Standard Edited American English.

SPSS: Created by IBM, SPSS software is a software application whose:

"platform offers advanced statistical analysis, a vast library of machine learning algorithms, text analysis, open source extensibility, integration with big data and seamless deployment into applications. Its easy-to-use, flexible and scalable platform makes IBM SPSS accessible to users with all skill levels and outfits projects of all sizes and complexity to help you and your organization to find new opportunities, improve efficiency and minimize risk" (IBM.com, 2018).

Stereotypes: The study will seek to explore perceptions that may or may not be based on stereotypical views of individual writing styles; therefore, the definition from About.com (2016) states, "stereotypes are characteristics imposed upon groups of people because of their race, nationality and sexual orientation, among others" suits the purpose most adequately. According to Khan & Stagnaro (2012), stereotypes are judgements made based on group membership about people (Khan & Stagnaro, p. 1).

White, Whiteness, Whites, White People: For purposes of this study, these terms represent individuals who identify themselves according to the racial group representing the mainstream in the 21st century United States. Oxford Dictionary defines Whiteness as "the quality of being very pale," and "the fact or state of belonging to a human group having light-coloured skin; 'whiteness was defined as both a racial and a regional characteristic" (Oxford Dictionary, 2018).

Writing Professional: A writing professional is an individual who writes as part of his or her profession within business, entertainment or Academia, as in corporate writing, copywriting, screenwriting, journalism, literary, scientific, technical, etc. A person who makes a living writing. Study.com describes professional writing as "a style of written communication used in a workplace environment that allows professionals (e.g. businesspeople, professors, doctors, lawyers, etc.) to make informed decisions. Professional writing typically has a formal tone and differs from written text that is considered literary or artistic, which generally seeks to entertain and/or convey a philosophical truth. For purposes of this dissertation, a writing professional can be either one who writes in a corporate or academic setting as well as a writer who entertains, reports or conveys philosophical truths.

Writing Style: The way in which something is written (Wheaton.edu., 2016). Writing styles can be described as "the manner in which an author chooses to write to his or her audience." The text explains that writing style of an individual can "reveal" both the personality of the writer as well as the voice and may indicate how the writer perceives his or her audience (Dictionary.net, 2016).

Chapter II

Literature Review

Scholarship in the realm of African American or Black writing is not abundant. The majority of the available research deals with linguistics and composition and is somewhat limited to the Academy. There are few scholarly references or studies that deal with perceptions by the mainstream of the writing of African Americans. Most of the literature relates to linguistics and language, their differences and social as well as cultural ramifications. However, studies on the effects of students and other individuals with regard to differences in vernacular are abundant.

Famous and not-so-famous African American writers offer poignant and valuable perspectives into their own unique and familiar challenges, hindrances and obstacles.

These individual experiences as writers allow for a more comprehensive examination of factors such as race, identity and differences, and how those factors impact perceptions of African American writing.

Linguistics, Language and Identity

To engage in a serious study of perceptions of African American writing, an explanation of the commonality and close proximity of linguistics, language and writing was necessary. Bloomfield (1933) explained writing as the symbolic representation of linguistics; that "words are the linguistic units first symbolized in writing" (Bloomfield, p. 285), and that these symbols in the form of characters are "features of the writers' language" (Bloomfield, p. 285). With this understanding of how linguistics, language and writing are so closely meshed, the literature review reflects, in pertinent part, the scholarly research of African American linguistics and language in relation to its

relevance to race, racial identity and potential differences in the writing of African

Americans and served as an excellent framework from which to tie the relevant research

literature of linguistics and language of African Americans to their writing.

An opinion piece written by author L. J. Alonge called, "Writing Past the White Gaze as a Black Author," provided a striking examination of the effect perceptions by white people can have on African American writing. He stated:

"It's no secret that the stories we tell are important — they give shape to our experiences, they document our humanity, they cultivate our sense of possibility — but I realize now that I'd underestimated the mental work that "telling your story" actually takes, the kind of sustained effort needed to resist everything this country tells you about how marginalized or unimportant you are without the white gaze." (Alonge, 2017, para. 10).

Most of the literature on differences extends to linguistics and language patterns, and how those patterns affect composition with regard to standard edited American English or SEAE. (Alonge, 2017). Matsuda and Tardy (as cited in Davilia, 2012, p. 182) defined the authorial construction of voice as "written identity created by the writer, the text, and the 'reader'." According to Davilia (2012), it is clear "not only that identity is a part of the reception of student texts but also that there are limited recognizable identities based on instructors' experiences and compelling ideologies about SEAE and privilege" (Davilia, p. 182).

Citing (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 594), Davilia (2012) discussed "indexicality" as "the creation of semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meanings" (Davilia, p. 183) and that indexicality can have a negative impact on identity, since there is a potential for it to be used as "linguistic profiling," stereotyping and even to the extent of "justifying inequality" and "perpetuating oppression" (Davilia, p.183). Since linguistic patterns of language contribute to written composition, and identity may be tied to

linguistic profiling, then it stands to reason African Americans may be adversely impacted by stereotyping caused by such profiling when writing using their own linguistic patterns.

Davila (2012) stated that even though there is no inherent link between race and dialect, when one dialect is both "read" as *White* and deemed more acceptable than other dialects, it becomes raced in the reader's mind and perpetuates *Whiteness* (Davilia, p. 199). The research suggested "that readers do look for clues about writers' identities" (Davila, p. 182). In addition, the research found that "80% of participants [stated] they had speculated or had a sense of the author when reading a blind manuscript (p. 43)" (Davila, p. 182). Moreover, Davila (2012) stated that "instructors are more likely to perceive discursive difference as an "error" if they believe the author is an African American or simply as a *mistake* if they believe the author is white. This reverse indexicality works to justify existing stereotypes" (Davilia, p. 198). Her study conceded that not many scholarly studies discuss the "ways that particular language features do or do not signal specific identities" (Davilia, p. 182), but that "there is significant scholarship which considers the relationship between writing and identity, especially at the level of literacy" (Davilia, p. 181).

According to her study, Davilia (2012) described Matsuda's (2006) "myth of linguistic homogeneity" and what she further described as an "erroneous assumption" that all students follow the model of Standard Edited American English, or SEAE (Davilia, p. 181). The study examined what is termed standard language ideology (SLI) and whiteness. The study cited Lesley Milroy (1999), describing SLI as "the belief that there is one and only one correct spoken form of the language, modelled [sic] on a single

correct written form (p. 174)" (Davilia, p. 184). Davilia argued that the environment created by this belief allows for discrimination against what is considered non-standard, rendering anything non-standard incorrect or justifying the notion of substandard. Furthermore, perceptions tied to the "myth of linguistic hegemony and SLI" are factors in creating identity in the same way that "perceptions of identities contribute to the reception of standardness (Davilia, p. 198). If, as Davilia (2012) discussed, SEAE is considered to be "prevalently" non-indexical, and the reliance on its non-indexical status by SLI, then whiteness as an ideology has to be considered due to the indexicality that was revealed in the study. As Davilia (2012) stated:

"I have come to a working definition of Whiteness as an ideology of privilege and neutrality that actively creates continued White dominance, drawing on and reinforcing historical and structural inequality while denying its existence and/or power. In this project, Whiteness is especially useful for understanding the negative valuing of difference that allows a positioning of SEAE as superior to other language varieties" (Davilia, p. 184).

Among the many other conclusions in the study, Davilia (2012) succeeded in describing "the role of perceived student-author identities in influencing the interpretation of 'difference' in student texts" and the so-called correctness associated with indexicality or pointing to such differences using the semiotic links inherent in what is termed as "bidirectional indexicality" (Davilia, p. 188).

Kohn (2014) suggested in "Contextualizing African American English Vowels," that there are differences between the mainstream styles of writing and African American styles by virtue of a different "African American English" and different African American English Vowels." In 2000, Patricia Bizzel, a professor of English wrote in the "Journal of Basic Writing," Vol. 19, No. 1, that a persistent topic in basic writing is

"correctness" (Bizzel, P., 2000). This issue of correctness was the basis for instruction in writing where students perceived unable to produce satisfactory academic writing were considered "cognitively deficient" (Bizzel, p. 4). The article discussed whether a different approach should be considered when determining "correctness" since the necessity "to inculcate traditional academic discourse" may no longer exist, based on scholarly references that indicate both standard and nonstandard models are being used more and more (Bizzel, P., 2000). There certainly are differences in dialect, as many studies have illustrated. Years ago, teachers and researchers of composition considered non-standard dialects and writing styles which suggested the social identity of the writer as, "elements of interference" (Rubin, p. 5). These "stylistic markers" were typically founded on the basis of demographics and thus value and success was determined by the least amount of "markedness" or conformity as much as possible with standard English (Rubin, p. 5). Rubin (1995) claimed achieving "unmarkedness" in one's writing style was a myth. He cautioned, however, the identity of the writer, whether actual or perceived was not "straightforward" (Rubin, p. 5). Ebonics, or its more socially and academic name, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has been studied for over 60 years and the debate over its authenticity as well as the stigmas associated with it still persist today. While the scope of this study is not to define Ebonics or AAVE, or to delve into its history, the subject of linguistics and dialect derived from it are some of the issues that relate to African American writing and the stereotypes and biases associated with it.

The controversy over AAVE as a respectable form of language and communication began in earnest on December 18, 1996, when the Board of Education of

Oakland California's Unified School District made a resolution with the intent of improving the English language skills of its African American students. The concept for the resolution was "to respect the legitimacy and richness of Ebonics in order to facilitate African-American students' acquisition and mastery of English-language skills" (Ronkin & Karn, 1999, p. 360). What resulted was a tremendous backlash by civil rights groups and a linguistic firestorm among language and linguistic scholars. In no small part, there was also an upheaval within the mainstream culture at large. According to Ronkin & Karn (1999), citing Feagin & Vera (1995), "Outgroup racism," defined as the "socially organized set of attitudes, ideas, and practices that deny [a racialized group] the dignity, opportunities, freedoms, and rewards that [the United States] offers white Americans (Feagin and Vera 1995: 7)" (Ronkin, & Karn, p. 360), invaded the Internet. In their subsequent study, Ronkin & Karn (1999) determined the apparent difference between standard English and AAVE was yet another way for racism in America to assert its power and to justify mainstream belief in the inferiority of African Americans. In his paper entitled, "The Ebonics Controversy in My Backyard: A Sociolinguist's Experiences and Reflections," Rickford (1998) suggested that:

"Ebonics had become a proxy for African Americans, and the most racist stereotypes were being promulgated. This cruel humor might remind us, however, that behind people's expressed attitudes to vernacular varieties, there are often deep-seated social and political fears and prejudices about their speakers. If we don't take the "socio" part of sociolinguistics seriously, we won't be prepared to understand or respond to such attitudes effectively" (Rickford, para. 19).

The emerging "difference" between Standard American English and African American Vernacular English and the subsequent controversies surrounding the efficacy of Ebonics gave license to many scholars to assume, according to Ronkin & Karn (1999),

that because of "slang-induced ignorance of the standard language, African-American students are unable to read, or at least appreciate, the classic versions. They concluded that this representation was a strategy that allowed for the depreciation of Ebonics as a viable linguistic alternative as well as a symbolic way of further marginalizing African Americans "from the larger social system" (Ronkin, & Karn, p. 370).

Notwithstanding America's history of racism, Delpit & Dowdy (2002) stated that during the era of increased study about AAVE compared to Standard American English, there continues to be the perception between scholars and American culture as a whole of African Americans and AAVE as "attached to the inferiority of all things black" (Delpit & Dowdy, p. xxi).

Ronkin & Karn (1999) assumed varieties of English including Ebonics with the linguistic component added, "exhibit continuities with and differences from one another, rather than deficiencies in relation to an idealized norm," and when they added the diversity component, their assumption was "that perceived language inequality is linked to racial prejudice and dominant group privilege" (Ronkin, & Karn, p. 362). Their study suggested racial biases and stereotypes with regard to Ebonics and AAVE were driven by the same stereotypes and biases that permeate racial biases of African Americans overall.

Negative perceptions of African American writing may be extended for African Americans in higher education. It should be noted, according to Rubin (1995), when students enter college, they may very well show inconsistencies with respect to grammar and in the case of African American students, they may mix AAVE in their college composition papers. However, it is incumbent upon the instructor to understand the nature of the inconsistencies as part of the process of writing and not the result of their

perceived notions of the students, i.e., laziness and/or carelessness (Rubin, p. 37). In a 1982 study for the College Board, the purpose was to "begin to explore the characteristics of the writing of entering college students as perceived by teachers and professors of English, generally, and to attempt to isolate and describe important elements of the type of essay studied" (Breland, H.M., et. al., 1982, p.1). Of the many statistical analyses detailed in the report, there was one that appeared important for purposes of this study. A total of 202 Black and 202 White essays were reviewed. Out of that total, the following areas were among the most negatively perceived in terms of the characteristics of writing skill as a percentage of the total. Of note were the areas of "Noteworthy Ideas," "Supporting Material," "Precision of Diction," and "Paragraphing Transition" (Breland, et. al., 1982, p. 21). Although the report did not specify the attitudes that drove the perceptions, the numbers indicated that Blacks overall were scored negatively in each instance. It is questionable, however, that under normal circumstances, a reader would be able to immediately discern the racial identity of the students. Since the Black and White demographic was specified beforehand by standard, self-descriptive identification through the questionnaire responses, it can be reasonably assumed that as part of a typical College Board exam, the racial identity of a student is known beforehand. This begs the question, "Would it be as easy to determine Black or White writers if their work were not identified by race?" Would the racial identity of the writer filter through the writing if the College Board hadn't already known the racial identity of the student?"

Rubin (1995) stated identity is not always inherent or straightforward whether perceived or actual in writing. Piche, Rubin, Turner & Michlin (1978) explained in evaluating the writing of students who may be known to be members of a marginalized group, evaluators and teachers may be more apt to perceive the writing as nonstandard and draw specious conclusions as to errors, whether reasonable or not.

Rubin (1995) stated that oral style, even in very early writers, does not render itself in its written form in an identical fashion and that African American writers do not hold the exclusive marker for an orally-based writing style; all writers from a variety of backgrounds and cultures vary in terms of conversation and their writing depends on "author-audience role relations" (Rubin, p. 13). Citing Rosina Lippi-Green (1997, 2012), Dunstan & Jaeger (2015) discussed the implications of students who may not speak the appropriate "correct" form of English, or how the less valued varieties feel they must adapt their speech or face consequences such as not being taken seriously, not being considered educated or intelligent and not being able to take part in what Delpit (1995, 2006) calls "the culture of power" (Dunstan, & Jaeger, p. 778). This also suggests that if identity is tied to African American writing, African Americans may feel compelled to adapt their writing, or racially code switch, in order to be taken seriously, which has implications with respect to the culture of power mentioned in Delpit (1995, 2006) and the ability to influence readers' perceptions of the relevance, importance, interest, validity and value of what is being written. Rubin (1995) concluded with the declaration that with respect to writing style, identity is ascribed by others and appropriated by the writer. In the case of African American writers, identity may be imposed by the mainstream and

reluctantly appropriated by the writer due to perceptions of the writing and the imposed identity.

In an article written in the Journal of Higher Education by Dunstan & Jaeger (2015), "the dialects that college students speak represent a type of diversity that can influence many elements of their experiences in college, including academic experiences" (Dunstan & Jaeger, p. 777). Dunstan & Jaeger (2015) explained language is not generally examined on its own, but when culture is being discussed, the implications are evident. The fact that examinations about language are rare, problems are more likely to occur since language is tied to identity which "may have a more profound influence on academic experiences than previously considered, particularly for speakers of stigmatized dialects" (Dunstan & Jaeger, p. 778). This tends to suggest that if language is tied to identity, then identity may also be tied to the writing of the individual as well. Moreover, the article's authors allude to language as a form of privilege based on a "common standard language ideology—the belief that there is a single correct form of English spoken by educated individuals," and based on the values of the dominant culture (Dunstan & Jaeger, p. 778), which may suggest that if identity is tied to writing, then perceptions may be guided by such privilege based on the "correct form of English" (Dunstan & Jaeger, p. 778).

While Dunstan & Jaeger (2015) make a reference to "stigmatized dialects," it is not clear whether this connotation is specifically related to race. It can certainly be stated the African American dialect could be categorized as such, since there are studies on African American Vernacular English and Ebonics suggesting such stigmatizing on account of race. However, it may be the case that the dialect of a writer may filter into

his or her writing, forming an indication as to the identity of the writer. It may also be possible such writing may be perceived beforehand that the writer is African American and therefore perceived negatively due to racial stereotyping and/or personal bias. Rubin (1995) contended African American writers were more likely to write in Standard English, with very little difference than would be seen in the "kind or quantity" of nonstandard English written by mainstream culture students (Rubin, p. 12).

Critical Race Theory, Culture, Identity and Differences in African American Writing

African American writers throughout the history of this country have struggled to gain acceptance in the mainstream. One possible exception could be considered during the 1920s, when Harlem Renaissance writers such as Wallace Thurman, Nora Zeale Hurston and Langston Hughes gained prominence in an otherwise racially hostile America.

Boston Globe writer and author Leonce Gaiter wrote in 2014 that "publishers would not see commercial success with his books" and Jim Crow notions of Black writing still exist within mainstream publishing in terms of what Blacks should write about, suggesting that even in the 21st century, racially biased perceptions persist (Gaiter, L., 2014).

In a passage from "The Souls of Black Folk," W. E. B. Dubois wrote, "The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line" (Dubois W.E.B., 1903). As stated in the Introduction, Critical Race Theory or CRT, explains that throughout history up to and including our present century, race, color and racial discrimination is used against African Americans in all areas of human activity. As discussed in Golash-Boza (2016), the rationale for understanding the racist societal undercurrent of oppression and

the best resolution for purging society of its ravages is the study of critical race theory. Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) discussed critical race theory as being a continued, "significant factor in determining inequity in the United States," based on readily available statistics and demographics. Within the context of and concepts outlined in critical race theory, it is clear the United States still faces problems associated with the color line, racism and the stereotypes that still persist in at least 115 years since Dubois (1903) wrote famous passage from his book.

It is difficult to be a writer and an African American without being an African American writer. This is an inherent duality borne out of a racialized American view of African Americans in general. While 1903 is not considered contemporary and race relations of that time were markedly different than what is expected today, issues still resonate with sharp detail, the contemporary nature of racism in America in the 21st century. While it is true the Civil Rights era ushered in a model of inclusion and integration, America appears still as segregated as if Americans still lived under Jim Crow in terms of how it perceives African American writing.

It would be unrealistic to assume notions of differences between African American writers and writers in the mainstream do not exist or that there are no attitudes of non-acceptance based on biases and/or stereotypes as in the way colorblindness exists to the general culture of post-racial 21st century America. Therefore, it would seem African American writers may still have to deal with the duality of being are both Black and Black writers within this context.

In a discussion of what could be considered noteworthy academic documentation and study with respect to African American folklore and its disciplines in literature,

among other studies, Oforlea, & Mullen (2012) stated that critical race theory has had a "profound influence" (Oforlea, & Mullen, p. 251). They explained that in the social construction of race, there would be misunderstandings related to the biology of race and the culture of race (Oforlea, & Mullen, p. 251). Golash-Boza (2016) stated that "the purpose of a critical theory of race and racism is to move forward our understanding of racial and racist dynamics in ways that bring us closer to the eradication of racial oppression" (Golash-Boza, p. 129).

There are African Americans in America with skin shades that are as pale as the whitest Scandinavian and as dark as the darkest Nubian. For Americans born prior to the 20th century, the term passing was common among some very light skinned Black people. Passing for White is the literal act of moving through White spaces virtually undetected as Black because of features indicative of White people, such as pale skin, straight, thin hair, and thin noses and lips. The number of African American individuals who engaged in passing is unknown and it is unknown if many still pass for White today. Kendi (2016) discussed a situation in which a light-skinned NAACP member, Walter White, passed for White during the 1920s to "courageously" infiltrate southern lynching parties, conducting valuable research on behalf of the NAACP (Kendi, p. 204). In 1933, a famous White author named Fannie Hurst wrote the best-selling novel, "Imitation of Life," which featured the subject of passing for White. One of the main characters, Peola, was a very fair young Black woman who struggled with the fact of her race. When the reality of her blackness was clear to her classmates after her dark-skinned mother met her at her school, Peola later scolded her mother, "They didn't know! They treated me like White" (Hurst, p.186). The novel sparked a great deal of controversy

around race, stereotypes and biases (Hurst, p. viii). While the majority of Black individuals who engaged in passing were not doing so in order to perform undercover operations for the NAACP, many were choosing to change their racial identities because of the racial discrimination visited on darker African Americans and passing enabled them to bypass some of the harsher treatment darker skinned African Americans suffered.

The ability to change identity in terms of oral and written language is typically called *code switching*. Code switching is generally defined as "the use of one dialect, register, accent, or language variety over another, depending on social or cultural context, to project a specific identity" (Dictionary.com, 2017). African American writing can be construed within that definition in terms of its social or cultural context. Historically, African Americans changed text structure, tone, inflection of the written word and content to meet standards of acceptance by the mainstream. In an article from the Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, Hill (2009) discussed that the language spoken by a student at home is "linked to student identity" (Hill, p. 120). The study examined resistance and acceptance of African American student voices and also examined two students through their own voices and writing. It offered an alternative to pedagogies that considered the use of nonstandard English as incorrect (Hill, p. 121).

Williams (2013) discussed the African American Verbal Tradition (AVT) and its relationship to student writing and pedagogy. Her study offered a social justice argument relative to the contributions of African American "written communication structures" (Williams, p. 411). The study also explored approaches to instruction that AVT "may be incorporated into expected conventions for academic writing" (Williams, p. 411).

In the 21st century, African American writers have found ways to circumvent racial code switching in favor of designing creative writer/collaboration platforms and utilizing new media platforms on the Internet. These writers and authors are able to express themselves in ways that seem to defy the necessity for racial code switching for perceived acceptability. For example, the popular blog, "For Harriet," is an African American women's Internet magazine dedicated to being a "multifaceted platform for Black women's storytelling and journalism," and is one of the most popular websites on the Internet and a leading voice for African American women. It was founded in 2010 and has grown to become a network of five (5) sites. In one of the site's many articles discussing race, identity and assimilation, contemporary African American writer, Hanifa Barnes, wrote eloquently in 2015 of the concern she had for how she was perceived:

"Was I too white or too black? Did I use the right word choice? Was my subject and verb agreement in tact?" (Barnes, 2015, para. 7).

While the gist of her article was on language, the impetus to write the way one speaks and the concern for identity perception and acceptance is a reality for African American writers. She alluded to W.E.B. Dubois in terms of Black duality and a "double consciousness of Black existence" (Barnes, para. 4). Ms. Barnes stated a concern echoed by many African Americans about perception, and that "minorities tend to adjust speech and behavior to fit the situation in order to avoid profiling and negative perceptions" (Barnes, para. 8). Indeed, Ms. Barnes believed the ability to code switch was a "masterful skill" and a "delicate balancing act" (Barnes, para. 8).

Jamieson (1997) discussed identity in relation to academic writing. The students were required to write interpretations of essays they read using the identity of the author.

Jamieson (1997) explained that in all of the studies she read, students were required to interpret essays using the same identity of the author when the author was Caucasian and a man. Conversely, and in "sharp contrast," there were no requirements or assignments following essays by Caucasian women or "women and men of color to adopt the voice of the author or narrator, even if the reader was different." Students were asked to "step back from the text and discuss it from another perspective or identity" (Jamieson, pp. 161-162). This would seem to suggest that using a Caucasian male perspective and identity is the appropriate method in terms of representing one's self in any form of writing. She explained that because "we must imagine ourselves as unified subjects in order to represent ourselves in any form of writing, it is particularly effective for the texts designed to teach students to write within the Academy also to offer them a carefully defined identity from which to write" (Jamieson, p. 162). The question therefore becomes, *Is the white identity the one with whom everyone is best and most carefully defined?*

The use of pseudonyms by African American writers was another way to mask his or her African American identity. For example, Harriet Jacobs, autobiographical author of, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," used the pseudonym, *Linda Brent* (Documenting the American South, 2018). Although it is unknown if she used the pseudonym, *Linda Brent* solely to mask her Black identity, it is evident she had difficulty publishing until she used the name. As stated previously, historical accounts of *passing* or physically looking White enough to hide oneself from his or her Blackness is not new. It is also not unrealistic to consider that African American writers would try to pass for Caucasian writers.

Toni Morrison, American novelist, editor, teacher, Professor Emeritus at Princeton University, Pulitzer and Nobel Prize winner, asked an important question: "when does racial unconsciousness or the awareness of race enrich interpretative language and when does it impoverish it" (Morrison, 1997). In terms of African Americans' perceptions of their own writing, African American writers and authors themselves provide the best examples of differences that may or may not exist and the effects of those differences if they in fact do exist.

"I am a Black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive 'othering' of people and language which are by no means marginal or already and completely knowable in my work" (Morrison, p. x).

Ms. Morrison understood the effects of language and writing in relation to the predominant impacts of race on African American writing and literature.

In his article, "Does African American Literature Exist," Dr. Kenneth Warren, a Professor of English at the University of Chicago, offered an alternative argument that African American literature was a phenomenon in response to Jim Crow and that the advent of the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties until today render any difference between Black and White literature null and void. Warren (2011) argued that Jim Crow appeared to define Black literature as having been a "function of changing the world through what became explicit propaganda; and the primary consideration governing its subject matter and presentation was the welfare of the race" (Warren, para. 9). Contrary to the perception that African American writing, and specifically, African American literature is different and uniquely Black, Dr. Warren wrote:

"African-American literature was the literature of a distinct historical period, namely, the era of constitutionally sanctioned segregation known

as Jim Crow. Punctuated by state constitutional amendments that disfranchised black Americans throughout much of the South, legitimated by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1896 with the infamous "separate but equal" ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and stumbling into decline in the 1950s, 60s, and early 70s, Jim Crow and the fight against it gave rise to—and shaped—African-American literary practice as we have come to know it. Like it or not, African-American literature was a Jim Crow phenomenon, which is to say, speaking from the standpoint of a post-Jim Crow world, African-American literature is history" (Warren, para. 2).

He further argued that many African American writers through the Harlem Renaissance held the same view of African American writing and literature in particular. He explained in every instance of the debate, the critique of African American writing always held out the hope "that black literature could shed the very qualities that had previously identified it as black literature" (Warren, para. 20), and in so doing, "it could finally become what it had striven to be at the outset—truly representative of black people and a true index of the creativity and capacity of the race. Others argued that after Jim Crow, black writers could be freed entirely from the burden of representing a race—writers would at last be free to be themselves" (Warren, para. 10). Finally, Warren (2011) argued the insistence on the idea that the color line is still inextricably tied to the literature of Black writers and their writing "obscures the economic and political problems still facing Black Americans in general" (Warren, para. 19).

An article on Toni Morrison in 2015 revealed a sentiment that may be shared by many African American writers in the 21st century, "What I'm interested in is writing without the gaze, without the white gaze" (Ghansah, R., 2015, para. 14). In another compelling interview of Toni Morrison by Susan Kelley in 2013, upon reflecting on the subject of the white gaze, Ms. Morrison responded, "I thought, I can't do that..." (Kelley, 2013, para. 6).

Prior to the end of Jim Crow in 1954, and despite efforts to assimilate the African American culture into the mainstream during the Civil Rights movement, the prevailing view could be considered that there was a definite difference in African American writing and the perceptions were shaped by the segregationist views of the races themselves by virtue of their perceived differences. Dr. Warren asked the question, "Would racial difference and the need for a distinct literature prove to have been only a function of a system of imposed inequality?" (Warren, para. 11).

In his 2011 book, "What Was African American Literature," Dr. Warren argued from a historical perspective that writers were unable to "operate indifferently either of the expectations that African American literature ought to contribute demonstrably to some social end or of the belief that novels, poems, or plays constituted proxies for the status or the nature of the race as a whole" (Warren, para. 13). Warren (2011) explained that in recent years, Black writers who no longer found it necessary to consider Jim Crow decided they were free to consider the problems associated with identity. He argued that the paradox of identity and the literature of identity is what African American writers face today as opposed to the notion of African American literature in and of itself (Warren, 2011).

It would seem this alternative position espoused by Dr. Warren may not be apparent in the 21st century. Explicit within the title of the article by Gaiter (2014), the plight of African American writers even in this 21st century, i.e., "Black authors in the 'write white' trap" was eloquently defined and described. He wrote:

"There remains in publishing a very Jim Crow notion of what black authors should write. We are supposed to write about "The Black Experience." What does that mean? We can write about slavery and the civil rights movement. We can write protest fiction of one sort or another.

We can write victimized characters who take the world's abuse and turn it self-destructively inward. And black writers know this. That's why self-censorship enters the picture. We know what kind of books will gain mainstream acceptance, and we know what kinds of books will receive the polite publishing industry "no thank you" — regardless of merit" (Gaiter, para. 3).

Mr. Gaiter's perceptions are not unique. He explained Black writers *know* their unique situations as Blacks *and* as writers and will consider the prospect of censoring themselves (Gaiter, 2014). His reference to self-censorship, or racial code switching is necessary in understanding the mainstream culture which pervades the African American writer's perception of his or her writing. His realization of how identity is focused on the writing and how that writing will be accepted by the dominant culture is explicit and that African Americans are therefore trapped into writing *White* to be considered acceptable in the mainstream. Moreover, in reading through the interview on Toni Morrison by Ghansah (2015), a statement that was made by Chris Jackson, one of the only black senior editors in the United States at a major publishing company, described the bleak reality of bias in perceptions of African American writing:

"In some ways, it's less representative of the racial diversity of America than almost any industry I know. I feel like black literature, black art, has always been put in a separate category...

"But I do think the resentment, part of it, is that the self-conscious literary establishment is a clubby kind of world where everyone is like, 'Well, this is not the person who's my person, who represents me,' and the literary world in America is filled with people who are represented by white men or white women. I mean, there are almost no people in literature represented by a black woman, right?" (Ghansah paras. 34, 35).

Summary

Chris Jackson, also credited for his work with author Ta-Nehisi Coates on his best-selling book, "Between the World and Me," was featured in a 2016 New York

Times magazine article by Vinson Cunningham, where he reflected on the effects of racism in his writing and editing experiences and his desire to overcome them for other African American writers:

"I want to protect the writer, of any race, from the dishonesty of racism, and how it can inflect any kind of work." And, for writers who are trying to challenge the pandering of the white gaze, if you have to go through a series of gatekeepers who are uniformly white, you're going to end up with something that's — going to be tough to preserve the integrity in the end" (Cunningham, V. 2016, para. 31).

African American writers stepping into the 21st century hold the same aspirations for success in their writing fields as any other writer in the country. They want their individual purposes for setting pen to paper to garner the same enjoyment, entertainment, seriousness and acceptance as Caucasians and others in the mainstream. Ms. Morrison asked this question:

"What happens to the writerly imagination of a black author who is at some level 'always' conscious of representing one's own race to, or in spite of, a race of readers that understands itself to be "universal" or race free? In other words, how is "literary whiteness" and literary blackness made?" (Morrison, p. xii).

The exploration of perceptions today among readers and writers, both African American and Caucasian, must continue to contribute to scholarly and general discourse on this subject. Continued study by individuals who are interested in how these perceptions affect attitudes and acceptance of African American writing and how these perceptions will continue to impact African American writers and their writing have the potential to become part of a lasting legacy of importance for writing as a whole in this century and beyond.

Chapter III

Methodology

Overview

There are many definitions of the term *exploration* that adequately describe the purpose of this study, which according to Merriam-Webster (2018), is to "examine, look into, investigate" and to "travel over new territory to discover." Metaphorically speaking, the research for this study could be considered a journey over new territory with few scholarly research sources to use as fuel for the trip and an uncertainty of the final destination, save for clues provided by the research questions:

- 1. Are there differences in the way African Americans write than mainstream or Caucasian writing?
- 2. How does racial identity drive perceptions and attitudes of African American writing?
- 3. Are perceptions of African American writing based on attitudes that may stem from historical racial biases, personal beliefs, social biases and/or racial stereotypes in the 21st century?

Morse & Niehaus (2009) believed that either methodology used for research analysis in a research study help ensure the validity of the research collected. Moreover, Patton (2002) discussed qualitative and quantitative methodologies were not mutually exclusive and both kinds of data could be used in the same study. He further stated qualitative studies are best used when the desire for depth and detail are indicated, and quantitative studies "require the use of standardized measures" (Patton, p. 14).

No matter how daunting discovering the answers to these questions were, or the particular methodology ultimately decided upon to employ to that end, the fundamental reason for the methodologies chosen for the study was clear: qualitative studies are best for discovering the meaning within experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), and when exploration is the desired and *required* course (Stake, 1995). Furthermore, quantitative methods are excellent for measuring, as in responses provided by a sample population of study participants to statements related to the research questions for purposes of ascertaining the value of the responses and a preponderance of agreement or lack of agreement to those questions.

Research Design

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies served as the focus for the design for the research for this study.

Qualitative. The qualitative design for the study consisted of 14 interview questions on the subject of writing as an African American or being an African American writer. The study sought to collect interview responses from eight (8) writers from various areas and professions recruited through LinkedIn and Facebook. The 14 interview questions (See Appendix C, p. 161, Interview participant Questions) were centered around the respondents' personal experiences as writers, their perceptions, and their challenges faced as writers. The questions also dealt with subjects discussed in the Introduction and Literature Review of this Dissertation, such as racial code switching, racial biases, etc. The respondents were also asked to expound within any of the questions and add more detail to their responses or to offer additional insight into the questions posed.

Quantitative. For the quantitative design, a Likert-style survey was created on the Survey Monkey online survey application platform consisting of seven (7) demographic questions: (1) Gender, (2) Race, (3) Religion, (4) Age, (5) Income Level, (6) Political Affiliation, and (7) Education, and forty-four (44) statements following specific themes of the study (See Appendix B, Survey Monkey Survey, p. 151). The themes of the survey were: (1) Are there differences in the writing of African Americans? (2) What are your perceptions and attitudes about African American writing? and (3) What are your personal feelings/attitudes about race? The first theme was taken directly from one of the research questions. The second theme concerned general perceptions and the third theme dealt with racial attitudes, potential biases and stereotypes.

Participant Selection

Survey participants were invited and anonymously self-selected via a link posted through the popular social media application, Facebook, primarily from the Facebook Group, Writers and Readers. The study sought to use one hundred (100) participants who would complete the survey and respond to all of statements within each of the three themes. The race of the respondents was the primary variable for use in the study. Additionally, other demographic data inclusive of gender, religious affiliation, etc., was collected from participants to determine if perhaps any correlations among demographics other than the primary variable of race in the responses within the themes existed. Participants also had the opportunity to provide open-ended comments to each statement. No other information was collected on the respondents and their participation in the survey was completely voluntary, with no incentive to participate. They were informed

by online consent that they could withdraw from the survey at any time without any penalty (see Survey Monkey Participant Consent Form, Appendix D, page 165).

The interview participants were solicited through African American writing groups on Facebook and LinkedIn social media applications. It was open to African American adults who write for a living, such as university professors, psychotherapists journalists, published authors and aspiring writers. The participants signed online consent signatures and were then sent the interview questions through electronic email. Interview participants were coded as "Interviewee" with a number designation such as 1-8.

Instruments

As stated previously, a Likert-style survey was developed for the participants who self-selected primarily from the group, "Writers and Readers" on Facebook. Likert-type scale was chosen because they are considered "one of the most reliable ways to measure opinions, perceptions, and behaviors" (SurveyMonkey, 2018). Each statement response within a particular theme in the quantitative portion of the study was structured using ratings based on a five-point structure where 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Each respondent was also provided an opportunity to comment on each question if desired. The African American writers were interviewed using 14 broad questions on the subject of writing as an African Americans. (See Appendix B, Survey Monkey Survey p. 151, and Appendix C, Interview Participant Questions, p. 161, respectively.)

Data Collection, Confidentiality and Storage of Data

Interview responses were collected over a period of 30-60 days from the date of the signed consent of the participants. Data for the survey was collected over a period of

one month. Tom Granoff, Ph.D., PCC, Dissertation Statistician/Methodologist/Professor, and Professional Certified Coach, served as the statistical consultant who was employed to assist in preparation of the quantitative data statistics from the survey. To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the survey participants, a Survey Monkey feature that allowed for omitting storage and retention of personal respondent information, such as names, addresses, email, addresses or other identifying data was activated. Therefore, no information was able to be collected and retained or provided to the consultant that would personally identify any of the survey participants. The consultant generated the statistical data using SPSS, a software program designed for calculating and analyzing statistical information from raw data.

The interview participants received their consent forms through electronic mail and signed their consent forms using a software application called Adobe Sign, which allowed for created digital signatures. Once the digitally signed consent forms were returned, the interview questions were sent to them through electronic email. Interview responses were collected via return email (see Interview Participant Questions, Appendix C, p. 161). To protect the confidentiality of the interview participants, no identifying information other than their professions for relevance to the study was collected. Email addresses from the interview participants as well as the collected data from the results of the survey were stored in a password protected, encrypted, electronic format, kept on a separate flash drive and locked in a safe in the researcher's home office. The online Survey Monkey survey was closed and deleted. The flash drive and digital data contained therein will be destroyed three (3) years after the study per the approved Institutional Review Board proposal.

Chapter IV

Analysis and Results of Exploration Data

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions and attitudes that may shape acceptance of African American writing among readers and writers in all areas of writing. As was stated in the Methodology, there were indeed many definitions of the term exploration that could adequately describe the purpose of this study and the lack of scholarly research on the subject brought with it the uncertainty of adequate conclusions other than possible answers to clues provided by the research questions. The study did not intend to solve any problems with regard to perceptions of African American writing, nor did it intend to prove that problems necessarily existed because of certain perceptions. The study was designed to explore whether racial identity drove perceptions of African American writing and explored whether the differences in African American writing in these areas were based on attitudes which were influenced by perceptions that stem from personal beliefs, cultural biases and racial stereotypes of African Americans. The research attempted to determine whether the possibility exists that perceptions of African Americans in general are what drive attitudes of African American writing and whether these perceptions and attitudes from history persist in the 21st century.

The mixed method of quantitative and qualitative analyses was chosen to determine both measurable responses as well as authentic, reflective responses from survey participants and interview participants, respectively, as part of the exploration of perceptions of African American writing.

Qualitative Analysis: Interview Participants

The research for the qualitative analysis attempted to explore genuine writing experiences of African American writers in the 21st century to determine if their attitudes and perceptions of their writing reflect what was expressed through the literature review writings of other well-known African American writers and authors, and whether through their individual experiences considerations concerning identity, bias, and differences were indicative and reflective of their personal experiences. While the research sought to gain insights from eight (8) individual African Americans who were either professional writers, authors, aspiring authors, journalists, professors and others who write for a living, five (5) individuals completed the interview questions.

The interview participants were asked a total of 14 questions. The interview participants were coded and identified as *Interviewee 1 through 5*. Each of the following tables were given a letter designation, e.g., "A" for Question 1 through "N" for Question 14.

Table A lists the responses of each interview participant to Question 1, "Consider the role that ethnic identity played in how African American writing was perceived prior to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Do you believe that ethnic identity still plays a significant role in how African American writing is perceived in the 21st century? Why?" The intent was to determine if ethnic identity was significant to the way African American writing is perceived in the 21st century and to gain insight into why the interview participants did or did not believe identity played a significant role. It should be noted that the word ethnic identity was used instead of racial identity to determine if any of the interview participants would distinguish between the terms since the terms

ethnic and racial are sometimes interchanged. The interview participants' responses were not edited or changed in any way.

Table A

Question 1. Consider the role that ethnic identity played in how African American writing was perceived prior to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Do you believe that ethnic identity still plays a significant role in how African American writing is perceived in the 21st century? Why?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee-1	Yes, because AA can best describe their lived experiences and the generational impact.
Interviewee-2	I don't think it's changed much. Afro-American writing has always been perceived through a mainstream lens. It has always been judged on a white audience's ability to align the work with their perceptions of us. We were either explaining our culture to them or annotating our plight for them. When pitching proposals to white publishing executives in the 90s, I regularly heard the term "The Black Experience." My job, to them, was to explain "The Black Experience" to a white audience—to acknowledge the subsidiary nature of that experience by decoding its "blackness" for the majority's entertainment and edification.
	We are a far more historically attuned people than the majority, so Afro-American writers' works often examine that history. However, when a writer moves beyond topics that can be handily associated with race, waters grow murky. Octavia Butler wrote Kindred, wherein a modern black woman time-travels back to the antebellum south, but she also wrote the Xenogenesis trilogy, which has darkskinned protagonists, but bypasses direct, easily recognizable racial signifiers. I empathize entirely with her focus on hybrid worlds, but I believe it kept her from the level of mainstream applause she deserved. Her work simply wasn't "black enough."
Interviewee-3	I think this may be changing. Technology gives us all more access to the public through writing, and there are certain figures, such as Shonda Rhimes, who has an author, has also consistently produced popular movies and television shows. Additionally, more AA's are educated than in times past, and have taken more relevant public roles. Attempts throughout time have consistently been made to limit and

suppress the presence and influence of AA's, however, with the evolution of time, this is becoming increasingly less easy to do.

Interviewee-4

Without a doubt I believe that ethnic identity still plays a significant role in how African American writing is perceived in the 21'st century. If we look at the different influences in writing during that period of time: modernism, realism, and naturalism, not much has changed since. African American's have made strides, but realism, the concentration and preoccupation on the middle class life, and the criticisms of our social conditions. Naturalism; our ascending into the harsher realities of life, being the rebel. And, then there's the modernisms, with a strong break in tradition with poetry, and even verse, even our form of rap music; the self expressions, and experimentation that go into it.

Interviewee-5

When it comes to African Americans I prefer the word, "racial identity." I believe that when it comes to African Americans and particularly those who are not immigrants in the U.S., and slaves were not immigrants, Ethnic identity I believe refers to other people of color who have not had the same experiences as African Americans and when you look at the official definition, the official category of race and ethnicity, ethnicity is used more for Hispanics and Hispanic is not a race. Terminology matters and we are a racial group, not an ethnic group.

There is no question in my mind and I have been thinking about this for a long time, that racial identity matters in every context and in every stage or phase of your life. My preferred model is William Cross's model of Black Racial identity.

Table B lists the responses of each interview participant to Question 2, Considering the term, "code switching," camouflaging names and/or other ways that African Americans have found to hide their identity to reach mainstream audiences throughout history, do you believe that African American writers still face having to resort to these methods? Why?" The purpose of this question was to explore the concepts of racial code switching, name camouflaging or pseudonyms and "passing" for White as a writer and if any are issues in the 21st century.

Table B

Question 2. Considering the term, "code switching," camouflaging names and/or other ways that African Americans have found to hide their identity to reach mainstream audiences throughout history, do you believe that African American writers still face having to resort to these methods? Why?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee-1	I do not think it is a good idea for the continuation of code switching. AA have already sacrificed enough and need to assert themselves as a force to be reckoned with. There is nothing to be gained by supporting notions that whiteness is superior, even if others attempt to enforce that thinking. We as AA need to claim our space and force a reckoning where white America has to meet us half way.
Interviewee-2	I think it would depend on the type of work they produce. I have often thought that any work by a black writer that does not focus on racial topics might benefit from a pseudonym with a white persona behind it. Again, most publishers are looking for white audiences in order to maximize sales. Especially in our current commoditized world, readers seem to enjoy seeing their visions of themselves, their world, and their place within the world reinforced in what they read. A black person dissecting "their" world does not fit that template. That is unexpected. It is jarring and potentially discomfiting. Many still have a ghettoized vision of Afro-Americans, which inherently disqualifies us from discussing the mainstream, when it is in fact mainstream writers who have very limited vision into Afro-American culture (but which never stops them from writing black characters).
Interviewee-3	To a degree, albeit I believe that perceptions of African writers are changing, due to the advent of the internet and social media. My sense is that many are learning what they didn't know from African American writers. They are learning aspects of life that did not occur to them, so I believe there is a sense of curiosity about African Americans, if nothing but to challenge or explore popular stereotypes that African Americans are inferior or uneducated.
Interviewee-4	The whole urban infrastructure has changed and it being changed brings about different vernaculars: Spanish-Spanglish, and Ebonics, as well as many others. So, to reach a target audience per say, a writer has to be fluid in his ways to fit in and connect to the audience that their trying to reach, and/or relay their message to. Some examples being; Papi, Carlos-Latino, Chen, Hoe-Asian, and so forth.

Interviewee-5 Code switching is a very common term, and it is what many of us who are Black English speakers had to do. When we talk about code switching we are talking about bilingual. I think that we know how to speak Black English and mainstream English and that is a win-win situation. I don't like the word code-switching. I would never do it. I just couldn't and would never use a different name because I have Black racial pride. I don't have any evidence, but I think that people do it when they write fiction. I don't think that people should camouflage their name. I think that there may be people who do that on the Internet and blogs, That does not happen when you are on a tenure tract. I do not condone it. I would never do it and I don't think anyone else should do it.

Table C lists the responses of each interview participant to Question 3,

Considering historical attitudes of white people about African American people in

general, do you believe that these attitudes contribute to possible negative perceptions of

African American writing in the 21st century?" This broad question on White historical

attitudes surrounding race was designed to find out if the interview participants felt those

historical attitudes contributed to negative perceptions of their own writing as well as

African American writing in general in the 21st century.

Table C
Question 3. Considering historical attitudes of white people about African American people in general, do you believe that these attitudes contribute to possible negative perceptions of African American writing in the 21st century?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee-1	Frankly, I am tired of tip-toeing around the feelings and fragility of white America. AA need to become self-defining as individuals and collectively, not seek approval from white people.
Interviewee-2	I believe it leads to preconceptions about our work – about the topics that are "suitable" for us to write about. Unfortunately, I believe those preconceptions exist within the Afro-American community as well as outside it.

Interviewee-3

I believe that the racial perceptions are much the same as in times past, as they result from social construction/conditioning, and they are passed down in families and throughout America's institutions. Whatever negative attitudes Whites have about AA's, are largely consistent. Impacts are lessening, however, also due to changes in the racial make-up of society, where Whites are approaching minority status; and although Whites aim to protect their status as a majority and maintain the deception that they are more superior than others, they are also having to grapple with the fact that things are changing, and that no matter how much they believe they are superior, they ae learning that they are not. I believe there is a strong sense of dissonance among whites on this topic, and many are very confused about their identity as White people, vs. others.

Interviewee-4

History has always been in regard to African Americans and Whites, as the superior, and inferior, based on what Whites themselves have structured the be 'superior', and African Americans have always had the burden, and struggle to achieve a measure, a bar that will always be raised higher. Because it doesn't exist in reality, doesn't mean that it's not there. The struggle that we have been through is the proof. Ingrained in our minds, our souls even. So, we almost self consciously write our work, per se, to be like our White counterparts, and we end up writing about a world that doesn't really exist to us, and in some ways, for us.

Interviewee-5

I don't think that mainstream publishers and journals really are taking seriously our experiences. We come across as angry in their opinion. I don't think they take our work seriously. I think that the most vulnerable voices are people of color.

Table D lists the responses of each interview participant to Question 4, "Do you believe that historically negative attitudes and stereotypes of African Americans in general may have contributed to possible negative perceptions of African American writers and their work?" This question, similar to question 3, was designed to elicit more specific detail in terms of themselves as African American writers. The intention was to gain insight on whether these African American writers felt opinions of the mainstream of their writing was due to the same kinds of stereotypical and biased attitudes which pervaded African Americans historically and whether these attitudes contributed negatively to their acceptance by the mainstream.

Table D

Question 4. Do you believe that historically negative attitudes and stereotypes of African Americans in general may have contributed to possible negative perceptions of African American writers and their work?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee-1	Most AA writers who have been published or are considered widely acclaimed demonstrate the value of their work just by their existence. I do not think it is a good idea to always view ourselves from the frame of reference of white people.
Interviewee-2	I think any negativity comes wrapped in the above-mentioned preconceptions. I think those negative attitudes certainly lend to the general disinterest in black writers exploring topics outside the triangle of slavery, civil rights, and social justice.
Interviewee-3	Indeed. The social construction of race has always aimed to relegate AA's to a lower status, and this notion has become the norm, when compared to every race and ethnicity that has entered the U.S., since our inception. Every race/ethnicity was conditioned that it was socially acceptable to embrace negative stereotypes about AA's, even as negative stereotypes began to be romanticized by such individuals as the Irish and Italian. Now, the Irish and Italian are White. Asians are also considered White, as well as Egyptians (dark or light –skinned). Race is all a social construct based on deception, propaganda, power, control, and leverage in society. We have generally been made America's scapegoat on many matters in society.
Interviewee-4	Yes. White people, mainstream white people, are not interested in our story, and our struggles unless it has beneficial inclinations for them. So, many African Americans get snubbed, and actually not even recognized for their value, their writing more so than what their writing about.
Interviewee-5	I don't think it has improved, in my opinion. I think we are getting more and more and more pushback because we are speaking up and facing consequences for speaking up and not keeping silent.

Table E lists the responses of each interview participant to Question 5, "What do you believe are the perceptions within mainstream culture about African American writing today in terms of literature, poetry, nonfiction and/or academic writing? Why?"

This question intended to yield clues as to their individual perceptions as African American writers of each thought he or she was perceived within the mainstream.

Table E

Question 5. What do you believe are the perceptions within mainstream culture about African American writing today in terms of literature, poetry, nonfiction and/or academic writing? Why?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee-1	Mainstream perceptions are oriented around whiteness as default, as has been the case historically. But as more AA continue to produce unique content in various outlets, including social media, there is more integration of black voices into what is considered mainstream. Marginalization will continue, particularly in academia and publishing that are shaped by predominantly white decision makers in authority, but blacks creating their own spaces and supporting a wider range of options for sharing their works, will make a difference in promoting greater exposure of a broader range of black writers.
Interviewee-2	I don't read a lot of academic writing, but I would hazard a guess (based on absolutely nothing) that black writers in this field are less constrained by perceptions.
Interviewee-3	Whatever negative perception that exist, stem from historical perceptions of AA's in my view.
Interviewee-4	That our educational values, and core values are so far behind that African Americans cannot have anything of value to this country, world, or life in general worth writing about. The buffoonery, and what the media has imaged us, is what African Americans perceive as worthwhile for them, or even healthy. Unless they are the facilitators of such prose, or that they are not involved in that value one way or another.

Interviewee-5

Respondent

In general, writing as African Americans too often not told, too often discounted and is relegated to second class status. I don't think that empathy is in operation.

Table F lists the responses of each interview participant to Question 6, "How do you think these perceptions have contributed positively or negatively in terms of acceptance of African American writing in the mainstream? This question was asked to gain additional understanding of the role that mainstream perceptions played on their own view of their acceptance as African American writers.

Table F
Question 6. How do you think these perceptions have contributed positively or negatively in terms of acceptance of African American writing in the mainstream?

Response

Interviewee-1	These perceptions are contributing to awareness of the range of black thought that goes beyond either/or thinking and narrow stereotypes regarding definitions of what it means to be black. Black writers are becoming more recognized for their areas of expertise beyond racial subject matter.
Interviewee-2	Certain Afro-American writing is embraced in the mainstream, but I think it's fascinating that certain topics are never broached. The topics that are celebrated generally reinforce the mainstream perceptions of African Americans, limiting our historical place to enslavement and victims of discrimination. For instance, I wrote multi-racial historical novel (based on a true story) called "I Dreamt I Was in Heaven – The Rampage of the Rufus Buck Gang," about Indian Territory at the end of the 19 th century that accurately portrayed the many roles African Americans played, and placed them at the center of the story. It was found to be "uncommercial" by mainstream publishing houses. Also, this book was based on a true story of black and Indian characters lashing out in vengeance against white oppression and usurpation of Indian lands in 1895. Black and brown characters lashing out at injustice as any similarly positioned white person would do is not an acceptable topic—not when they're lashing out against offending whites.

Interviewee-3 They are social norms, practiced, built upon, enhanced, and confirmed throughout time, and they are embedded in American institutions, and

life.

Interviewee-4 These perceptions have contributed positively in the African American

writing communities because now the writer doesn't have the burden of competing with White America to target the African American community. But, at the same time, negative perceptions exist because of

the quality of work available to that audience.

Interviewee-5 I think that we are even more vulnerable as Black scholars and scholars

of color. And I think that even with regard to dissertation topics, too many are being sanctioned and silenced or that their research is not important. This is 2017, going on 2018 and there injustices, there are inequities. Racism is at work. We want our degrees so we acquiesce on

colorblindness and culture blindness and we do not study ourselves.

Table G lists the responses of each interview participant to Question 7, "What are your own perceptions of African American writing in general?" This question was asked to get the writers own view of African American writing, absent their own, individual writing styles.

Table G

Question 7. What are your own perceptions of African American writing in general?

Interviewee-1	I love the diversity of black voices across the spectrum of both fiction and non-fiction. I have generally been more exposed to non-fiction items by black writers but hope to continue to expand my awareness of other categories of written contributions by black writers. Black writing is as legitimate and as varied as writing by people from other demographic groups.
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Interviewee-2 I am distressed that it seems to be constricted by what the mainstream deems our sanctioned topics.

Interviewee-3 There is a mental and emotional depth in AA writing that cannot be found among others. I believe that the AA experience is unique to others, and they have a special ability to convey thoughts, realities, and feelings, etc., into words.

Interviewee-4	For better or worse, African Americans have to continue to write their stories on a ongoing basis so that a actual record will exist. So that our future generations may know the struggles, intellectually, physically, and spiritually that we faced in the 21'st century. Better we tell our own stories than to allow anyone else to interpret our stories to us, for us.
Interviewee-5	Too many times when you want to get published, you will have to be go to minority journals, urban journals, multi-cultural journals, Latino journals, because the mainstream journals are not going to accept your work in too many cases. I have to say, in capitals, I don't think that minority journals are substandard in any way, but sometimes it is our only option.

Table H lists the responses of each interview participant to Question 8. "In what ways are writing styles for African Americans different from the mainstream in terms of literature, nonfiction and other forms of expression?" Since one of the research guiding questions dealt directly with the issue of differences in African American writing, this question assumed that differences do exist between African American writers from mainstream writing. The purpose was to ascertain the interview participants' perceptions of those differences in the areas of literature, nonfiction and/or other forms of written expression or if they felt differences even existed at all.

Table H
Question 8. In what ways are writing styles for African Americans different from the mainstream in terms of literature, nonfiction and other forms of expression?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee-1	Black people's writing styles are both similar and unique as can be found across diverse populations
Interviewee-2	Don't have an answer for that one.

Interviewee-3

See previous answer. AA's in my view, are similar to comedians, in that they aim to express truth and honesty, in artistic ways. AA writing aims to be thought provoking, and informative.

Interviewee-4

Using the modernism, realism, and naturalism as the standard in this question, the African American still has the irresistible concentration towards oppression, and conflicts regarding black identity, art, and the role of culture in our society. Naturalism is still used as a platform to protest racism. Modernism is the break; allowing the writer the ability to artistically push forth his work, or rather, disguise it, if you will.

Interviewee-5

I think there are some differences, mostly technical stuff, like conjugating a verb, etc. I think it's different in terms of, I think Blacks are not thinking of any other groups of color, but we like to tell stories, we like to personalize our work, we like to contextualize our work. We like to tell stories. We are more casual. I think we can be more informal. And then, because of all of the above and more, we are then not taken seriously as scholars. We are not as linear. I think our style, our way of speaking. I think we are viewed as more emotional, and in the mainstream it means you're not very cognitive, and I find that very problematic. We are considered nonlinear, not as rational,

Table I lists the responses of each interview participant to Question 9, "Describe a time, if any, that you felt you needed to hide your identity in order to have your writing published?" The question was posed generally to highlight the potential for the interview participants relative to the idea of camouflaging their identities in any way in their writing styles. The interview participants were asked to discuss any instances where they might have felt the desire or need to hide their identity in order to get their writing published.

Table I
Question 9. Describe a time, if any, that you felt you needed to hide your identity in order to have your writing published?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee-1	I absolutely will never hide my identity in order to have my writing published. I am a former newspaper reporter and have experience being published in various environments. I am working on a book/s that I plan to self-published. I have no interest in jumping through hoops in dealing with corporate decision makers in white America. I am mid-50s and have no more fucks to give about what white America's perceptions of me and other black people in general.
Interviewee-2	Have never done so and have not been widely published either. To hide my identity would be to stick to "sanctioned" topics and characters that behaved in ways that reinforced mainstream ideas of who African-Americans should be.
Interviewee-3	Never.
Interviewee-4	I as a author, write from my own background experiences, from the perceptions I saw as a youth, young adult, and manhood coming up in my lifetime. Also, the stories that were shared with me from my elders, family members, and even academics. So, rather than have the focus on who I am, or even where my information was attained I'd rather not expose that so my story could be pushed forth.
Interviewee-5	Never have.

Table J lists the responses of each interview participant to question 10, "Describe a time, if any, where you used a pseudonym to attract wider audiences for your writing? Among the historical accounts of African Americans using pseudonyms to alter their racial identity is Harriet Jacobs, the most famous, who used the pseudonym, Linda Brent. This question dovetails off question 9, "Describe a time, if any, that you felt you needed to hide your identity in order to have your writing published," to determine if any of the

interview participants used a pseudonym in order to attract wider audiences for their writing or to hide their identities.

Table J
Question 10. Describe a time, if any, where you used a pseudonym to attract wider audiences for your writing?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee-1	Never.
Interviewee-2	Considered it for the novel "In the Company of Educated Men," which had a white protagonist, but couldn't bring myself to do it.
Interviewee-3	Never.
Interviewee-4	Actually, that time is now. I choose to use a more attractively, politically correct name. I'm trying not to be limited to the scope of which I write based on my name. A neutrality of sorts.
Interviewee-5	Never used.

Table K lists the responses of each interview participant to question 11, "What have been your experiences with regard to your writing process and how you think you will be perceived by your audience?" The question was designed to gain insight into the writing processes of the interview participants and the factors involved in their writing processes that may be affected by what they consider to be the perceptions of their audiences. It was a question dealing with their thoughts about whether their own views of their audiences are influential in their writing processes.

Table K

Respondent	Response
Interviewee-1	I try to stick to my areas of expertise and lived experience, rather than write about things I simply do not know enough about. I like to offer in depth information and insightful commentaries to challenge and engage readers to think about racial and other issues in difference ways. "Changing the narratives" is my gift.
Interviewee-2	Writing black characters is an inherently fraught act. If you want white readers, you reinforce their ideas of who they are and their place in the world, and that means adhering to their notion of who we are and our place in the world. I have non-traditional ideas of both. My work grows from that. I don't believe you walk away from my books with your preconceptions – racial or otherwise - reinforced. I write to entertain, but I have to write from my own experience of the world, and I am a black, gay, Harvard educated man raised in the comfortable middle-class who has lived all over the country and overseas and whose principal interactions outside of the home throughout my life have been with whites. My background does not fit anyone's preconceived notions of anything. A long time ago I decided I would not try to alter that for my writing, and yes, it has prevented any traditional notions of literary success. So be it.
Interviewee-3	I am a scholar, and my writing is heavily research based. If anything, I pride myself as a researcher, who uses writing/research toward positive social change.
Interviewee-4	I have found out that in the African American urban fiction community, that you have to write what is moderately popular. What everyone is reading sort of thing. Right now its romance, and I'm more inclined towards a classic literature in regards to street lit. So, I have to press forward and do what I'm basically not comfortable with because at the end of the day I'm employed. Whether it be with a publisher, self, and even to the audience.
Interviewee-5	I publish so much and I publish so often, that I don't get push back or even criticism for my books, journal publications or even chapters. So, it might make sense for others, but it has not affected me, and it might also be attributed to the volume of work that I published, But I definitely think it affects others who are less experienced.

Table L lists the responses of each interview participant to question 12, *How do you think your writing is perceived by your audience?* This is a general question which dovetails off question 11, "What have been your experiences with regard to your writing process and how you think you will be perceived by your audience?" The question was designed to gain more insight into how the interview participants thought their own audiences felt about their writing.

Table L

Question 12. How do you think your writing is perceived by your audience?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee-1	People are receptive to my writing as an activist who demonstrates consciousness and compassion in my approaches to most subject matter.
Interviewee-2	Readers seem to find the work entertaining. Few question my skills. They often object to my topics and the treatment of my characters. Many reactions to "I Dreamt I Was in Heaven" saw presenting the story as endorsement of the characters' actions. Of course, that's absurd. We consume and provide the stories of murderers and miscreants all the time. That does not mean we endorse their actions.
Interviewee-3	I believe my writing is perceived as thoughtful, and informative.
Interviewee-4	'He's a good writerdifferent.' is what's been said. Even writing in other genres I still infuse much of me and my character in that, and as a result it becomes me, my signature, my voice.
Interviewee-5	Overall, my writing is very well accepted. As long as there is no one competing with me, all is okay.

Table M lists the responses of each interview participant to question 13, "In your career, what have you considered were obstacles with regard to your own ability to write and reach all audiences?" This question was asked to determine what hindrances and obstacles the interview participants felt stood in the way of their ability to move into the

mainstream if they were not already, or to reach a wider audience with their writing. The question was designed to determine if there were any common challenges on account of race among the interview participants.

Table M

Question 13. In your career, what have you considered were obstacles with regard to your own ability to write and reach all audiences?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee-1	I feel the major obstacle is the fact that white people are in charge of almost everything. I am tired of being forced to jump through hoops to deal with decision makers who have no appreciation for the contributions of black writers.
Interviewee-2	Being me inhibits my ability to reach all audiences. But as Popeye said, "I yam what I yam."
Interviewee-3	My only challenge concerning writing was the fact that at some point, I learned that writing styles varies across venues (academic, and further, based on the discipline, newspaper and magazine, and further the type, audience, etc.) Learning acceptable writing styles requires that we study the works that are published by a certain entity, to know how to adjust or writing, as well as where our writing style fits. It took a little while to learn how to do this.
Interviewee-4	Promoting. African Americans have the tendency to always follow word of mouth in their buying practices. You have to stay relevant, and stay out of the negative traps put out there to avoid a stumble, and even if you do. you have to learn how to, quote-unquote, come up. Especially with regard to social media; you can barely live with it, but you can't live without it.
Interviewee-5	In my career, personally, fortunately everything I write gets published. So what I write for white, mainstream journals and what I write in journals for people of color, almost everything I write gets published.

Table N lists responses to question 14, "Do you believe that more research and study in the area of African American writing would be a benefit in the overall study of African Americans in Academics? Why?" This question solicited the interview participants to consider whether there is enough scholarly research on the subject of African American writing and whether such research and studies would benefit African Americans in Academia. The question then asked the interview participants to consider why more research into African American writing would be important and beneficial.

Table N

Question 14. Do you believe that more research and study in the area of African American writing would be a benefit in the overall study of African Americans in Academics? Why?

Respondent	Response
Interviewee-1	Definitely. There needs to be more research in all areas that are proposed by blacks who have various subject matter expertise. To date, white people in academia and elsewhere have set the agenda about what is most important. I want to see black people being positioned to sign off on important areas designated for further research.
Interviewee-2	I am too distant from the academic side of things to give an informed response here.
Interviewee-3	Depends on what the aim is. I think there is much to learn about this subject, as well as many others. However, it appears that we need to identify the most pertinent issues that are consistently presenting a challenge in some way. From that aspect, I am not aware of what those challenges are, and I anticipate that this study will reveal these things to us.
Interviewee-4	Yes. It would open up many minds of African Americans to write out of themselves-their world: to write what they seefeel. To tell their stories, and thus pass them on for future generations to study, and enhance our growth many years from now. And hopefully, just hopefully, in that process,

establish the African American writer again, as a scholar. That's what I believe.

Interviewee-5

Absolutely, because I think that we are censored. Yes, there is a difference in terms of who gets published. Too many of us are silenced. Too often it is about the status quo, aka white privilege, aka unearned privilege, I think we also have to be very prolific so that somewhere, there are a number of places where your work will be accepted and you can get the word out there.

Quantitative Analysis: Survey participants and Analysis of the Survey Data

The survey analysis attempted to determine whether the research questions of the study could be answered by way of measured responses based on themes related to perceptions of African American writing as well as whether historical biases and/or attitudes of African Americans in general drive these perceptions in the 21st century.

There were three themes associated with the survey questions that were directly related to the research questions:

- (1) Are there differences in the Writing of African Americans?
- (2) What are your perceptions and attitudes about African American Writing?
- (3) What are your personal feelings/attitudes about Race?

Figure 1 displays the percentage breakdown of the race of the respondents who completed the survey.

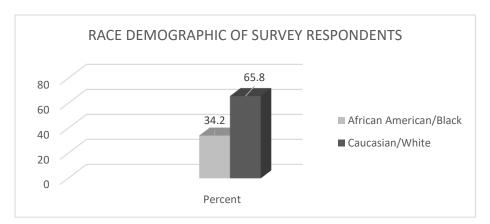


Figure 1: Race Demographic of Respondents N=76

Of the 76 participants in the survey 50, or 65.8% of the total were Caucasian. There were 26 African American respondents, or 34.2% of the total.

Table 1 displays the frequency counts by the variables, Race, Gender, Education, Age, Political Affiliation, Income and Religion. Race was the primary variable for the study however, the other variables were used to determine if possible correlations existed beyond the race of the respondents and their relationships with the other variables.

Table 1 Frequency Counts for Respondents by Variables: Race, Gender, Education, Age, Political Affiliation, Income and Religion n=76

Variables	Category	n	%
Race	African American/Black	26	34.2
	Caucasian/White	50	65.8
Gender	Male	12	15.8
	Female	64	84.2
Education	High School	4	5.3
	Some College	11	14.5
	College-2 years	8	10.5
	College-4 years	2	2.6
	College-Graduated	21	27.6
	Post Graduate	18	23.7
	Doctorate	12	15.8
Age ^a	18-24	4	5.3
	25-34	13	17.1
	35-44	25	32.9
	45-54	14	18.4
	55-64	16	21.1
	65 and over	4	5.3
Political Affiliation	Democrat	30	39.5
	Republican	7	9.2
	Independent	25	32.9
	Declined to Answer	3	3.9
	Other	11	14.5
Income ^b	Under \$20,000	16	21.1
	\$21-\$35,000	13	17.1
	\$36-45,000	8	10.5
	\$46-55,000	7	9.2
	\$56-65,000	8	10.5
	\$66-75,000	10	13.2
	\$76-85,000	3	3.9
	\$86-95,000	2	2.6
	\$96,000 and over	9	11.8
Religion	Christian	38	50.0
	Jewish	2	2.6
	Buddhist	4	5.3
	Declined to answer	7	9.2
	Atheist/Agnostic	15	19.7
	Other	10	13.2

^a Age: Mdn = 39.50 years. ^b Income: Mdn = \$50,500.

African American/Black participants represented 34.2% of the total respondents and Caucasian/White participants represented 65.8%. Eighty-four percent were female and 15.8% were male. Seventy percent were college graduates, and 39.5% also had at least one graduate degree. Ages ranged from 18-24 (5.3%) to 65 and over (5.3%) with the median age being 39.50 years. The most common political affiliations were Democrat (39.5%) and Independent (32.9%). Income ranged from under \$20,000 (21.1%) to \$96,000 and over (11.8%) with the median income level of \$50,500. Christians were the largest number of respondents at 50.0% of the total participants, with Atheists/Agnostics next largest at 19.7% (Table 1).

Table 2 through 4 illustrate the descriptive statistics from the survey responses sorted by the highest agreement for each statement within three themes of the survey:

- 1. Table 2: Are there differences in the writing of African Americans
- 2. Table 3: What are your perceptions and attitudes about African American writing, and
- 3. Table 4: What are your personal feelings/attitudes about Race, respectively.

With regard to Table 2, Theme #1, Are there differences in the writing of African Americans, the highest level of agreement among both racial groups was reflected in statement #12. I think African American writers are more interested in writing about their own cultural experiences, and statement #18. I believe there are no differences in the way African Americans write as opposed to any other writers, where the mean was M = 3.41 and M = 3.22 respectively, of total respondents. Conversely, statement #14. I believe that African American writers are limited in terms of their experiences when writing for general audiences and statement #15. I think that African American

writers have a limited view of the world, rated lowest in agreement among the respondents in the survey within the first theme, both at M = 1.55 (Table 2).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics Sorted by Highest Rating of Agreement for Theme #1: Are there differences in the writing of African Americans? n=76

Statements	M	SD
12. I think African American writers are more interested in writing about their own cultural experiences.	3.41	1.04
18. I believe there are no differences in the way African Americans write as opposed to any other writers.	3.22	1.13
20. I think that there are subtle differences in African American literary writing when compared to white literary writing.	3.04	1.17
11. I believe African Americans have a distinct writing style from other cultures.	2.96	1.16
19. I think African Americans have a unique way of writing that is different than any other group.	2.78	1.09
9. I think African American writers are better at writing about urban issues than other subjects.	2.50	1.03
17. I believe that African Americans usually write exclusively from their own experiences.	2.45	1.12
16. I can usually detect differences in the writing styles of any ethnic or racial group by reading their stories.	2.38	1.13
13. I can usually tell if the author is African American based on the subject of the text.	2.36	1.02
10. I know when the author of a novel is African American by the genre.	2.26	1.06
14. I believe that African American writers are limited in terms of their experiences when writing for general audiences.	1.55	0.74
15. I think that African American writers have a limited view of the world.	1.55	0.76

Note. Ratings based on a five-point rating scale: $1 = Strongly \, Disagree \, \text{to} \, 5 = Strongly \, Agree.$

The statements from Theme #1 with the highest level of agreement among all of the respondents shown on Table 2 were also broken down by race and rated response.

Statement #12, "I think African American writers are more interested in writing about their own cultural experiences," had the highest level of agreement as shown on Table 2.

Figure 2 displays the percentage breakdown for Statement 12 by rated response and race. African American/Black respondents agreed and strongly agreed 35% and 31% respectively. Caucasian/White respondents agreed 34% and strongly agreed with the statement 6%.

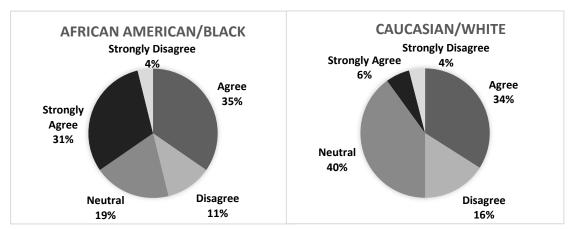


Figure 2: Statement 12 Response Breakdown by Rated Response and Race N=76

Statement #18, "I believe there are no differences in the way African Americans write as opposed to any other writers," had the second highest level of agreement as shown on Table 2. Figure 3 displays the percentage breakdown for Statement #18 by rated response and race. African American/Black respondents agreed 19% and strongly agreed 11%. Caucasian/White respondents agreed 34% and strongly agreed with the statement 16%.

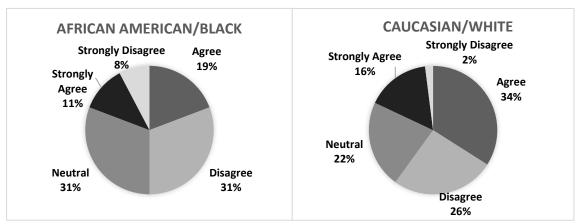


Figure 3: Statement 18 Response Breakdown by Rated Response and Race N=76

Statement #20, "I think that there are subtle differences in African American literary writing when compared to white literary writing," had the third highest level of agreement as shown on Table 2. Figure 4 displays the percentage breakdown for Statement 20 by rated response and race. African American/Black respondents agreed and strongly agreed 58% and 15%, respectively. Caucasian/White respondents agreed 24% and strongly agreed with the statement 2%.

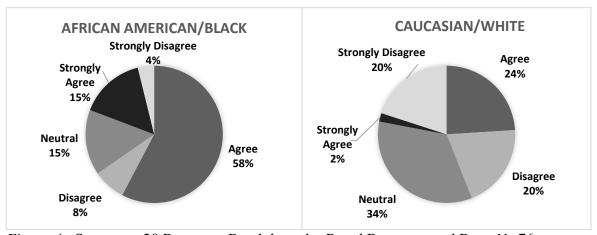


Figure 4: Statement 20 Response Breakdown by Rated Response and Race N=76

In Table 3, the two highest ratings of agreement within Theme #2, What are your perceptions and attitudes about African American writing were statement #33. I enjoy all

genres and the race of the writer never matters to me at M=4.08, and statement #29. If given the choice, I would probably choose to read a book written by an African American, with a mean of M=3.43. The lowest level of agreement was reflected in statement #21. When asked to read something written by an African American author, I will generally lose interest quickly, with a mean of M=1.51 and statement #22. I believe that African American authors can only relate to other African Americans in their stories, at M=1.45 (Table 3).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics Sorted by Highest Rating of Agreement for Theme #2: What are your perceptions and attitudes about African American writing? n=76

Statements	M	SD
33. I enjoy all genres and the race of the writer never matters to me.	4.08	1.16
29. If given the choice, I would probably choose to read a book written by an African American.	3.43	1.02
25. I don't generally think about the race of the characters when I am reading a novel.	3.08	1.19
24. I am interested in specific genres that do not include urban or inner city stories, characters or subjects.	2.43	1.27
26. I consider the race of the author when I choose a subject, story or novel to read.	2.18	1.30
35. I generally will not visit the urban genre section of the library or bookstore.	2.08	1.12
37. Stories about African American people are usually centered around problems of poverty, gangs and drugs.	2.03	1.07
34. I can usually tell the novel or non-fiction subject is written by an African American by the plot.	2.01	0.84
27. I generally assume all of the characters will be Black when reading a story written by a Black author.	1.99	1.08
36. I generally believe that stories about African Americans or African American characters will usually have dark themes.	1.99	0.97
28. I only enjoy the writing of people who have the same interests as I do.	1.88	1.17
32. I consciously seek to determine the race of the author if I can't tell by the author's name.	1.75	0.98
31. I believe if given the choice, I would not probably choose to read something written by an African American writer.	1.62	0.92
23. I have difficulty understanding African American writing because I don't relate to their culture.	1.55	0.81
30. I am easily confused by the story lines when I read novels or other literature written by African American writers.	1.54	0.68
21. When asked to read something written by an African American author, I will generally lose interest quickly.	1.51	0.79
22. I believe that African American authors can only relate to other African Americans in their stories.	1.45	0.72

Note. Ratings based on a five-point rating scale: $1 = Strongly \, Disagree$ to $5 = Strongly \, Agree$.

The statements from Theme #2 with the highest level of agreement among all of the respondents shown on Table 3 were also broken down by race and rated response. Statement #33, "I enjoy all genres and the race of the writer never matters to me," had the highest level of agreement as shown on Table 3. Figure 5 displays the percentage breakdown for Statement #33 by rated response and race. African American/Black respondents agreed and strongly agreed 19% and 50%, respectively. Caucasian/White respondents agreed 24% and strongly agreed with the statement 52%.

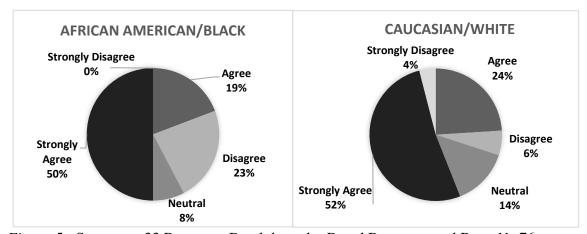


Figure 5: Statement 33 Response Breakdown by Rated Response and Race N=76

Statement #29, "If given the choice, I would probably choose to read a book written by an African American," had the second highest level of agreement as shown on Table 3. Figure 6 illustrates the percentage breakdown for Statement #29 by rated response and race. African American/Black respondents agreed 19% and strongly agreed 31%. Caucasian/White respondents agreed 22% and strongly agreed with the statement 14%.

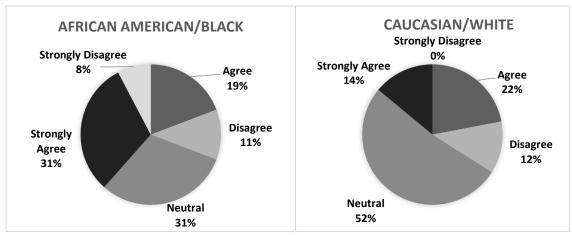


Figure 6: Statement 29 Response Breakdown by Rated Response and Race N=76

Statement #25, "I don't generally think about the race of the characters when I am reading a novel," had the third highest level of agreement as shown on Table 3. Figure 7 illustrates the percentage breakdown for Statement #25 by rated response and race. African American/Black respondents agreed 31% and strongly agreed 4%. Caucasian/White respondents agreed 26% and strongly agreed with the statement 18%.

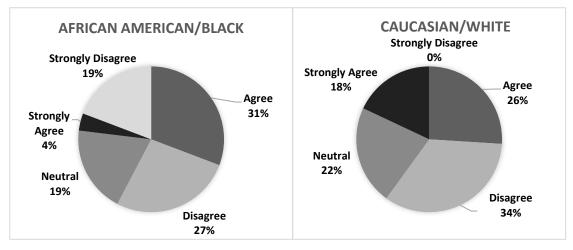


Figure 7: Statement 25 Response Breakdown by Rated Response and Race N=76

Finally, in Table 4, the highest rating in terms of agreement among respondents for Theme #3, What are your personal feelings/attitudes about Race was reflected in statement #52. I believe that Racial discrimination against African Americans in this country is a serious problem, with a mean of M = 4.43 and statement #38. In this 21st century, I believe that all lives should matter, with a mean agreement rating of M = 4.08. The lowest ratings within Theme #3 were found in statement #47. In my view, Racism was ended during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, and statement #40. I believe that as a group, African American people are generally lazy when it comes to earning a living, with means of M = 1.21 and M = 1.18, respectively (Table 4).

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics Sorted by Highest Rating for Theme #3: What are your personal feelings/attitudes about Race? n=76

Statements	M	SD
52. I believe that Racial discrimination against African Americans in this country is a serious problem.	4.43	0.93
38. In this 21st century, I believe that all lives should matter.	4.08	1.21
46. I believe anyone can be a racist.	3.50	1.47
39. I usually consider myself unbiased against any group.	3.36	1.22
45. In my view, the best athletes come primarily from the African American community.	2.74	1.20
44. I believe that African American people make the best singers because they are the most musically inclined.	2.14	0.98
42. African American people will usually make everything about race if they think something is unfair to them.	1.96	1.23
43. I believe that African American women are usually very loud in public.	1.88	1.12
41. I believe that African American people as a group seldom read books.	1.87	1.16
49. I believe that Affirmative Action discriminates against white people.	1.86	1.19
51. I believe that African Americans are given special benefits from the government that white people do not receive.	1.62	0.91
50. I do not believe African Americans are adversely treated by police in America today	1.54	0.93
48. I believe there is no such thing as white privilege because everyone is treated fairly in the 21st century.	1.49	0.93
47. In my view, Racism was ended during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.	1.21	0.55
40. I believe that as a group, African American people are generally lazy when it comes to earning a living.	1.18	0.51

Note. Ratings based on a five-point rating scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

The statements from Theme #3 with the highest level of agreement among all of the respondents shown on Table 4 were also broken down by race and rated response. Statement #52, "I believe that Racial discrimination against African Americans in this country is a serious problem" had the highest level of agreement as shown on Table 4. Figure 8 illustrates the percentage breakdown for Statement #52 by rated response and race. African American/Black respondents agreed and strongly agreed 15% and 73% respectively. Caucasian/White respondents agreed 26% and strongly agreed with the statement 58%.

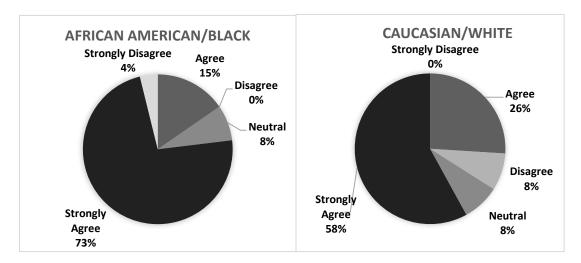


Figure 8: Statement 52 Response Breakdown by Rated Response and Race N=76

Statement #38, "In this 21st century, I believe that all lives should matter" had the second highest level of agreement as shown on Table 4. Figure 9 illustrates the percentage breakdown for Statement #38 by rated response and race. African American/Black respondents agreed 23% with the statement and 42% strongly agreed. Caucasian/White respondents agreed 24% and strongly agreed with the statement 56%.

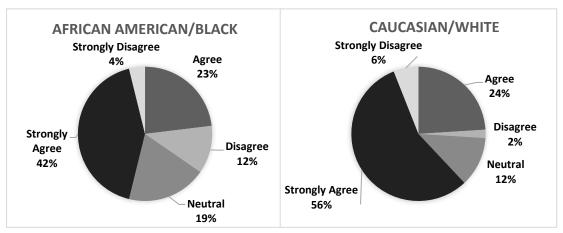


Figure 9: Statement 38 Response Breakdown by Rated Response and Race N=76

Statement #46, "I believe anyone can be a racist" had the third highest level of agreement as shown on Table 4. Figure 10 displays the percentage breakdown for Statement #46 by rated response and race. African American/Black respondents agreed 27% and strongly agreed 15%. Caucasian/White respondents agreed 25% and strongly agreed 47% with the statement.

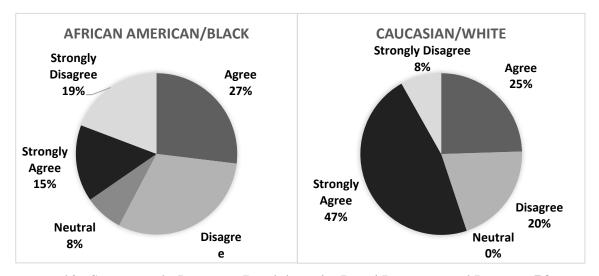


Figure 10: Statement 46 Response Breakdown by Rated Response and Race N=76

Additional Qualitative Analysis

The 76 respondents who completed the survey were given an opportunity to provide an open-ended comment to each of the statements in the survey. These comments were added by the respondents to include an additional layer of context to the responses they gave. For the survey analysis, comments were also broken down by the race of the respondent.

A total of 300 comments were added to the rated survey responses of the respondents. Caucasian/Whites commented on all 44 statements and made a total of 286 comments overall. African American/Blacks offered qualifying comments to 10 statements and made 14 comments overall. Among all of the comments made to the rated survey responses, the largest number of comments were made regarding Theme #3, What are your personal feelings/attitudes about Race, Statement #38, In this 21st century, I believe that all lives should matter, with a total of 19 comments. The next largest number of comments made were regarding Theme #2, What are your perceptions and attitudes about African American writing, statement #17, Statement #25, I don't generally think about the race of the characters when I am reading a novel, with a total of 16 comments. It should be noted that African American/Black respondents did not offer any additional comments to these statements.

Appendix A, Comments to Survey Statements by Theme Questions and by Race of Respondent, p. 126, displays the individual statements numbered from 9 to 52, and the corresponding qualifying comments associated with each statement.

Additional Quantitative Analysis

Tables 5 to 7 display the Spearman rank ordered correlations for the statements within each of the three themes with the respondent's racial background (0=African American/Black 1=Caucasian/White). Spearman correlations were selected instead of the more common Pearson correlations due to the use of ordinal level rating scales (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree), taking the subjectivity into account.

Cohen (1998) suggested some guidelines for interpreting the strength of linear correlations. He suggested that a weak correlation typically had an absolute value of r = .10 ($r^2 =$ one percent of the variance explained), a moderate correlation typically had an absolute value of r = .30 ($r^2 =$ nine percent of the variance explained) and a strong correlation typically had an absolute value of r = .50 ($r^2 = 25$ percent of the variance explained). Therefore, for the sake of parsimony, this chapter primarily highlighted those correlations that were of at least moderate strength to minimize the potential of numerous Type I errors stemming from interpreting and drawing conclusions based on potentially spurious correlations.

Table 5 displays the Spearman correlations for the 12 ratings in Theme #1 with the respondent's racial background. As stated previously, Spearman correlations were selected instead of the more common Pearson correlations due to the use of ordinal level rating scales (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree), taking the subjectivity into account. Inspection of the table found 8 of 12 correlations to be significant with seven of those correlations to be at least moderate strength using the Cohen (1988) criteria. For the three ratings with the highest correlations, African-American respondents had more agreement with: (a) statement #9, "I think African American writers are better at writing

about urban issues than other subjects ($r_s = -.46$, p = .001)"; (b) statement #13, "I can usually tell if the author is African-American based on the subject of the text ($r_s = -.56$, p = .001)"; and (c) statement #20, "I think that there are subtle differences in African-American literary writing when compared to white literary writing ($r_s = -.45$, p = .001)" (Table 5).

As an additional set of analyses, these 12 ratings from Theme #1 were also correlated with the respondent's gender, education level, age, and income. For the resulting 48 Spearman correlations, two were significant at the p < .05 level with one correlation of moderate strength using the Cohen (1988) criteria. Specifically, younger respondents were more likely to agree with statement #18, "I believe there are no differences in the way African Americans write as opposed to any other writers" ($r_s = .30$, p = .009)" (no table shown).

Table 5
Correlations for Ratings of Theme #1: Are there differences in the writing of African Americans? n=76

Statements	Race a	
9. I think African American writers are better at writing about urban issues than other subjects.	38	****
10. I know when the author of a novel is African American by the genre.	46	****
11. I believe African Americans have a distinct writing style from other cultures.	35	***
12. I think African American writers are more interested in writing about their own cultural experiences.	27	*
13. I can usually tell if the author is African American based on the subject of the text.	56	****
14. I believe that African American writers are limited in terms of their experiences when writing for general audiences.	03	
15. I think that African American writers have a limited view of the world.	.04	
16. I can usually detect differences in the writing styles of any ethnic or racial group by reading their stories.	36	***
17. I believe that African Americans usually write exclusively from their own experiences.	21	
18. I believe there are no differences in the way African Americans write as opposed to any other writers.	.17	
19. I think African Americans have a unique way of writing that is different than any other group.	42	****
20. I think that there are subtle differences in African American literary writing when compared to white literary writing.	45	****

^{*}p<.05. ** p<.01. ***p<.005. **** p<.001.

Table 6 displays the Spearman correlations for the 17 ratings in Theme #2 with the respondent's racial background. As stated previously, Spearman correlations were selected instead of the more common Pearson correlations due to the use of ordinal level rating scales (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree), taking the subjectivity into account. Inspection of the table found 5 of 17 correlations to be significant with three of those correlations to be at least moderate strength using the Cohen (1988) criteria. Specifically, African-American respondents were found to have more agreement with:

^a Coding: 0=African American/Black 1=Caucasian/White.

(a) statement #27, "I generally assume all of the characters will be black when reading a story written by a Black author ($r_s = -.35$, p = .002)"; (b) statement #32, "I consciously seek to determine the race of the author if I can't tell by the authors name ($r_s = -.30$, p = .009)"; and (c) statement #34, "I can usually tell the novel or nonfiction subject is written by an African-American by the plot ($r_s = -.37$, p = .001)" (Table 6).

As an additional set of analyses, these 17 ratings from Theme #2 were also correlated with the respondent's gender, education level, age and income. For the resulting 68 Spearman correlations, five were significant at the p < .05 level with no correlations of moderate strength using the Cohen (1988) criteria (no table shown).

Table 6 Correlations for Ratings of Theme #2: What are your perceptions and attitudes about African American writing? n=76

Statements	Race a	
21. When asked to read something written by an African American author, I will generally lose interest quickly.	.16	
22. I believe that African American authors can only relate to other African Americans in their stories.	08	
23. I have difficulty understanding African American writing because I don't relate to their culture.	.22	*
24. I am interested in specific genres that do not include urban or inner city stories, characters or subjects.	.01	
25. I don't generally think about the race of the characters when I am reading a novel.	.20	
26. I consider the race of the author when I choose a subject, story or novel to read.	16	
27. I generally assume all of the characters will be Black when reading a story written by a Black author.	35	***
28. I only enjoy the writing of people who have the same interests as I do.	01	
29. If given the choice, I would probably choose to read a book written by an African American.	09	
30. I am easily confused by the story lines when I read novels or other literature written by African American writers.	.01	
31. I believe if given the choice, I would not probably choose to read something written by an African American writer.	.10	
32. I consciously seek to determine the race of the author if I can't tell by the author's name.	30	**
33. I enjoy all genres and the race of the writer never matters to me.	.06	
34. I can usually tell the novel or non-fiction subject is written by an African American by the plot.	37	****
35. I generally will not visit the urban genre section of the library or bookstore.	.17	
36. I generally believe that stories about African Americans or African American characters will usually have dark themes.	03	
37. Stories about African American people are usually centered around problems of poverty, gangs and drugs.	27	*

^{*}p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.005. ****p<.001. **Oding: 0=African American/Black 1=Caucasian/White.

Table 7 displays the Spearman correlations for the 15 ratings in Theme #3 with the respondent's racial background. As stated previously, Spearman correlations were selected instead of the more common Pearson correlations due to the use of ordinal level rating scales (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree), taking the subjectivity into account. Inspection of the table found 4 of the 15 correlations to be significant with two of those correlations to be at least moderate strength using the Cohen (1988) criteria. Specifically, African-American respondents were found to have more agreement with statement #45, "In my view, the best athletes come primarily from the African-American community ($r_s = -.39$, p = .001)" while Caucasian respondents had more agreement with statement #46, "I believe anyone can be a racist ($r_s = .32$, p = .005)" (Table 7).

As an additional set of analyses, these 15 ratings from Theme #3 were also correlated with the respondent's gender, education level, age and income. For the resulting 60 Spearman correlations, five were significant at the p < .05 level with one correlation of moderate strength using the Cohen (1988) criteria. Specifically, less educated respondents were more likely to agree with statement #39, "I usually consider myself unbiased against any group ($r_s = -.31$, p = .006)" (no table shown).

Table 7 Correlations for Ratings of Theme #3: What are your personal feelings/attitudes about Race? n=76

Statements	Race a	
38. In this 21st century, I believe that all lives should matter.	.14	
39. I usually consider myself unbiased against any group.	.10	
40. I believe that as a group, African American people are generally lazy when it comes to earning a living.	02	
41. I believe that African American people as a group seldom read books.	27	*
42. African American people will usually make everything about race if they think something is unfair to them.	.03	
43. I believe that African American women are usually very loud in public.	.16	
44. I believe that African American people make the best singers because they are the most musically inclined.	23	*
45. In my view, the best athletes come primarily from the African American community.	39	****
46. I believe anyone can be a racist.	.32	***
47. In my view, Racism was ended during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.	03	
48. I believe there is no such thing as white privilege because everyone is treated fairly in the 21st century.	.20	
49. I believe that Affirmative Action discriminates against white people.	.12	
50. I do not believe African Americans are adversely treated by police in America today	.17	
51. I believe that African Americans are given special benefits from the government that white people do not receive.	.18	
52. I believe that Racial discrimination against African Americans in this country is a serious problem.	12	

^{*}p<.05. ** p<.01. ***p<.005. **** p<.001. a Code: 0=African American/Black 1=Caucasian/White.

Summary

The study analyzed reflective interview responses from five (5) African American writers from diverse fields where writing was their sole profession or an integral part of their profession, to discuss their perceptions of their writing as African Americans. The study also analyzed responses from 76 people surveyed to measure their responses to themed statements in order to explore perceptions and the attitudes of African American writing and whether differences exist, if perceptions were based on personal, racial biases, and if those biases were part of an overall attitude about African Americans in general, among readers and writers in all areas of writing.

Of the survey participants' measured responses, the most significant findings in the study were:

- among both racial groups surveyed, differences do exist with regard to African American writing;
- both African Americans and Caucasian respondents who completed the survey agreed with the majority of the statements as to their perceptions of African American writing; and
- both African Americans and Caucasians held similar views about race,
 even to the extent of stereotypes and biases.

Comments that accompanied the responses were written predominately by the Caucasian/White respondents and in many cases displayed a predilection for additional qualification of their initial responses for clarification on the more controversial questions, but the African American/Black respondents commented to a much lesser degree. The Caucasian/White respondents' comments in some cases indicated a different

perception than their rated response on the survey. In the final chapter, these findings will be compared to the literature, and conclusions as well as implications will be drawn based on the themes of the survey, interviews and the research questions presented.

Specific recommendations will also be suggested for further scholarly research.

Chapter V

Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations

Perceptions of African American writing are not studied in abundance. Whether these perceptions of African American writing are due to historically racial and/or cultural biases, and stereotypes, or simply differences in personal preference not related to race are not easily determined, especially within the limitations detailed later in this chapter. These issues and the question of whether racial identity affects perceptions of African American writing from mainstream writing are almost impossible to ascertain without an adequate breadth of scholarly research on the subject.

This study sought to explore perceptions and the attitudes that shape acceptance of African American writing among readers and with writers in all areas of writing and to draw attention to the importance of African American writing in American discourse.

Due to the intrinsic subjectivity and controversial nature of this study and its concept, it was not designed to form any definitive answers, conclusions or statements about any perception, positive or negative about African American writing. It did not intend to prove anything beyond the research questions raised in this study, but to raise awareness of how important perceptions are to acceptance and efficacy of African American writing and to ignite more scholarly research into the subject of race and African American writing in the 21st century and beyond.

This study explored whether the differences in African American writing are based on attitudes which are influenced by perceptions that may stem from personal beliefs, cultural biases and racial stereotypes of African Americans. The research attempted to determine whether historically negative perceptions of African Americans

still persist in the 21st century and are what drive attitudes of African American writing. For African Americans who wish to enter the field of writing as a life career, it is important to be able to differentiate simple preferences from perceptions with the potential power to create racial barriers; challenges and obstacles that might pigeon hole efforts of otherwise potentially great contributions to American discourse.

While there are many questions and issues available to study, for the exploration in this subject, three questions were pursued:

- Are there differences in the way African Americans write than mainstream or Caucasian writing?
- 2. How are African American writers perceived and are perceptions of African American writing based on attitudes that may stem from historical and/or contemporary racial biases, personal beliefs, social biases and/or racial stereotypes in the 21st century?
- 3. Does racial identity drive perceptions and attitudes of African American writing?

The research included a survey with three themes associated with survey statements that were both directly and indirectly related to the research questions:

(1) Are there Differences in the Writing of African Americans?

This theme was directly related to research question 1. In fact, the questions were almost identical.

(2) What are your perceptions and attitudes about African American Writing?

This theme was related both directly and indirectly to all three of the research questions, since differences could be based on racial identity which could stem from racial biases, personal beliefs, social biases and/or racial stereotypes.

(3) What are your personal feelings/attitudes about Race?

This theme was also related both directly and indirectly to all three of the research questions, since, as stated previously, differences could be based on potential racial biases, personal beliefs, social biases and/or racial stereotypes as well as racial identity.

In addition to the survey, the research included interview responses by African Americans who write as their profession or as a major part of their professional life. The cohesion among the survey themes and the research questions also extended to the interview questions posed to the five (5) interview participants.

Discussion of Interview Questions from Interview Participants

The African American writers who were interviewed worked at varying occupations where writing was either the primary aspect or one of the primary aspects of their work. Some interview participants were professors, authors, former journalists and professional writers within various fields.

The interview questions were structured to gain insight into the challenges faced by African American writers themselves and their own perceptions of their writing relative to the mainstream in terms of validity and acceptance. In addition, the questions intended to explore their views about racial/ethnic identity, or "passing" through the use of pseudonyms, racial code switching and other issues concerning hiding one's identity when writing. Their views were varied as might be expected from individual, critical thinkers; however, many of their views were consistent with the state of African

Americans and race today, but the interview participants' responses did not completely coincide with the results of the survey participants' rated responses or comments.

These writers of diverse writing backgrounds all shared similar views of their experiences and perceptions of themselves relative to the mainstream view of themselves as African Americans in general, as well as writers. Many held perceptions of their own writing different from the results indicated by the survey participants, except for the fact that all agreed biases existed in general about African Americans and there were differences in the way that African Americans write. Most of the interview participants also acknowledged challenges they faced because of biases and stereotypes. In one particular response, the challenges included expressions of bias in Academia, to the extent of difficulty in attempts to publish for academic periodicals, and the relegation, most often, to "minority" academic publications as opposed to wider exposure through "mainstream" publications. The responses were indicative of the overarching opinions and perceptions generally held among many African Americans with regard to race and a racialized America.

Questions and Responses. Four out of five of the interview participants opined that ethnic identity still plays a significant role in how African Americans are perceived in the 21st century based on responses to question 1, "Consider the role that ethnic identity played in how African American writing was perceived prior to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Do you believe that ethnic identity still plays a significant role in how African American writing is perceived in the 21st century? Why?" One interview participant considered that perceptions were changing for the better, and cited education as a determining factor in the changes as well as noting a famous screenwriter as an

example of the changing perceptions from the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. In response to question 1, one of the interview participants offered this response:

I don't think it's changed much. Afro-American writing has always been perceived through a mainstream lens. It has always been judged on a white audience's ability to align the work with their perceptions of us. We were either explaining our culture to them or annotating our plight for them. When pitching proposals to white publishing executives in the 90s, I regularly heard the term "The Black Experience." My job, to them, was to explain "The Black Experience" to a white audience—to acknowledge the subsidiary nature of that experience by decoding its "blackness" for the majority's entertainment and edification.

A similar response was provided by another interview participant, who was emphatic about the preference for and use of the words *racial identity*, instead of *ethnic identity*, and that racial identity matters:

When it comes to African Americans I prefer the word, "racial identity." I believe that when it comes to African Americans and particularly those who are not immigrants in the U.S., and slaves were not immigrants, Ethnic identity I believe refers to other people of color who have not had the same experiences as African Americans and when you look at the official definition, the official category of race and ethnicity, ethnicity is used more for Hispanics and Hispanic is not a race.

Terminology matters and we are a racial group, not an ethnic group.

There is no question in my mind and I have been thinking about this for a long time, that racial identity matters in every context and in every stage or phase of your life. My preferred model is William Cross's model of Black Racial identity.

Responses by all five interview participants were mixed on the subject of question 2. Two of five interview participants did not believe the use of code switching or other forms of hiding racial identity should ever be warranted and one of five believed it depended on the situation presented. Question 2, "Considering the term, "code switching," camouflaging names and/or other ways that African Americans have found to hide their identity to reach mainstream audiences throughout history, do you believe that

African American writers still face having to resort to these methods? Why?" also prompted interesting responses. One interview participant stated:

The whole urban infrastructure has changed and it being changed brings about different vernaculars: Spanish-Spanglish, and Ebonics, as well as many others. So, to reach a target audience per say, a writer has to be fluid in his ways to fit in and connect to the audience that their trying to reach, and/or relay their message to. Some examples being; Papi, Carlos-Latino, Chen, Hoe-Asian, and so forth.

Another interview participant had a different take on the question:

I do not think it is a good idea for the continuation of code switching. AA have already sacrificed enough and need to assert themselves as a force to be reckoned with. There is nothing to be gained by supporting notions that whiteness is superior, even if others attempt to enforce that thinking. We as AA need to claim our space and force a reckoning where white America has to meet us half way.

All interview participants expressed concern about the racially negative attitudes of Caucasians regarding African American people in general, with one interview participant expressing particular concern about preconceptions of what is considered "suitable for us to write about." That concern was in response to question 3, "Considering historical attitudes of white people about African American people in general, do you believe that these attitudes contribute to possible negative perceptions of African American writing in the 21st century?" The same interview participant also referenced African Americans as holding the same negative preconceptions as Caucasians. Most of the interview participants believed negative attitudes are the same today as they have been throughout history. Question 3 generated strong responses from the interview participants. One interview participant stated:

"Frankly, I am tired of tip-toeing around the feelings and fragility of white America. AA need to become self-defining as individuals and collectively, not seek approval from white people."

Alluding to at least some change in attitudes, the sense of this interview participant was still similar to the majority of the other responses:

"I believe that the racial perceptions are much the same as in times past, as they result from social construction/conditioning, and they are passed down in families and throughout America's institutions. Whatever negative attitudes Whites have about AA's, are largely consistent. Impacts are lessening, however, also due to changes in the racial make-up of society, where Whites are approaching minority status; and although Whites aim to protect their status as a majority and maintain the deception that they are more superior than others, they are also having to grapple with the fact that things are changing, and that no matter how much they believe they are superior, they ae learning that they are not. I believe there is a strong sense of dissonance among whites on this topic, and many are very confused about their identity as White people, vs. others."

Another interview participant discussed the lack of seriousness expressed by the mainstream of African American writing:

I don't think that mainstream publishers and journals really are taking seriously our experiences. We come across as angry in their opinion. I don't think they take our work seriously. I think that the most vulnerable voices are people of color.

Interview question 4, "Do you believe that historically negative attitudes and stereotypes of African Americans in general may have contributed to possible negative perceptions of African American writers and their work?" was designed to prompt responses directly related to one of the research questions. As was the case with the other questions, responses were consistent to the extent of belief in the notion of historical attitudes of African Americans and negative perceptions. Question 4 revealed that all but one of the interview participants agreed general negative attitudes and stereotypes have contributed to negative perceptions of their work. One interview participant stated it is "never a good idea to always view ourselves from the frame of reference of White people." This statement implies that African American writers should look beyond what

may be evident in the perceptions of White people about negative attitudes in general.

Many of the responses included:

"I think any negativity comes wrapped in the above-mentioned preconceptions. I think those negative attitudes certainly lend to the general disinterest in black writers exploring topics outside the triangle of slavery, civil rights, and social justice."

"Indeed. The social construction of race has always aimed to relegate AA's to a lower status, and this notion has become the norm, when compared to every race and ethnicity that has entered the U.S., since our inception. Every race/ethnicity was conditioned that it was socially acceptable to embrace negative stereotypes about AA's, even as negative stereotypes began to be romanticized by such individuals as the Irish and Italian. Now, the Irish and Italian are White. Asians are also considered White, as well as Egyptians (dark or light –skinned). Race is all a social construct based on deception, propaganda, power, control, and leverage in society. We have generally been made America's scapegoat on many matters in society."

"Yes. White people, mainstream white people, are not interested in our story, and our struggles unless it has beneficial inclinations for them. So, many African Americans get snubbed, and actually not even recognized for their value, their writing more so than what their writing about."

"I don't think it has improved, in my opinion. I think we are getting more and more and more pushback because we are speaking up and facing consequences for speaking up and not keeping silent."

Question 5 was, "What do you believe are the perceptions within mainstream culture about African American writing today in terms of literature, poetry, nonfiction and/or academic writing? Why?" This question intended to yield clues as to their individual perceptions as African American writers of how they thought they were perceived within the mainstream. This question was phrased to gain insight into their thoughts and beliefs about what drives the mainstream attitudes toward their writing. Regarding question 5, much of the responses indicated mainstream culture views all writing within the context of Whiteness, as in one of the interview participant's

statements "as default." One interview participant described the perception of mainstream culture as believing "African Americans cannot have anything of value to this country, world, or life in general worth writing about." One such response provided a controversial, yet consistent view shared among the interview participants:

"Mainstream perceptions are oriented around whiteness as default, as has been the case historically. But as more AA continue to produce unique content in various outlets, including social media, there is more integration of black voices into what is considered mainstream. Marginalization will continue, particularly in academia and publishing that are shaped by predominantly white decision makers in authority, but blacks creating their own spaces and supporting a wider range of options for sharing their works, will make a difference in promoting greater exposure of a broader range of black writers."

Question 6 was, "How do you think these perceptions have contributed positively or negatively in terms of acceptance of African American writing in the mainstream? This question was asked to gain additional understanding of the role that mainstream perceptions have played on their own view of their acceptance as African American writers. All of the interview participants acknowledged that both positive and negative perceptions contribute to acceptance, and many of the responses were written with a view to generality as opposed to perceptions of their individual acceptance, with some responses offering the opinion that despite overall stereotypical and biased perceptions in general, there are some African American writers who enjoy mainstream success. This view was offered, however, with a caveat, that subject matter is generally limited to the African American experience of slavery or subjects surrounding discrimination. None of the interview participants opined in any detail on the "how" of the question; however, some interview participants did expound on the "what," i.e., what the perceptions have

done or are doing, in terms of acceptance of African American writers and their writing, either positively or negatively. A few of the strongest responses were:

"I think that we are even more vulnerable as Black scholars and scholars of color. And I think that even with regard to dissertation topics, too many are being sanctioned and silenced or that their research is not important. This is 2017, going on 2018 and there are injustices, there are inequities. Racism is at work. We want our degrees so we acquiesce on colorblindness and culture blindness and we do not study ourselves."

"These perceptions have contributed positively in the African American writing communities because now the writer doesn't have the burden of competing with White America to target the African American community. But, at the same time, negative perceptions exist because of the quality of work available to that audience."

"Certain Afro-American writing is embraced in the mainstream, but I think it's fascinating that certain topics are never broached. The topics that are celebrated generally reinforce the mainstream perceptions of African Americans, limiting our historical place to enslavement and victims of discrimination. For instance, I wrote multi-racial historical novel (based on a true story) called "I Dreamt I Was in Heaven — The Rampage of the Rufus Buck Gang," about Indian Territory at the end of the 19th century that accurately portrayed the many roles African Americans played, and placed them at the center of the story. It was found to be "uncommercial" by mainstream publishing houses. Also, this book was based on a true story of black and Indian characters lashing out in vengeance against white oppression and usurpation of Indian lands in 1895. Black and brown characters lashing out at injustice as any similarly positioned white person would do is not an acceptable topic—not when they're lashing out against offending whites."

Question 7 was, "What are your own perceptions of African American writing in general?" This broad question was asked to get the writers' own view of African American writing, absent their own, individual writing styles. It was intended to determine if the writers themselves held any of the same stereotypical views that were apparent in the responses among respondents to the survey statement on perceptions of African American writing. The overall view of African American writing among the interview participants was positive with caveats. Some expressed a richness and

diversity in the quality, while one expressed distain for what was considered mainstream constriction and "sanctioned topics." Others discussed emotional depth, unique and special realities. Two responses suggested their own perceptions were based on perceptions of the mainstream that were inherently negative:

"Too many times when you want to get published, you will have to be go to minority journals, urban journals, multi-cultural journals, Latino journals, because the mainstream journals are not going to accept your work in too many cases. I have to say, in capitals, I don't think that minority journals are substandard in any way, but sometimes it is our only option."

"I am distressed that it seems to be constricted by what the mainstream deems our sanctioned topics."

Other responses were more closely related to a general positive, albeit hopeful view and reflected their assessments based on their own perceptions:

"I love the diversity of black voices across the spectrum of both fiction and non-fiction. I have generally been more exposed to non-fiction items by black writers but hope to continue to expand my awareness of other categories of written contributions by black writers. Black writing is as legitimate and as varied as writing by people from other demographic groups."

"There is a mental and emotional depth in AA writing that cannot be found among others. I believe that the AA experience is unique to others, and they have a special ability to convey thoughts, realities, and feelings, etc.. into words."

Question 8 was, "In what ways are writing styles for African Americans different from the mainstream in terms of literature, nonfiction and other forms of expression?"

Since one of the research questions dealt directly with the issue of differences in African American writing, this question assumed that differences exist between African American writing from mainstream writing. The purpose was to ascertain the interview participants' own perceptions of those differences in the areas of literature, nonfiction

and/or other forms of written expression. The responses to this question were as varied as the question would suggest in terms of what the word *differences* represented to each of them. The question was supposed to determine if there were commonalities inherent between the survey respondents and the African American writers who were interviewed. One of the interview participants had no response, while another used the similarity of how comedians express themselves:

"...AA's in my view, are similar to comedians, in that they aim to express truth and honesty, in artistic ways. AA writing aims to be thought provoking, and informative."

Another interview participant responded that the differences are more akin to Black identity as that identity relates to art, culture, and the nature of oppression:

"Using the modernism, realism, and naturalism as the standard in this question, the African American still has the irresistible concentration towards oppression, and conflicts regarding black identity, art, and the role of culture in our society. Naturalism is still used as a platform to protest racism. Modernism is the break; allowing the writer the ability to artistically push forth his work, or rather, disguise it, if you will."

Still another response related differences that were more likened to the linguistic differences described in the Literature Review, and then went on describe some of the differences such as *liking to tell stories*:

"I think there are some differences, mostly technical stuff, like conjugating a verb, etc. I think it's different in terms of, I think Blacks are not thinking of any other groups of color, but we like to tell stories, we like to personalize our work, we like to contextualize our work. We like to tell stories. We are more casual. I think we can be more informal. And then, because of all of the above and more, we are then not taken seriously as scholars. We are not as linear. I think our style, our way of speaking. I think we are viewed as more emotional, and in the mainstream it means you're not very cognitive, and I find that very problematic. We are considered nonlinear, not as rational."

Question 9 was, "Describe a time, if any, that you felt you needed to hide your identity in order to have your writing published?" The question was posed generally to highlight the potential for any of the interview participants relative to the idea of camouflaging their identities in any way in their writing styles. The interview participants were asked to discuss any instances where they might have felt the desire or need to hide their identity in order to get their writing published. Many of the responses were emphatic about never having felt the need to hide their identity in order to be published. One interview participant offered a further explanation:

"I absolutely will never hide my identity in order to have my writing published. I am a former newspaper reporter and have experience being published in various environments. I am working on a book/s that I plan to self-published. I have no interest in jumping through hoops in dealing with corporate decision makers in white America. I am mid-50s and have no more fucks to give about what white America's perceptions of me and other black people in general."

One interview participant felt having to hide one's identity would mean succumbing to "sanctioned topics" as in conforming to mainstream characteristics of writing and in a sense, not hiding, but losing his or her own identity in the process:

"Have never done so and have not been widely published either. To hide my identity would be to stick to "sanctioned" topics and characters that behaved in ways that reinforced mainstream ideas of who African-Americans should be."

Question 10, asked the question "Describe a time, if any, where you used a pseudonym to attract wider audiences for your writing?" There are some historical accounts of African American writers using pseudonyms to alter their racial identity.

Among the most famous historical accounts is Harriet Jacobs, who used the pseudonym, Linda Brent. This question dovetails off question 9, "Describe a time, if any, that you felt you needed to hide your identity in order to have your writing published," and was asked

to determine if any of the interview participants ever used a pseudonym in order to attract wider audiences. Gaddis (2017) stated that while "no research has systematically investigated the validity of using names to signal race," it is evident "race can be signaled through names and that using names as a signal of race can successfully capture some version of racial discrimination" (Gaddis, p. 470). Historically, discrimination on the basis of race had been the overarching rationale for African Americans who passed for White to mask their identities, and for African American writers to hide names stereotypically construed as "Black names."

Three out of the five interview participants were emphatic about never using pseudonyms. Two of the respondents considered using a pseudonym and at least one intended to:

"Considered it for the novel "In the Company of Educated Men," which had a white protagonist, but couldn't bring myself to do it."

"Actually, that time is now. I choose to use a more attractively, politically correct name. I'm trying not to be limited to the scope of which I write based on my name. A neutrality of sorts."

Of the two responses in which the use of a pseudonym was considered, the response where the interview participant decided against using the pseudonym was because of the white protagonist in the story, but "couldn't bring myself to do it," and suggested doing so would have caused a question of conscience for the interview participant. The other response was telling, since the choice to use a pseudonym would afford the interview participant a more "attractively politically correct name," and that "I am not trying to limit. I'm trying not to be limited to the scope of which I write based on my name. A neutrality of sorts." The view of this interview participant suggests using a name other than his or her own would be more advantageous, attractive and politically

correct than the one with which he or she was born and that the neutrality of a name not considered a Black name would alleviate limitations of scope that would be the result of using his or her own original name.

Question 11 asked, "What have been your experiences with regard to your writing process and how you think you will be perceived by your audience?" It was asked to gain insight into the individual writing processes of the interview participants and the factors involved which may be affected by the perceptions of their audiences. It was a broad question dealing with their thoughts about whether their own views of their audiences were influential in their writing processes. As expected, the responses were as varied as the individual writer's own experiences.

One writer explained the process necessary to write for the Urban Fiction community, where "urban" is generally equated with Black, and his or her own process of writing outside of that genre while remaining relevant:

"I have found out that in the African American urban fiction community, that you have to write what is moderately popular. What everyone is reading sort of thing. Right now its romance, and I'm more inclined towards a classic literature in regards to street lit. So, I have to press forward and do what I'm basically not comfortable with because at the end of the day I'm employed. Whether it be with a publisher, self, and even to the audience."

Most of the responses were filled with incredulity over how their writing will be perceived based on their own experiences with their own writing processes. In other words, their experiences vis a vis their writing processes do not necessarily determine how they are going to be perceived by audiences.

"I try to stick to my areas of expertise and lived experience, rather than write about things I simply do not know enough about. I like to offer in depth information and insightful commentaries to challenge and engage

readers to think about racial and other issues in difference ways. "Changing the narratives" is my gift."

"Writing black characters is an inherently fraught act. If you want white readers, you reinforce their ideas of who they are and their place in the world, and that means adhering to their notion of who we are and our place in the world. I have non-traditional ideas of both. My work grows from that. I don't believe you walk away from my books with your preconceptions – racial or otherwise - reinforced. I write to entertain, but I have to write from my own experience of the world, and I am a black, gay, Harvard educated man raised in the comfortable middle-class who has lived all over the country and overseas and whose principal interactions outside of the home throughout my life have been with whites. My background does not fit anyone's preconceived notions of anything. A long time ago I decided I would not try to alter that for my writing, and yes, it has prevented any traditional notions of literary success. So be it."

Question 12, How do you think your writing is perceived by your audience?" dovetailed off question 11, "What have been your experiences with regard to your writing process and how you think you will be perceived by your audience?" It was designed to find out how the interview participants thought their own audiences felt in general about their writing, absent any preconceived notions of race. All of the interview participants' responses were positive and consistent in the view that they were perceived well by their audiences. For example:

"People are receptive to my writing as an activist who demonstrates consciousness and compassion in my approaches to most subject matter."

"I believe my writing is perceived as thoughtful, and informative. 'He's a good writer...different.' is what's been said. Even writing in other genres I still infuse much of me and my character in that, and as a result it becomes me, my signature, my voice."

Question 13, "In your career, what have you considered were obstacles with regard to your own ability to write and reach all audiences?" was asked to determine the challenges, hindrances and obstacles stood in the way of the interview participants' ability to reach a broad swath of audiences. This question was designed to find out what

they felt stood in the way of their ability to move into the mainstream if they were not already with their writing, and to determine if there were any common challenges among the interview participants themselves related to biases or discrimination on account of race.

Most of the interview participants alluded to race as a challenge, whether perceived as a struggle or obstacle, where *white* and *whiteness* was the recurring theme in their responses:

"I feel the major obstacle is the fact that white people are in charge of almost everything. I am tired of being forced to jump through hoops to deal with decision makers who have no appreciation for the contributions of black writers."

While explaining there was no issue with being published for this interview participant, the allusion to a seeming segregation between "White" publications and those of "people of color" was striking:

"In my career, personally, fortunately everything I write gets published. So what I write for white, mainstream journals and what I write in journals for people of color, almost everything I write gets published".

Still another response was an observation of lessons learned:

"My only challenge concerning writing was the fact that at some point, I learned that writing styles varies across venues (academic, and further, based on the discipline, newspaper and magazine, and further the type, audience, etc.) Learning acceptable writing styles requires that we study the works that are published by a certain entity, to know how to adjust or writing, as well as where our writing style fits. It took a little while to learn how to do this."

The last question was question 14, "Do you believe that more research and study in the area of African American writing would be a benefit in the overall study of African Americans in Academics? Why?" This question solicited the interview participants to consider whether research and studies would benefit African Americans in Academics.

The question then asked why the interview participant would consider that more research into African American writing would be important and beneficial.

All but one of the responses agreed with the belief that more research and study would be a benefit, with one of the interview participants abstaining due to lack of knowledge in the area of Academia. Race figured implicitly within many of the responses and in some, there were explicit references to race as part of the reason why more research and study would be beneficial. Many of the responses alluded to the African American written voice, and the need for more study relative to the ability for African Americans to be *heard* and the reasons for the silence in African American written voices:

"Absolutely, because I think that we are censored. Yes, there is a difference in terms of who gets published. Too many of us are silenced. Too often it is about the status quo, aka white privilege, aka unearned privilege, I think we also have to be very prolific so that somewhere, there are a number of places where your work will be accepted and you can get the word out there.

"Definitely. There needs to be more research in all areas that are proposed by blacks who have various subject matter expertise. To date, white people in academia and elsewhere have set the agenda about what is most important. I want to see black people being positioned to sign off on important areas designated for further research."

"Yes. It would open up many minds of African Americans to write out of themselves-their world: to write what they see-feel. To tell their stories, and thus pass them on for future generations to study, and enhance our growth many years from now. And hopefully, just hopefully, in that process, establish the African American writer again, as a scholar. That's what I believe."

Discussion of Themes and Statements of Survey Participants

Accessing and analyzing the perceptions of people who are interested in reading and writing, the people who take reading seriously and enjoy turning pages or pushing

their Kindle buttons, as well as people who enjoy reading and writing were the relevant sources for the survey research in this study and for the exploration of the questions surrounding the acceptance and validity of African American writing today. Within such a rich environment of resources and information, the potential for insight into personal and racial biases, stereotypes and negative perceptions appeared promising, if not expected.

Theme #1 of the survey asked the question, "Are there differences in the writing of African Americans." This question was very closely related to the first research question for the study. The Literature Review indicated the existence of linguistic differences between African Americans and what is called Standard American English, which would also suggest that differences also exist in writing among African Africans. The statements in the survey under this theme were designed to respond to the research question concerning whether differences existed in the writing of African Americans and what is considered mainstream or dominant culture in America.

Two of the responses from Table 2, statement #12, I think African American writers are more interested in writing about their own cultural experiences at 3.41% and statement #18, I believe there are no differences in the way African Americans write as opposed to any other writers, at 3.22%, were the most significant. These two responses are opposing statements, although one question did not expressly state a difference, only an "interest" in a particular kind of writing. All survey respondents agreed with each of the two statements. Although the statements suggested that on the one hand, there were no differences in the way African Americans write, the other suggested African Americans are more interested in writing about their own cultural experiences. This

would seem to suggest that while there are no differences in the *way* African Americans write as opposed to Caucasian writers, African American writers, however, appear to *have a preference* for their own cultural experiences as topics in their writing.

It was interesting to note that nine of the twelve statements in Theme #1 where the implication of differences was most evident, both African Americans and Caucasians were in agreement. However, correlations indicated a higher level of agreement among African Americans than Caucasians in terms of the number of statements where differences were most evident. For example, statement #13, I can usually tell if the author is African American based on the subject of the text, had the highest level of significance among African American respondents who agreed more with the statement than their Caucasian counterparts. Each of the next statements in the order of highest significance: #20, I think that there are subtle differences in African American literary writing when compared to white literary writing, #10, I know when the author of a novel is African American by the genre, #19, I think African Americans have a unique way of writing that is different than any other group, #16, I can usually detect differences in the writing styles of any ethnic or racial group by reading their stories, and #11, I believe African Americans have a distinct writing style from other cultures, respectively, clearly specified that African American respondents agreed more than the Caucasian respondents to the research question, "Are there differences in the way African Americans write than mainstream or Caucasian writing?"

Theme #2 of the survey asked the question, "What are your perceptions and attitudes about African American writing?" This theme was designed to gain insight into whether the respondents' perceptions were based on racial attitudes or general

preferences and to aid in answering the research question, *How are African American* writers perceived and are perceptions of African American writing based on attitudes that may stem from historical and/or contemporary racial biases, personal beliefs, social biases and/or racial stereotypes in the 21st century," as well as the research question, "Does racial identity drive perceptions and attitudes of African American writing?"

Table 3 illustrated that the statements, #33, "I enjoy all genres and the race of the writer never matters to me" at 4.08% and #29, "If given the choice, I would probably choose to read a book written by an African American" at 3.43%, respectively, rated the highest in terms of agreement of all of the respondents surveyed. Although those two questions rated highest in terms of overall agreement, correlations for Theme #2 (Table 6) indicated that neither statement was considered significant in comparing African American and Caucasian responses. African Americans agreed less with statement #29 and Caucasians agreed less with statement #33. Overall, however, it would appear African Americans agreed more than Caucasians in at least three of the statements in Theme #2, statement #27, "I generally assume all of the characters will be black when reading a story written by a Black author," statement #32, "I consciously seek to determine the race of the author if I can't tell by the author's name," and statement #34, "I can usually tell the novel or nonfiction subject is written by an African-American by the plot" (Table 6). This indicates that while there was little significance between either respondent group, both African Americans and Caucasians do hold similar perceptions of African American writing.

Theme #3, "What are your personal feelings/attitudes about Race" was a direct question to determine how the survey participants would respond to broad statements on

race, racial issues and some common stereotypes. The statements were designed to solicit perspectives about racial attitudes incorporating all of the research questions, and in particular, to aid in answering the specific research question, "How are African American writers perceived and are perceptions of African American writing based on attitudes that may stem from historical and/or contemporary racial biases, personal beliefs, social biases and/or racial stereotypes in the 21st century," to consider if racial biases and stereotypes drive perceptions of African American writing, which was one of the principal facets of the study.

Table 7 illustrated that out of the four significant correlations, African Americans agreed more with statement #45, "In my view, the best athletes come primarily from the African-American community," while Caucasian respondents agreed more with statement #46, "I believe anyone can be a racist" (Table 7).

The highest rated statement from Theme #3 in terms of overall agreement among both survey groups was statement #52, "I believe that racial discrimination against African Americans in this country is a serious problem" at 4.43%. This was a significant acknowledgement in consideration of critical race theory and its implications for African Americans today in the United States. The agreement among both groups of respondents to this statement would suggest that if racial discrimination against African Americans is a serious problem in America, then it could be concluded discrimination may extend to perceptions of African American writing based on attitudes stemming from historical and/or contemporary racial biases, personal beliefs, social biases and/or racial stereotypes, as stated in the research question.

The second highest statement in agreement among both African American and Caucasian respondents was statement #38, "I believe that all lives should matter." The significance of this statement is found within the "Black Lives Matter" movement of the 21st century and the controversy that resulted over whether Black lives were inclusive of "all" lives. The statement was phrased with the conditional word, "should," to provide the respondent with the caveat of inclusivity with the statement All lives matter, which created a lightning rod in the public discourse for the opposite view or exclusive of Black lives mattering as well.

The third highest statement in agreement among both African American and Caucasian respondents was statement #46, "I believe anyone can be a racist." Among the groups, correlations indicated this was the one area where Caucasians agreed more than African Americans. According to Clair & Denis (2015), the focus today is on relationships between the "ways in which historical, unconscious, institutional, and systemic forms of racism interact," including "other social forces," which work to facilitate and perpetuate racial inequality (Clair & Dennis, p. 858). Clair & Denis (2015) contended that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, racism was an individual and overt attitude. This is also a traditional, stereotypical view held by many since the advent of the post-racial, colorblind era from the late sixties until the present. In fact, a recent Washington Post article entitled, "White People Think Racism is Getting Worse – Against White People," revealed that as late as 2011, whites tended to believe anti-white bias was greater than anti-black bias (Sommers, & Norton, 2016). Based on the responses to this statement, Caucasians respondents believe racism also extends to the very people with whom racial inequality is perpetuated, i.e., that racism is a shared

individual behavior and response that can include African Americans as potential "racists."

Discussion and Comparisons of Comments, Research Questions and Themes

The survey respondents were given the opportunity to provide open-ended comments to their rated responses to survey statements. The controversial and subjective nature inherent in the survey themes and statements limited the ability to determine the honesty of the participants in the survey. This is because many of the comments were not necessarily indicative of some of the rated responses and also contradicted the rated responses. Although correlations in the study suggested African Americans agreed generally with statements in some cases to a larger degree than the Caucasian respondents, the Caucasian respondents offered comments to all 44 survey statements. African American respondents offered only 14 comments out of the total of 44 statements, which were limited to Themes 2 and 3. No comments were made by African Americans in Theme 1.

Theme #1. Theme 1 of the survey was designed to aid in answering the research question, "Are there differences in the writing of African Americans." Comments from the three statements rated highest in agreement among both African Americans and Caucasians in Theme 1 were: #12, I think African American writers are more interested in writing about their own cultural experiences; #18, I believe there are no differences in the way African Americans write as opposed to any other writers; and #20, I think that there are subtle differences in African American literary writing when compared to white literary writing, respectively. African American respondents did not offer any comments.

Correlations indicated the African American respondents agreed significantly more with statements #12 and #20. Caucasians agreed more with statement #18, although not as significantly as the agreement among African Americans to the other two statements. It was interesting that although Caucasians tended to agree more with statement #18, their comments seemed to contradict their rated responses. For example, comments from the Caucasian respondents for #18 did not follow the theme or research question and included:

Everyone has a unique perspective, and different heritages are different starting points. All are valuable.

Don't know: consider it possible that they may be more formal to avoid being labeled as "African American" or "Black" writer.

I disagree because most of the African American authors I've read really worked extremely hard at their craft. It's probably just as difficult for an African American person to get published as do anything else in our society.

Comments from the Caucasian respondents to statement #12 followed the theme and research question. Comments included:

I also feel that white folks are more interested in writing about their own cultural experiences as well.

Isn't everybody more interested in writing their own cultural experiences? I wouldn't presume to write about what it's like to be an Inuit or an Australian.

I think *anyone* is more interested in writing about their own cultural experiences.

I believe everyone writes their own cultural experience.

I hope so. Toni Morrison doesn't write for the "white gaze" and I admire her so much.

Comments from the Caucasian respondents to statement #20 followed the theme and research question. Comments included:

Broader life experiences that white people never even know are there because they're centered on their own whiteness. I am not saying all white authors. Just most.

When writing gets to the literary level, you only know ethnicity because it pleases the author to show it. That skill level is high enough to make this the author's choice.

When comparing the comments to the correlations as well as the descriptive data from the research, it would appear African American writing is considered different, and those differences may be considered "cultural." Whether "cultural" translates to "race" is unknown.

Theme #2. This theme of the survey was designed to answer the research question, How are African American writers perceived and are perceptions of African American writing based on attitudes that may stem from historical and/or contemporary racial biases, personal beliefs, social biases and/or racial stereotypes in the 21st century, as well as Does racial identity drive perceptions and attitudes of African American writing? and were constructed to provide responses that could possibly determine if the identity of the writer was important, relevant and/or significant. Comments from the three statements rated highest in agreement among both African Americans and Caucasians in Theme #2 were statement #33, I enjoy all genres and the race of the writer never matters to me; statement #29, If given the choice, I would probably choose to read a book written by an African American; and statement #25, I don't generally think about the race of the characters when I am reading a novel, respectively. African Americans offered comments to statement #29.

Comments from Caucasian respondents to statement #33 included:

Not all genres equally...I prefer fiction but tend to avoid westerns, romance and mystery novels! I choose books based on recommendations and reviews usually.

Unless its an issue related to race, then I prefer an African-American author.

Depends on the topic: if it's about politics, race or religion, I am interested in the race and religion of the author.

Well, most genres. Horror's not my thing. Race irrelevant.

I have favorite genres and ones I don't like (such as horror), but the race of the writer doesn't matter.

I'm interested in the race of the writer, but it won't stop me from reading anything--it just informs my reading. I do enjoy all genres.

I don't enjoy all genres. The authors race does not matter to me as long as the book is entertaining.

Judging from the individual statements by the Caucasian respondents, racial identity was not a significant factor with regard to statement #33. Comments from Caucasian respondents to statement #29 included:

Depends on a book subject.

Depends on the book.

depends what they've written about as opposed to the other books i'd [sic] have a choice of

I choose by reading the synopsis

Statement #29 elicited two comments from Caucasian respondents that appeared somewhat defensive:

Badly worded question. What are the other choices?

I'd judge by the book or whether I like other books the author has written, not by the looks or heritage of the author. That's stupid

The only comment to statement #29 by an African American respondent was:

I prefer reading works by classic Black authors.

Comments from Caucasian respondents to statement #25 included:

Unless it is explicitly important to the plot.

Unless the point of the story is the character's race

Normally, not. But if would like to know, as some experiences of a character could be different based on race- and sometimes writer would not think themselves that it would be different, but readers do.

Only if it is a novel where race is a factor to the storyline.

As was stated previously, some of these comments did suggest personal bias which was inconsistent with the rated responses of some of the Caucasian respondents. For example, one respondent who disagreed with Theme #2, Statement #21: When asked to read something written by an African American author, I will generally lose interest quickly, wrote a qualifying comment,

"The author's AAness doesn't factor in. I'm very fussy about my leisure reading and I lose interest quickly in equal opportunity bad writing."

The connotation of *equal opportunity bad writing* could suggest an underlining, subliminal bias of African American writing as bad while, at the same time, declaring equal opportunity in terms of *losing interest in* such *bad writing*.

In another example, a respondent who disagreed with statement #32, *I* consciously seek to determine the race of the author if *I* can't tell by the author's name, added a qualifying comment, "Only if *I* believe race is crucial [sic] the authenticity of a work of fiction or veracity of a work of non-fiction." This was a thought-provoking comment inasmuch as the authenticity of a fictional work or veracity of a non-fictional work would be the driving force behind a conscious determination of race. The question becomes, why would race determine authenticity in a work of fiction and why would the veracity of a work of nonfiction be dependent on the race of the writer?

When comparing the comments to the correlations as well as the descriptive data from the research, the answers to the research questions this theme was designed to

address were left somewhat unclear because some of the comments included "unless" and "depends," which allowed for caveats to their rated responses, even though both African Americans and Caucasians held similar perceptions of African American writing. Of interest was that both groups disagreed the majority of the statements in Theme 2. In the few areas of agreement, correlations revealed African Americans agreed more than their Caucasian counterparts about the importance of the racial identity of the writer or its relevance.

Theme #3. This theme of the survey was designed to aid in answering the research questions, "How are African American writers perceived and are perceptions of African American writing based on attitudes that may stem from historical and/or contemporary racial biases, personal beliefs, social biases and/or racial stereotypes in the 21st century and Does racial identity drive perceptions and attitudes of African American writing." Comments from the three statements rated highest in agreement among both African Americans and Caucasians in Theme #3 were statement #52, I believe that Racial discrimination against African Americans in this country is a serious problem; statement #38, In this 21st century, I believe that all lives should matter; and statement #46, I believe anyone can be a racist, respectively. African American respondents offered comments for both statement #38 and statement #46.

Comments from Caucasian respondents to statement #52 were:

I agree. I don't think it's around every corner - but there are pockets of it everywhere. But just because someone hates you, it doesn't mean it's a race thing. Some people just hate everyone.

Evidently it is more serious than I had realized. I am pretty sure that all along, African Americans were trying to tell us this, and we weren't paying attention. Whether or not I believed it before, I certainly believe it now.

it is anywhere

Kind of easy to lie in this questionnaire--even if one is only lying to one'sself. It's pretty easy to know what the "right" answer is in the last part--not so much in the 1st part. Would love to know what your hypothesis is, and what your take is on African Americans.

I believe politicians are telling people it's a problem and manufacturing incidents, but I don't believe it's an issue amongst average citizens.

These comments from the Caucasian respondents indicated they were all aware to varying degrees that racial discrimination against African Americans in this country is a serious problem.

The one statement that garnered the most comments from both respondent groups in the entire survey was question #38. Examples of the comments from Caucasian respondents were:

All lives should matter, but they don't. Some people are treated like their lives don't matter at all, specifically Black people are treated this way. I feel so uncomfortable with this question! I do believe this, but I don't believe it's currently true on a large scale, and that's why we need to emphasize the fact that black lives matter.

Unless "all lives matter" is being used to minimize the message of "black lives matter" - then I resent that message. Taken at face value, yes, all lives matter

not in an "all lives matter" as response to "black lives matter" way though. If it was meant like that, I'm on "strongly disagree"

well, technically, no. I don't believe murderers, rapists, paedophiles etc should matter.

Yes, but not if that statement implies "Black Lives matter less" (That statement has become a "Some of my best friends..." "I haven't a racist bone in my body" sort of statement.

All lives SHOULD matter, but currently black lives don't matter enough

The "all lives matter" slogan is a deliberate smoke screen to counter the Black Lives Matter movement. From police violence and political

disregard, it is shown that to the authorities black lives do not matter to them. Of course everyone's lives matter

Comments by the African American respondents echoed their Caucasian counterparts:

Yes as everyone life is important but there needs to be more regard and respect for Black lives. We are not the lesser of society to be picked off.

All Lives Should Matter; however, in reality, groups are marginalized and these phrase doesn't apply.

All lives matter has been taken and flipped into a phrase I, along with the majority of black people, have come to hate.

Comments from the Caucasian respondents to statement #46 were:

Strongly agree.

I think most people are to some degree. Nuance matters.

Three kinds of folks. Openly racist - Quietly racist - The rest are just people trying to get thru life together.

Especially in our world where everything is labeled "racism".

Only someone with money and power matched with their prejudiced can be racist.

In the commonly accepted view of sociologists, from whom I take my definition of racism, only whites can be racist because racism is defined as systemic. Meaning only those with the power to oppress can be racist. I do believe that all races can be bigot

Only the group in power (white people like me) can be racist, because racism is based on power vs. oppression. People of color can have prejudices, but that is different.

Only white people can be racist.

One African American respondent offered a comment to this statement which echoed the views of the comments offered by the Caucasian respondents:

If a system caters to one group while marginalizing others, it's possible. Anyone can be biased.

Although not included the highest level of agreement of statements for Theme #3, Statement #44, *I believe that African American people make the best singers because they are the most musically inclined* was important include for the purpose of establishing the potential of the respondents for stereotypical views related to African Americans. A couple of the comments by the Caucasian respondents demonstrated a clear inclination toward a common stereotypical view of African Americans and singing ability:

i actually do agree with this. they seem to have a natural 'feel' for beats that white people don't. Singers like Jason De Rulo and Chris Brown absolutely outperform the majority of white singers in singing and definitely dancing

The vocal chord is thicker with darker skin. (The bones are also denser.) The African American voice tends to have richer overtones. For that matter, the brunette Italian voice is usually richer than the blond, fracked person's.

While these comments cannot be taken to reflect an overall view of Caucasians in America, they do reflect at least some of the sentiments of the respondents in the survey. When comparing the comments to the correlations as well as the descriptive data from the research, racial biases, stereotypes and discrimination still exist in America in the 21st century and similar views on race, racism and discrimination are shared among both Caucasians and African Americans. Furthermore, African Americans tended to share in the belief of the common stereotypes referred to in the statements in Theme 3.

Conclusions

As stated throughout the study, it was intended to explore perceptions of African American writing and to answer the research questions:

- (1) Are there differences in the way African Americans write than mainstream or Caucasian writing?
- (2) How are African American writers perceived and are perceptions of African American writing based on attitudes that may stem from historical and/or contemporary racial biases, personal beliefs, social biases and/or racial stereotypes in the 21st century? and
- (3) Does racial identity drive perceptions and attitudes of African American writing?

According to the results of the study, it can be concluded that of the three research questions posed, both Caucasian and African American participants who were surveyed as well as the interview participants held the common view that racial identity drives perceptions of African American writing. Moreover, both groups surveyed were definitive in their belief in differences between African American and mainstream or Caucasian writing. On the question of perceptions of African American writing, both the survey participants as well as the interview participants held relatively positive views of African American writers. However, the survey results were questionable as to whether perceptions are based on attitudes stemming from historical and/or contemporary racial biases, personal beliefs, social biases and/or racial stereotypes in the 21st century, as stated in the research question. Conversely, it can be stated most the interview participants believed that biases and stereotypes existing generally for African Americans do impact the challenges they face and that historically negative stereotypes and attitudes persist today and extend to mainstream acceptance of their writing. The writers interviewed for the study believe their identity as African Americans indeed

drive perceptions of their writing, in terms of publishing in Academia, business and entertainment, as well as other forms and areas of writing.

Judging from the Literature Review, it is evident there are linguistic differences between Standard American English and African American Vernacular English. The literature review indicated identity was an important component in language for African Americans, and therefore, racial identity could very well play an important role in African American writing. Moreover, taking into account the writings offered by noted successful and famous writers highlighted in the study, historical biases and stereotypes have been an ongoing challenge and may still be considered a challenge faced by African American writers today.

Not surprisingly, the majority of racial views among both the African American and Caucasian survey groups were similar and could be said to mirror today's progressive views among people who identify with the Democratic political party. Many stereotypical statements indicated both agreement and disagreement with no significant differences between either racial group surveyed. Khan & Stagnaro (2012) suggested it is not uncommon for characterizations formulated by one group about another target group to be adopted by the target group (Khan & Stagnaro, p. 3). *Limitations of the Study*

Without the benefit of the experiences of many other African American writers, and other limitations, is it safe to say all the research questions were answered thoroughly? Therefore, most conclusions are subjective and can be considered in some cases mere conjecture, even as there are some moderate correlations to draw from the survey on the study's subject. The study literature dealt with that part of African

American differences in linguistics and language and the opinions of writers such as Morrison, Baldwin and others for relevant evidence of differences, identity issues and experiences. The research queried people who take reading and writing seriously as well as people who write for a living.

The research questions, survey themes and statements were arguably subjective and more likely to be prone to conjecture, which is one of the major reasons this study was presented as an exploration of perceptions and not an explicit, empirical and measurable determination of attitudes.

An exploration of perceptions of African American writing and the potential impact on attitudes with respect to race are limited in scope due to implications related to stereotypes and other race dynamics that were not examined. For example, while the perceptions of some noted African American writers were discussed in this dissertation, the overall effects of their perceptions and the perceptions of African Americans as a whole are outside of the scope of this study. The study is also limited regarding the scholarly research about African American or Black writing, since most of the scholarly research lends itself to linguistics and African American Vernacular English and dialects.

Since the study encompasses a broad view about African American writing and touches on literature and academic writing as well as other types, the study was limited because there were no individuals surveyed in the areas of publishing in academic, professional or literary fields where the subject of stereotypes and bias could have been explored as well.

The ability to control the environment within the survey group, Writers and Readers was another limitation. Members of the group self-selected by clicking on a link

to the survey. While the link was confined to the group page, chances of the survey link being shared among others outside of the group existed and was possible. In addition, the controversial and subjective nature inherent in the survey themes and statements limited the ability to determine the honesty of the respondents in the survey.

The quantitative portion of the study was limited to specific statements and the responses were limited to specific themes. Although additional commentary was available for the responses, some of the statements proved more limited in scope, thus creating additional questions that were not included and could not be explored in the study. Moreover, without a mathematical or scientific background, the study was limited to general descriptive and correlative analyses.

Although diligence was applied to ensure the adequate representation of the target population, vis a vis, the number of participants for the study, the study used writer organizations and readers who are members of book clubs and not all conceivable clubs or organizations were solicited. As a result, the data might not be considered general to the mass population. In addition, personal writing experiences gained through interviews provided anecdotal information and while many provided some shared experiences, these responses were personal and speculative and not capable of capturing the full breadth of experiences, perceptions, feelings and the impact on African American writers who write for a living. In terms of relevant research and discussions about writing styles of African Americans, the study is limited because there does not seem to be much relevant scholarly or other references available.

The survey was limited since most of the respondents were college educated and, in some cases, beyond the bachelor's degree level. The majority of respondents held

views consistent with the Democratic party, with only a few who identified with the Republican party therefore, it can be concluded that most of the respondents were more liberal and/or progressive than conservative in their views relative to race.

As experience and reflection are very important, anecdotal information derived from interviews with African Americans writers who responded were the only sources of information used for the qualitative portion of the study however, these experiences are personal and individual, and may not necessarily reflect the views or experiences of every African American writer in America in the 21st century. Moreover, most of the relevant literature relates to linguistics and language of African Americans and most studies and research on writing relates to composition and pedagogy or writing in general and not specifically perceptions of African American writing from any standpoint other than as comparisons for empirical studies on the abilities of particular groups.

Conclusion

This study drew upon the writings from various famous African American writers, poets and activists for context, clarity and reference. It is important to make a distinction, however, that many quotes and references in this study were attributed to Toni Morrison for a reason. Throughout the study, it was important to represent the research in the most credible way possible, given its subjectivity and controversial nature. Ms. Toni Morrison's written contributions to the discourse of African American life and the struggle for racial equality, equity and justice provided a rich source of reliable, relevant information for this study, both in terms of the African American writing life as well as life as an African American living in a racialized America. Ms. Morrison exemplifies the duality of a writer living within the mainstream and as a Black writer, a

duality that cannot be ignored. Furthermore, she is the personification of the value that lies within her duality. Because of this exemplification, it was determined that her voice was the strongest within the study's context, its relevancy and its importance for future research.

Ms. Morrison wrote that the same nation of people who created mechanisms for both individual freedom as well as "devastating racial oppression" present a singular landscape for a writer and as a writer and a reader, the pressure created by racialized societies on the creative process has "sharpened and elevated" the delight she holds for literature under these conditions (Morrison, p. xiii). The implications of the writers interviewed in the study were that biases and discrimination still exists for them as African American writers, which is much different than how the survey suggests they are perceived.

Recommendations

Based on the interview and survey responses, more questions inevitably arose, which of course, were not a part of the survey and were not answered in the study.

Therefore, more in-depth research and scholarly study into the efficacy, acceptance and relevance of African American writing in general as well as particular writing styles, and investigating what constitutes acceptance, relevance and value in writing to readers and influencers in the mainstream is indicated.

Another important area would be to study the impact of race, African American writing and other issues facing African Americans desiring to enter the various fields of writing. An additional area would be more scholarly study into racial stereotypes, biases

and discrimination in Academia, entertainment and business in America as it pertains to African American writers and their writing.

Ms. Morrison wrote:

"Readers of all American fiction have been positioned white. I am interested to know what the assumption has meant to the literary imagination. What does positing ones writerly self, in the wholly racialized society that is the United States as unraced and all others as raced entail? What happens to the writerly imagination of a black author who is at some level always conscious of representing one's own race to, or in spite of a race of readers that understands itself to be 'universal' or race-free? In other words, how is 'literary whiteness' and 'literary blackness' made and what is the consequence of that construction?" (Morrison, p. xiii).

These are also the kinds of questions that demand further study in the area of African American writing. More scholarly research and study into the effects of dialects and their impact on race and African American writing are recommended. There should be focus groups conducted to discuss and help explain data gathered from research on the topic as well as discussions about writing as an African American in an ever-changing technological environment of new media and the Internet. The hope of this research is this study will spark more interest in the subject of the writing of African Americans and more scholarly research can provide the answers for African Americans who through their writing, wish to be heard, taken seriously and considered relevant and acceptable as part of American discourse in the 21st century and beyond.

Appendix A

Comments to Survey Statements by Theme Questions and by Race of Respondent

Comments to Survey Statements by Theme Questions and by Race of Respondent (Typographical errors have not been changed)

Where both Caucasian/Whites and African American/Blacks have responded to the same statement, responses are shown together.

Theme #1: Are There Differences in the Writing of African Americans?

1. Statement 9 I think African American writers are better at writing about urban issues than other subjects.

Caucasian/White

Many African Americans have grown up in urban areas and people tend to write what they know.

Question suggests that AAs are fundamentally urban, which is a fact not in evidence. What I would say is that African Americans who have extensive urban life experience probably understand that experience better than others. Whether they are better at con

everyone has their own unique twist

This question seems constricting. Each person's experience is unique.

not all African Americans are Urban. Most write about what they have experienced.

I can't think of any authors I read who are African American who address "urban" issues. White authors tend to do that far more. I read lots of mysteries and crime fiction. Most of those authors, almost all actually, are white. They are the ones who write

2. Statement 10: I know when the author of a novel is African American by the genre.

Caucasian/White

Unless there is a photograph on the cover or it is someone that I know to be African American.

It's rare I research an author before reading a new book

Anyone can write any genre if they choose to.

I do not think I ever said, I think a black woman wrote this.

A true statement would be: there are times when I am fairly confident the author is AA by the genre, but no one could possibly always know.

3. Statement 11: I believe African Americans have a distinct writing style from other cultures.

Caucasian/White

Every culture is going to have its own writing style. Asian and European are going to differ as much as European and African Americans.

We are all shaped by our experiences. We tend to gravitate to those who are similar to us. For me, I appreciate the different nuances in each culture. It's a privilege to learn more about others.

Like all Authors and Writers, it is according to the subject matter within the pages and how they define it in respect to themselves.

I think African American authors are like other authors: individuals with their own writing styles. Some may strongly suggest heritage; most probably will not.

4. Statement 12: I think African American writers are more interested in writing about their own cultural experiences.

Caucasian/White

I also feel that white folks are more interested in writing about their own cultural experiences as well.

Isn't everybody more interested in writing their own cultural experiences? I wouldn't presume to write about what it's like to be an Inuit or an Australian.

I think *anyone* is more interested in writing about their own cultural experiences.

I believe everyone writes their own cultural experience.

I hope so. Toni Morrison doesn't write for the "white gaze" and I admire her so much.

I assume most people are generally (not always) intereste in writing about their own cultural experiences.

Writers have individual motivations. Some may involve heritage, as with any ethnicity. I think it's a mistake to take a look at the author's promo photo, see melanin, and jump to conclusions. As a professional editor, it would be even less pardonable.

Most of the African American authors I've read write about their cultural experiences. But I am not well read enough in African American literature to know if this is passionate calling for a majority of black authors. Because race is a primary subject of

Anyone can write about any subject that interests them. Different perspectives are essential to greater understanding of different subjects.

5. Statement 13: I can usually tell if the author is African American based on the subject of the text.

Caucasian/White

People tend to write about people who are very similar to them because that's what they're familiar with. If the characters are expressly stated as African American, I'm likely to assume that it was written by an African American. Whether by familiarity o

A caucasian person can write about someone being stabbed in an alley and an African American can write about tea with the queen. Race does not define what we choose to write about.

Truly it depends on the title and the subject matter. "My Life as a Black Woman" contains more clues than "Life of a Galactic Overlord"??

I don't think African Americans have a monopoly on writing about anything, so I try not to assume. I rarely need to. The author is usually candid enough to say so in the clear.

Only if the title, photo, bio, or book blurb specifies the author's race

That makes no sense to me. Nor should it matter.

6. Statement 14: I believe that African American writers are limited in terms of their experiences when writing for general audiences. I believe that African American writers are limited in terms of their experiences when writing for general audiences.

Caucasian/White

I think African Americans are have some limited experience that white people have and take for granted.

Everyone's writing can be limited by experience or lack of imagination. If the writer researches enough and plans well enough, they are able to write about anything.

No more than anyone else. Race, culture, or skin color doesn't affect that. Experience is very individual.

Limitations exist only to the extent that so far, African Americans have been economically have been less apt to be able to travel. That's a sociological problem, not a racial one.

Why would they be? I don't think there's something in melanin that limits writing ability.

I think the opposite is true.

7. Statement 15: I think that African American writers have a limited view of the world.

Caucasian/White

The view, if limited, is narrow because of the impact of systemic racism and white privilege. They lack there upward mobility and opportunities of their white counterparts.

I don't know, nor do I know how to compare against the insularity of any other ethnic/racial group. Untraveled and unexposed to other thoughts and cultures can be a limiter for any group

I think all writers have a limited view of the world. I don't think unlimited views of the world are necessarily good goals.

Surely some do. Surely a lot of non-AA writers also have limited views of the world. Surely a lot of people in general have limited views of the world. I don't think AA writers have more limited views of it than anyone else.

I think that African Americans have especially more perceptions about the complexities of our society than white authors.

Same comment as above. Not an intrinsic problem--but still a problem based on discrimination.

8. Statement 16. I can usually detect differences in the writing styles of any ethnic or racial group by reading their stories.

Caucasian/White

Each group has their own cultural nuances. You learn these differences by reading books by different authors from all races, and cultures. It's widens your world views, and opens your mind to different ideas, ideals, thought processes, etc..

I can tell the difference between a Canadian or English or Indian writer and an American in English, because of the spelling differences, and that is it.

I think writing styles are based on the story being told, or because the author has been writing for a very long time and has an audience that has expectations of their work.

Most of the time when I can tell, I believe it's because the author wants me to be able to tell. There are certainly times I go out of my way to sound like the Kansas country boy that I am; I'd expect the same of others. But I don't think that means they

9. Statement 17: I believe that African Americans usually write exclusively from their own experiences.

Caucasian/White

All writers write exclusively from their own experiences. Even science fiction writers.

I believe most writers draw from personal experience

I think most authors do.

So does everyone

I honestly don't know

It's according to the subject matter.

Personal experiences colour our opinions and writing styles, but that doesn't mean African Americans are limited by their experiences, or lack there of.

This applies to all writers.

this is often true of many races--and African American people are an under-represented people group in fiction and non-fiction. Diversity in writing is necessary for growth as a society. Do they not have an imperative to write about their own culture?

I do believe we're at a historical moment where there's more pressure for everyone to write exclusively from their own experiences.

No more than any other Americans.

I don't even see why anyone would imagine this were so. The rules that apply to people in general apply fully to African Americans.

10. Statement 18: I believe there are no differences in the way African Americans write as opposed to any other writers.

Caucasian/White

Everyone has a unique perspective, and different heritages are different starting points. All are valuable.

Some yes, some no, like anyone else.

The questions are becoming redundant. Same questions are being asked. It depends on the subject matter.

Although, again, it depends on the POV and genre

Don't know: consider it possible that they may be more formal to avoid being labeled as "African American" or "Black" writer.

I disagree because most of the African American authors I've read really worked extremely hard at their craft. It's probably just as difficult for an African American person to get published as do anything else in our society.

11. Statement 19: I think African Americans have a unique way of writing that is different than any other group.

Caucasian/White

I think they work harder and produce consistently higher quality work. They have to if they want to make a living being a writer.

This is a culmination of life experiences that are different than Whites experience. Racism is a factor in this.

Very dependent on the subject they are treating. For any author, personal experience colors our writing.

Assumes a fact not in evidence, which is that there is only one unique AA way of writing. Assumption is faulty because African Americans live in all states, in many environments, come from many educational and economic backgrounds and from two genders and

I would imagine that it depends on a particular author's genre, topic, and target audience.

12. Statement 20: I think that there are subtle differences in African American literary writing when compared to white literary writing.

Caucasian/White

Again, cultural and life experiences. And of course, racism.

Broader life experiences that white people never even know are there because they're centered on their own whiteness. I am not saying all white authors. Just most.

too much of a grey answer. different experiences will result in different writing

Subject matter may vary but the mechanics of storytelling do not

Same as above--except that every writer brings in something from his/her own background--may be religious, national, racial, economic--or combination.

When writing gets to the literary level, you only know ethnicity because it pleases the author to show it. That skill level is high enough to make this the author's choice.

Theme #2: What are your perceptions and attitudes about African American writing?

13. Statement 21: When asked to read something written by an African American author, I will generally lose interest quickly.

Caucasian/White

I quickly lose interest in BAD writing regardless of the sex or race of the author

Depends on the material, not the race of the author.

The author's AAness doesn't factor in. I'm very fussy about my leisure reading and I lose interest quickly in equal opportunity bad writing.

I don't choose my reading materials based on race -- I choose them based on topic.

If anything, interest would be piqued--depending on the genre & topic.

14. Statement 22: I believe that African American authors can only relate to other African Americans in their stories.

Caucasian/White

that's like saying that white writers can only relate to white people

15. Statement 23: I have difficulty understanding African American writing because I don't relate to their culture.

Caucasian/White

Because I don't have the same experiences and I probably lose subtle context.

i like learning about different cultures

Again, 'their culture' makes a monolith out of multiliths. There are many AA cultures. I have no trouble relating to most of them, even though I am not equipped with experiential understanding. Anyone with empathy can at least partly relate.

I don't relate or belong to the Alaska Native culture -- but it's one of my favorite topics -- from art, to families, language etc.

I hope.

I try to understand as many different cultures as possible.

16. Statement 24: I am interested in specific genres that do not include urban or inner city stories, characters or subjects.

Caucasian/White

Sure. I'm interested in adventure travel that doesn't go near urban subjects. I could probably think of a few more. However, it's not all I'm interested in, and it doesn't mean I am *not* interested in urban stories--which are not necessarily African Amer

But I still read African American authors in all the other genres.

That has more to do with my dislike of large cities than anything to do with the author

i don't care on the setting - it's more about the characters and what i could potentially learn from their story

Not my first choice of reading material. I go for content and style in non-fiction, for story, style and character arc in fiction.

Yes, I am interested in specific genres, but that does not mean that I would be interested ONLY in this genre.

I read in almost all genres

interested in all genres except romance novels, sci fi, fantasy, horror

I'm drawn to all kinds of literature.

17. Statement 25. I don't generally think about the race of the characters when I am reading a novel.

Caucasian/White

I am a lover of fantasy, so race/creed/colour isn't something I focus on

More like animated characters I conjur up

obviously have to to some extent to paint a picture in your head, but that's it

Unless it is explicitly important to the plot.

Unless the point of the story is the character's race

Normally, not. But if would like to know, as some experiences of a character could be different based on race- and sometimes writer would not think themselves that it would be different, but readers do.

Only if it is a novel where race is a factor to the storyline.

Depends on the novel. If race is known or important, I pay attention. If not, I don't think about it (but probably assume he/she is Caucasian.

Admittedly, I read about books with elves or aliens or walking tree people, but I take note of inconsistencies between character behaviors and their cultural backgrounds.

I do picture what characters might look like

I think I used to assume all characters were caucasian. I don't assume that anymore.

I want to know what my characters look like. It's a part of who they are. I read this one Black author who wrote a mystery and I liked his descriptions of his Black characters. Also, describing someone as pasty or having a pallor creates tone.

It depends on the novel.

It really depends on the story and if race is a significant part of the story

It's hard not to think about race/ethnicity/sex/religion etc if that's a major point of the story.

Race is a part of the character description. Of course I think about it.

18. Statement 26: I consider the race of the author when I choose a subject, story or novel to read.

Caucasian/White

Unless its a novel where race factors into the story. For instance, if the novel is about the civil rights movement, then I would prefer the author be African American, for a more authentic point of view.

I do so that I have a better window into understanding of other experiences. This is true of gender for me as well... I tend to read a lot of women of color because historically (and presently) their voices are much less likely to be heard.

I grew up reading white authors. I feel like I've had plenty of the white perspective.

When the subject is race, I consider the race of the author. When the writing is fiction and not focused on race, I'll consider the race of the author if I feel it might give them more insight into the subject matter. For example, I don't really want to

Depends. If Rachel Dolezal wrote a book titled _My Life as an African American Woman_, I'd probably consider her race, because she isn't AA. If an author were writing about Hispanic gang life, I'd probably take that author more seriously if he or she were

I often make an effort to read more marginalized writers, but I also take recommendations from everyone around me.

Only if topic of the novel would race based.

Good is good, interesting is interesting, and bad sucks, author race or sex.

the ONLY thing that may be an issue is if i know english isn't their first language, but that isn't limited to african americans, that's anyone.

African American/Black

It depends on if I am choosing to read about the Black experience or African American history.

19. Statement 27: I generally assume all of the characters will be Black when reading a story written by a Black author.

Caucasian/White

I wish I didn't. But I do.

It happens often, but not enough to assume that. I mean, white people tend to write books about only white people.

20. Statement 28: I only enjoy the writing of people who have the same interests as I do.

Caucasian/White

I don't care what authors are interested in on a personal level. I read fiction to be entertained.

21. Statement 29: If given the choice, I would probably choose to read a book written by an African American.

Caucasian/White

Given the choice to read the book or not, or given the choice to read a book by an African American or a book by someone else?

Badly worded question. What are the other choices?

Depends on a book subject.

Depends on the book.

depends what they've written about as opposed to the other books i'd have a choice of

I choose by reading the synopsis

I'd judge by the book or whether I like other books the author has written, not by the looks or heritage of the author. That's stupid

If given a list of books by authors of a cross-section of races and backgrounds, I pick the book I like best regardless of the author.

it would depend entirely on the subject matter.

It's the subject matter that interests me. If the author is known to write well, that can be factor.

See answer to 24.

The author is irrelevant to me. I choose a book based on the cover, then the blurb, then the sample

African American/Black

I prefer reading works by classic Black authors.

22. Statement 30: I am easily confused by the story lines when I read novels or other literature written by African American writers.

Caucasian/White

No more so than any others. I haven't observed that AA authors have some inherent racial problem with storyline clarity.

Humans are humans. All humans face the same basic problems and care about the same basic things no matter what form that takes.

23. Statement 31: I believe if given the choice, I would not probably choose to read something written by an African American writer.

Caucasian/White

Again, I'd choose based on the book

Recasting of badly worded question #29.

24. Statement 32: I consciously seek to determine the race of the author if I can't tell by the author's name.

Caucasian/White

I usually read the author's bio and look at a picture if available, but I don't get all hung up about it. Race is no indicator of quality writing.

Only if I believe race is crucial the authenticity of a work of fiction or veracity of a work of non-fiction.

Can I ever tell by the author's name??

Total nonsense to do so.

25. Statement 33: *I enjoy all genres and the race of the writer never matters to me.* Caucasian/White

Not all genres equally...I prefer fiction but tend to avoid westerns, romance and mystery novels! I choose books based on recommendations and reviews usually.

Unless its an issue related to race, then I prefer an African-American author.

Unless the story is about a topic specific to race. If I want to learn of first hand experiences of Native Alaskans --- I'll want to read a book authored by Native Alaskans.

Depends on the topic: if it's about politics, race or religion, I am interested in the race and religion of the author.

Well, most genres. Horror's not my thing. Race irrelevant.

I don't enjoy all genres. (Modern paranormal simply must go away, for example. If it has elves, zombies, vampires, werewolves, and cell phones, I'm out.) In rare cases, the race of the writer could matter to me. However, for the most part, it does not.

I have favorite genres and ones I don't like (such as horror), but the race of the writer doesn't matter.

I'm interested in the race of the writer, but it won't stop me from reading anything--it just informs my reading. I do enjoy all genres.

Race noes not matter in most subjects. I do not enjoy ALL genres, there are some I avoid, no matter of a writers genre.

I have a hard time with science fiction.

I don't enjoy all genres. The authors race does not matter to me as long as the book is entertaining.

26. Statement 34: I can usually tell the novel or non-fiction subject is written by an African American by the plot.

Caucasian/White

In some cases, yeah. In many, probably not. It's not uppermost in my mind as a reader.

27. Statement 35: I generally will not visit the urban genre section of the library or bookstore.

Caucasian/White

I don't go to bookstores or libraries

I don't remember even seeing a section like that in my local bookstore, and I know there isn't one in my local library. I tend to spend a lot of time in the fantasy section. Urban fantasy? Of course.

Living outside the US - there's no urban section in book shops here.

I didn't know it existed. I shop online for books. I'll Google it.

28. Statement 36: I generally believe that stories about African Americans or African American characters will usually have dark themes.

Caucasian/White

Embarassing, but somewhat true I think.

Although I may automatically expect a dark theme simply because so far, there has been so much discrimination that "darkness" has to be part of the African American experience, no matter how small that part might be.

That touches on a deep bias that's hard for us all to handle: dark vs. light. As long as we need light to see and grow crops, light will be perceived as good and dark as bad. Sadly, this affects our language, so we refer to a 'dark' theme as sorrowful or

I've read some stories about African Americans that had great family-centered themes...those are the most memorable ones to me.

29. Statement 37: Stories about African American people are usually centered around problems of poverty, gangs and drugs.

Caucasian/White

Thinking back to books and movies I have seen. I can say this is true about 80% of the time

Leaning toward "agree"--because so far, that's been part of much of African Americans' life--either directly or indirectly. (Same as most minorities).

I don't make this assumption, but I do make this assumption about the "urban" genre section of the bookstore.

Usually? I think that's too strong. Sometimes, yes.

I've read some, but I've read at least as many that aren't

African American/Black

Outside of the classic authors.

Theme #3: What are your personal feelings/attitudes about Race?

30. Statement 38. *In this 21st century, I believe that all lives should matter* Caucasian/White

All lives should matter, but they don't. Some people are treated like their lives don't matter at all, specifically Black people are treated this way.

I feel so uncomfortable with this question! I do believe this, but I don't believe it's currently true on a large scale, and that's why we need to emphasize the fact that black lives matter.

I support BLACK LIVES MATTER

Some lives are more in crisis -- blacks, Natives, women, children -- while the white men sotting in power control everything.

They should, but they don't. #BLM

Unless "all lives matter" is being used to minimize the message of "black lives matter" - then I resent that message. Taken at face value, yes, all lives matter

Black lives matter! Needs to be said because we're not behaving as if they do. Refugee lives matter. Gay and transgender lives matter.

But all lives aren't in jeopardy at the same rate. That is why there's a need for BLM.

I agree but also have to say I understand what the BLM movement is about.

It's clear that All Lives Don't Matter. That requires addressing and until such time that racism is destroyed, pointing out that Black Lives Matter is crucial to helping people understand racial disparities in their families, communities, nation, and arou

not in an "all lives matter" as response to "black lives matter" way though. If it was meant like that, I'm on "strongly disagree"

well, technically, no. I don't believe murderers, rapists, paedophiles etc should matter.

Yes, but not if that statement implies "Black Lives matter less" (That statement has become a "Some of my best friends..." "I haven't a racist bone in my body" sort of statement.

All lives SHOULD matter, but currently black lives don't matter enough

The "all lives matter" slogan is a deliberate smoke screen to counter the Black Lives Matter movement. From police violence and political disregard, it is shown that to the authorities black lives do not matter to them. Of course everyone's lives matter The issue is that we(as a culture) need to value Black lives equally, and we don't. but using the phrase all lives matter devalues the significance of having to call attention to the fact the Black lives do indeed matter.

I believe that all lives matter but have learned enough to know that black lives need to matter more because in the minds of white and people in power systematically oppressed and murdered without any consequences. Racism needs to confronted and stopped.

I don't believe that and neither does anyone else, though most won't admit it. Anyone who says he or she does, riddle me this: does Charles Manson's life matter? I thought not.

Let's worry about evening the playing field and (since I'm white) doing my best to dismantle systemic racial injustice and oppression first.

African American/Black

Yes as everyone life is important but there needs to be more regard and respect for Black lives. We are not the lesser of society to be picked off.

All Lives Should Matter; however, in reality, groups are marginalized and these phrase doesn't apply.

All lives matter has been taken and flipped into a phrase I, along with the majority of black people, have come to hate.

31. Statement 39: I usually consider myself unbiased against any group.

Caucasian/White

I generally agree, however, with an influx of negativity in my country and most crimes being committed by eastern europeans, there is a general bad taste about them.

I try to overcome the biases that I was raised with, and I'm conscious of what the people around me (white or black) think when I read a "black people" book. I try not to care what anyone else thinks, but it's not always easy.

Rich elite... I might be classist.

Everyone has biases they have to be aware of and consider.

Everyone has biases and if they say they don't they're lying.

I am aware that I still have biases. I am working on my biases, but I admit I have them.

I am not without bias. I am aware of my bias. I un-pack my bias daily.

I don't think that's possible in today's world--we imbibe racism--soak it up by osmosis. I TRY to be unbiased--and am too often forced to confront the fact that I am not.

I think we all have biases. I try not to let mine dominate my thinking. I hope others will try as hard, especially if I'm who they are biased against.

I wish I were, but I'm pretty sure everyone white and American carries racism.

I'm white. I'm not going to fix things unless I first acknowledge, and do my best to root out, my own privilege; my own way of looking at the world with a Eurocentric, white gaze.

Usually would mean for myself that I am unbiased toward terrorism and KKK types so I cannot answer this question without saying I am biased against them.

Bias is built into our culture; we are steeped in it.

I am white and therefore biased by my experience as a privileged white person. I work to uncover my biases, but my own paradigm means that I literally don't see my bias until... I see my bias.

African American/Black

Racists and those who willingly remain ignorant can burn.

32. Statement 40: I believe that as a group, African American people are generally lazy when it comes to earning a living.

Caucasian/White

I think a lot of people are lazy about earning a living, but I don't think it has a racial component.

Such bullshit.

33. Statement 41. I believe that African American people as a group seldom read books.

Caucasian/White

But also believe kids today as a whole don't read as much as the should.

If anything, I think that given the educational opportunity disparities in this country, African Americans are probably more eager than the average to read and learn. Anyone who doesn't think such disparities exist probably hasn't seen very many bases for

34. Statement 42: *African American people will usually make everything about race if they think something is unfair to them.*

Caucasian/White

A small minority of them will. But so will a minority of any heritage.

Agree because usually people *are* unfair to them and it *is* based on race. If the question asks whether I think African American people exaggerate the racism they experience, please move me to strongly disagree.

More often than not it is about race - so I understand why it comes up. I believe the race card comes up sometimes when it should stay down - but these few times shouldn't over shadow all the legitimate cases where race is brought up

Most of the time it is race related because the system itself is based on racist attitudes and targeting blacks to freely murder them without consequences, imprison them, not hire them, keep them in ghettos, and they get by with it!!! If you are a Black A

Well? That makes sense. Because it really is all about race. After 500+ years of persecution I am sure it colors all you see. That is not a bad thing. It's just the truth.

no more so than any other race

I have seen a few cases. I've also seen such cases with the disabled, women, men, Hispanics, and other groups who happen to be in a situational minority. Sometimes the complaint is valid. I think sometimes people see a bias that isn't there, but I also th

After how many hundreds of years of oppression, who wouldn't have that perspective?

35. Statement 43. I believe that African American women are usually very loud in public.

Caucasian/White

Love it. My kind of people are loud. :-)

I'm loud, I'm white and I'm female so if a black woman is loud I'm probably drowning her out so I don't notice. lol... true. Hell, most of my family is loud.

I believe African American children are better behaved in public than white children. They are required to be because of how white people view Black people.

This is a stereotype/prejudice.

African American/Black

I myself am louder in Public at times.

36. Statement 44: I believe that African American people make the best singers because they are the most musically inclined.

Caucasian/White

i actually do agree with this. they seem to have a natural 'feel' for beats that white people don't. Singers like Jason De Rulo and Chris Brown absolutely outperform the majority of white singers in singing and definitely dancing

The vocal chord is thicker with darker skin. (The bones are also denser.) The African American voice tends to have richer overtones. For that matter, the brunette Italian voice is usually richer than the blond, fracked person's.

There are a great many who ae tremendously talented. But there are just as many from all races.

African American/Black

Universal statements are generally false.

37. Statement 45: *In my view, the best athletes come primarily from the African American community.*

Caucasian/White

definitely. when thinking of athletics, my immediate thought is always Ethiopia and countries like that. Their athletes seem to have uncanny stamina and speed.

I agree that they are built better and are usually better in many sports when up against a white person. Is that racist?

On average, I don't see how anyone can watch sports without observing the preponderance of AA athletes. However, it's not as if they are dominant in every sport.

A lot of pro football players and basketball players are, but there are also a lot of other sports where there are more white athletes than black athletes.

How ironic that I listened to Jackie Robinson being taunted, and my 14 y.o. son told me he thought African Americans were "naturally better athletes":

38. Statement 46: *I believe anyone can be a racist.*Caucasian/White

Strongly agree.

I think most people are to some degree. Nuance matters.

Three kinds of folks. Openly racist - Quietly racist - The rest are just people trying to get thru life together.

Especially in our world where everything is labeled "racism".

Same as above comments. In my view, anyone who claims to be non racist has automatically proved him/herself racist.

Only someone with money and power matched with their prejudiced can be racist.

In the commonly accepted view of sociologists, from whom I take my definition of racism, only whites can be racist because racism is defined as systemic. Meaning only those with the power to oppress can be racist. I do believe that all races can be bigot

Only the group in power (white people like me) can be racist, because racism is based on power vs. oppression. People of color can have prejudices, but that is different.

Only white people can be racist.

Racism requires a power component.

African American/Black

If a system caters to one group while marginalizing others, it's possible. Anyone can be biased.

39. Statement 47: In my view, Racism was ended during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

Caucasian/White

Government racism was eended; individual racism will always be around

Still some work to do. But we seem to get better every decade.

Are you living under a rock?!

i think it's worse than ever, it's just not as public

Nah. It was driven underground, but it continued to fester. White privilege is a myth created to justify racism.

40. Statement 48. I believe there is no such thing as white privilege because everyone is treated fairly in the 21st century.

Caucasian/White

White privilege is a myth created to justify racism.

again, a grey area. not everyone is treated fairly, no. if i went for a job at a company that would mean i was the only white person, would they pick me or another african american? then that would be seen as african american privilege would it not?

Everyone has the same opportunities. Life has nothing to do with fairness.

I was almost laughing too hard to click.

White CIS male privilege

41. Statement 49: *I believe that Affirmative Action discriminates against white people.* Caucasian/White

Of course it does. However, that doesn't mean it's a bad idea. I've come to believe that there are good reasons for affirmative action, and that not all discrimination is automatically bad. I believe our moral cowardice is in refusing to admit that we are

I don't know what that is exactly

It can in some cases but not in others

It's a license to discriminate against any and all races

lol

White women have benefited the most by Affirmative Action.

African American/Black

Yes it discriminates against discriminatory practices.

Affirmative Action works in favor of white women

Given that white women are the biggest group benefiting, this statement's false.

42. Statement 50: I do not believe African Americans are adversely treated by police in America today

Caucasian/White

Don't get me started.

from what the media portray, it would appear that the police are hugely racist against african americans still

Sandra Bland...Michael Brown...Trayvonn Martin.... #BLM

African American/Black

Do not forget the jury of "peers"

43. Statement 51. I believe that African Americans are given special benefits from the government that white people do not receive.

Caucasian/White

And they should until racism and privilege are dismantled

I don't know if AAs are given special benefits from the government, but there are certainly minority-specific scholarships, affirmative action hiring preferences, and so on. I am pretty sure that whatever AAs do get, it doesn't compensate for the fundamen

They need to be paid reparations.

African American/Black

This has always been a hilarious point to me because statistically, white people receive the majority of government assistance.

44. Statement 52: I believe that Racial discrimination against African Americans in this country is a serious problem.:

Caucasian/White

I agree. I don't think it's around every corner - but there are pockets of it everywhere. But just because someone hates you, it doesn't mean it's a race thing. Some people just hate everyone.

Evidently it is more serious than I had realized. I am pretty sure that all along, African Americans were trying to tell us this, and we weren't paying attention. Whether or not I believed it before, I certainly believe it now.

it is anywhere

Kind of easy to lie in this questionnaire--even if one is only lying to one'sself. It's pretty easy to know what the "right" answer is in the last part--not so much in the 1st part. Would love to know what your hypothesis is, and what your take is on Afr

I believe politicians are telling people it's a problem and manufacturing incidents, but I don't believe it's an issue amongst average citizens.

Appendix B

Survey Monkey Survey

Survey Monkey Questionnaire

Perceptions of African American Writing in the 21st Century A Little Information About You * How do you identify yourself racially? *3 Are you: O Male O Female * 4 What is your educational level? High School College-some courses College-2 years College-4 years College-Graduated Post Graduate Doctorate * How old are you? Under 18 years of age 19-24 25-34 35-44 O 45-54 O 55-64 ○ 65 and over 6 What is your political affiliation O Democrat Republican Independent O I decline to answer Other (please specify) 7 What is your Income Level O Under \$20K per year \$21K-\$35K per year ○ \$6K-\$45K per year ○ \$46K-\$55K per year \$56K-\$65K per year 966K-975 per year ○ \$76K-\$95 per year ○ \$96K-\$95 per year 996K and over per year O I decline to answer * What is your faith or religion? Christian Muslim Jewish Buddhist I decline to answer Other (please specify)

Perceptions of African American Writing in the 21st Century

Are there differences in the writing of African Americans?

	American writers	are better at writing	about urban	issues than o
subjects.	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagre
0	0	0	0	0
Comments (if any)				
I know when th	ne author of a nov	vel is African Americ	an by the gen	ıre.
Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagre
0	0	0	0	0
Comments (if necessary)				
I believe Africa	n Americans hav	e a distinct writing s	tyle from othe	er cultures.
Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagre
0	0	0	0	0
Comments (if any)				
l think African cultural experie		are more interested	in writing ab	out their own
cultural experie		are more interested	in writing abo	
cultural experie	ences.			
cultural experie	ences.			
cultural experie	ences.			
Cultural experie	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagre
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Cultural experie	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagr
cultural experie	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree O ased on the su	Strongly Disagr
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Cultural experience Agree Comments (if any) I can usually te Agree Comments (if any) Light properties of the prope	ences. Strongly Agree Cell if the author is Strongly Agree Cell if the Author is	African American ba	Disagree ased on the su Disagree	Strongly Disagn ubject of the to Strongly Disagn
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(15)	I think that African American writers have a limited view of the world.					
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
	0	\circ	0	\circ	0	
	Comments (if any)					
16	I can usually det by reading their		in the writing styles	of any ethnic	or racial group	
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
	0	\circ	0	\circ	0	
	Comments (if any)					
(17)		ican Americans	usually write exclus	ively from the	eir own	
	experiences.					
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
	O	0	0	0		
	Comments (if any)					
(18)	I haliava thara ar	a no difference	s in the way African .	Americans w	rite as annosed	
	i believe triere ai	c no dincicio	5 III the way Amean	Afficilitatis W	nic as opposed	
	to any other writ	ers				
	to any other writ		I don't agree or disagree	Disagree		
	to any other writ	ers. Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
	Agree		I don't agree or disagree	Disagree		
			I don't agree or disagree	Disagree		
	Agree		I don't agree or disagree	Disagree		
	Agree		I don't agree or disagree	Disagree		
(19)	Agree Comments (if any)	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	0	Strongly Disagree	
19	Agree Comments (if any) I think African Ar	Strongly Agree	0	0	Strongly Disagree	
19)	Agree Comments (if any)	Strongly Agree	0	0	Strongly Disagree	
(19)	Agree Comments (if any) I think African Arother group.	Strongly Agree	a unique way of writi	ng that is diff	Strongly Disagree	
19)	Agree Comments (if any) I think African Ar other group. Agree	Strongly Agree	a unique way of writi	ng that is diff	Strongly Disagree	
19)	Agree Comments (if any) I think African Arother group.	Strongly Agree	a unique way of writi	ng that is diff	Strongly Disagree	
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0	Agree Comments (if any) I think African Ar other group. Agree Comments (if any) I think that there compared to wh	Strongly Agree mericans have a Strongly Agree	a unique way of writi I don't agree or disagree Cerences in African Anng.	ng that is diff	Strongly Disagree Ferent than any Strongly Disagree	

Perceptions of African American Writing in the 21st Century

What are your perceptions and Attitudes About African American Writing?

hoose	e the one answer that be	est describes how yo	ou honestly think about eac	ch question.	
21	When asked to re		written by an Africa	n American a	uthor, I will
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	0	0	0	0
	Comments (if any)				
(22)	I believe that Africant their stories.	can American a	authors can only rela	ate to other Af	frican Americans
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	\circ	0	\circ	0
	Comments (if any)				
23	I have difficulty u their culture.	nderstanding A	African American wri	ting because	I don't relate to
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	0	0	0	0
24	I am interested in stories, character		es that do not include	e urban or inn	er city
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	0	0	\circ	0
	Comments (if any)				
25	I don't generally t	hink about the	race of the characte	ers when I am	
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	0	0	0	0
	Comments (if any)				
26	I consider the rac	ce of the author	when I choose a su	ıbject, story o	r novel to read. Strongly Disagree
	Agree	O. C. Igiy Agree	O disagree	O	O. C. C. S. G. Diougice
	Comments (if any)				

Comments (if any) I only enjoy the writing of people who have the same interests as I do. Agree Strongly Agree I don't agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Dis Comments (if any) If given the choice, I would probably choose to read a book written by an Afr American. Agree Strongly Agree I don't agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Dis Comments (if any) I am easily confused by the story lines when I read novels or other literature written by African American writers. Agree Strongly Agree I don't agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Dis Comments (if any) I believe if given the choice, I would not probably choose to read something written by an African American writer. Agree Strongly Agree I don't agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Dis Comments (please specify) I consciously seek to determine the race of the author if I can't tell by the aut name. Agree Strongly Agree I don't agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Dis Comments (please specify)	by a Black auth				
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	I enjoy all genre	s and the race c	of the writer never ma	atters to me.	
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	0	0	0	0
	Comments (if any)				
34	Lean usually tall	the povel or po	n-fiction subject is w	ritton by an A	frican Amorican
	by the plot.	the nover of no	TI-fiction subject is w	intterruy arr	ATTICATI ATTICITCAL
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	0	0	0	0
	Comment (if and)	<u> </u>		0	<u> </u>
	Comment (if any)				
35)	I generally will n	ot visit the urba	n genre section of th	e library or bo	ookstore.
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	0	0	0	0
	Comments (if any)				
	(. 2,)				
36)			bout African Americ	ans or Africar	n American
	characters will u	ısually have dar	k themes.		
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	0	0	0	0
	Comments (if any)				
		·			
37)			people are usually c	entered arou	nd problems of
37)	poverty, gangs a	and drugs.			
37)			people are usually o	entered arou	nd problems of Strongly Disagree
37)	poverty, gangs a	and drugs.			
337)	poverty, gangs a	and drugs.			

Perceptions of African American Writing in the 21st Century

What are your Personal Feelings/Attitudes about Race?

Choose	e the one answer that b	est describes how yo	ou honestly think about ea	ch question.	
38	In this 21st cent	ury, I believe tha	at all lives should ma	atter.	
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		0	0	0	
	Comments (if any)				
39	I usually conside	er myself unbias	sed against any grou	ıp.	
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		0	0	0	0
	Other (please specify)				
(40)	I helieve that as	a group Africar	n American people a	re generally la	yzv when it
\cup	comes to earnin		TAITICITICATI PCOPIC A	re generally le	azy When it
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		0	0	0	0
	Comments (if any)				
	Comments (ir dily)				
(41)	I believe that Afr	ican American _I	people as a group se	eldom read bo	ooks.
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	\circ	0	0	0	0
	Comments (if any)				
	African America	ميا النبير ماموم م	ually make even this	a about roos	if thouthink
42)	something is un		ually make everythir	ig about race	ii triey triirik
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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	Comments (if any)				
	Comments (if dify)				
43	I believe that Afr	ican American v	women are usually v	ery loud in pu	ıblic.
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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	Comments (if any)				

(44)	I believe that Afr most musically i		people make the bes	st singers bed	cause they are the
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	0	\circ	\circ	0
	Comments (if any)				
45	In my view, the b	est athletes co	me primarily from th	ne African Am	nerican
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	0	0	0	0
	Comments (if any)				
46	I believe anyone	can be a racist.			
	Agree	Disagree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	\circ	\circ	\circ	0
	Comments (if any)				
47	In my view, Raci	sm was ended (during the Civil Right	ts movement	of the 1960s. Strongly Disagree
	\circ	\circ	\circ	\circ	\circ
	Comments (if any)				
48	I believe there is in the 21st centu		as white privilege be	cause everyo	ne is treated fairl
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	0	0	0	0
	Comments (if any)				
49			discriminates again		
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	O	O	O		
	Comments (if any)				

50 I do		African America	ns are adversely tre	ated by police	e in America
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	\circ	0	0	\circ
Com	ments (If any)				
		rican Americans le do not receive	are given special be	enefits from tl	he government
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	\circ	\circ	\circ	\circ
Com	ments (If any)				
	elieve that Ra ious problen	٦.	on against African A		
	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0	0	0	0	0
Com	ments (if any)				

Appendix C

Interview Participant Questions

Interview Participant Questions

- 1. Consider the role that ethnic identity played in how African American writing was perceived prior to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Do you believe that ethnic identity still plays a significant role in how African American writing is perceived in the 21st century? Why?
- 2. Considering the term, "code switching," camouflaging names and/or other ways that African Americans have found to hide their identity to reach mainstream audiences throughout history, do you believe that African American writers still face having to resort to these methods? Why?
- 3. Considering historical attitudes of white people about African American people in general, do you believe that these attitudes contribute to possible negative perceptions of African American writing in the 21st century?
- 4. Do you believe that historically negative attitudes and stereotypes of African

 Americans in general may have contributed to possible negative perceptions of

 African American writers and their work?
- 5. What do you believe are the perceptions within mainstream culture about African American writing today in terms of literature, poetry, nonfiction and/or academic writing? Why?
- 6. How do you think these perceptions have contributed positively or negatively in terms of acceptance of African American writing in the mainstream?
- 7. What are your own perceptions of African American writing in general?
- 8. In what ways are writing styles for African Americans different from the mainstream in terms of literature, nonfiction and other forms of expression?

- 9. Describe a time, if any, that you felt you needed to hide your identity in order to have your writing published?
- 10. Describe a time, if any, where you used a pseudonym to attract wider audiences for your writing?
- 11. What have been your experiences with regard to your writing process and how you think you will be perceived by your audience?
- 12. How do you think your writing is perceived by your audience?
- 13. In your career, what have you considered were obstacles with regard to your own ability to write and reach all audiences?
- 14. Do you believe that more research and study in the area of African American writing would be a benefit in the overall study of African Americans in Academics? Why?

Appendix D

Survey Monkey Survey Participant Consent Form

Survey Monkey Survey Participant Consent Form

Perceptions of African American Writing in the 21st Century

Consent to Participate in the Study

Principal Researcher: Cynthia Alease Smith, MA
Email Address: smith.c4@gmercyu.edu
Phone Number: 215-372-3058

Faculty Advisor: Rodney Alternose, Ed.D., Gwynedd-Mercy University

Please read carefully and then agree or disagree to participate in the study.

Dear potential participant:

Thank you for clicking the link to this Survey Monkey survey. I am excited that you are considering being an important part of this research. The purpose of this survey is to assist me in my research study and dissertation exploring perceptions of African American writing in the 21st century. You are being asked to participate in this study because as writers and readers, your valuable opinions, perceptions, attitudes and responses to the survey will assist greatly in examining how African American writing is perceived in America in the 21st century, with the hope of gaining more interest in the subject for further study. Your participation is completely voluntary and you can choose not to participate and withdraw anytime. By agreeing to take the survey, you are agreeing to provide your answers honestly and to the best of your knowledge. The answers you provide are meant to represent your own, personal beliefs and ideas and not what you think the answers should be.

Are there any reasons you should not participate in this study? Although I am looking for the most honest answers that you can provide, this study will be dealing with matters of race, culture and potential personal biases. While the questions are not meant to anger you and are not derogatory or defamatory, you will be asked to answer questions which may be very uncomfortable for you to read or respond to. If you believe that you will not be willing or able to respond honestly or will be upset in any way by the nature of the questions, then you should not consider participating in this study.

How many people will take part in this study? If you decide to be in this study, you will be one 100 readers and writers who will be participating.

What will happen if you take part in the study and how long will your part in this study last?

First you will provide your electronic consent to participate. Then you will begin taking a survey consisting of 54 short, Likert style questions where you will click the response that best describes how you feel. You will also be able to provide additional comments if you desire. The duration of your participation will be limited to the length of time it will take to respond to the survey questions and should not exceed 30 minutes of your time.

How will your privacy be protected? All of your data will be stored in a password protected, encrypted, electronic format. To help protect your confidentiality, Survey Monkey offers a feature that allows for limiting the storage of certain respondent information. Therefore, the survey will not collect or contain information that will personally identify you. The results of this survey will be used for scholarly purposes only and the results of the survey will be shared with Gwynedd-Mercy University representatives for purposes of evaluation and my dissertation defense. If the dissertation is published, no information that will personally identify you will be published.

What if you have questions about this study and/or questions about your rights as a research participant? You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you may contact me using the contact information on the this consent page. This research has been reviewed according to Gwynedd-Mercy University's IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

* 1 Electronic Consent:

- · I have read the above information.
- I voluntarily agree to participate in the survey and study.
- I am at least 18 years of age.

Click the Agree button and continue to the Survey. If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "Disagree" button. Thank you.

- AGREE and Continue to the Survey
- O DISAGREE and Exit the Survey

Appendix E

Consent Letter to Interview Participants

Principal Researcher: Cynthia Alease Smith Email Address: smith.c4@gmercyu.edu Phone Number: 215-372-3058

Faculty Advisor: Rodney Altemose, Ed.D., Gwynedd-Mercy University

Dear Potential Interviewees:

I am writing to formally invite you to participate in my study of the perceptions of African American writing in the 21st century for my dissertation in the pursuance of my Doctorate of Educational Leadership. You will be contributing your valuable insights and reflections as writers and professionals in terms of your own experiences and your perceptions from the past to our present here in the American mainstream. This letter will serve as your formal consent to participate in the study by responding to interview questions via electronic mail.

The purpose of this study is to explore perceptions and the subsequent attitudes that may shape acceptance of African American writing among readers and writers in the areas of fiction, non-fiction and academic writing. There is a suggestion concerning acceptance of African American writing that may be contingent on historically cultural differences in English composition, communication and literature and how they relate to racial identity. This study will explore whether the differences in African American writing in these areas are based on attitudes which are influenced by perceptions that stem from personal beliefs, cultural biases and racial stereotypes of African Americans. It will attempt to determine whether the possibility exists that perceptions of African Americans in general are what drive attitudes of African American writing. In order to fulfill the goal of identifying these perceptions and determining the drivers of the attitudes, I plan to survey approximately one hundred (100) respondents from the group "Writers and Readers", using the Facebook social media platform to post a link to the members of the group. You will be part of a total of eight (8) participants in the interview portion of the study. Your valuable contribution of interview responses will be incorporated as part of my qualitative analysis.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw anytime without any penalty whatsoever. You can elect to answer or not to answer any of the questions posed in the interview. If you decide to participate, you will be provided, via electronic mail, fourteen (14) questions relating to your personal experiences as writers, challenges and obstacles you face in reaching your intended audiences, your perceptions of African American writing in particular, and any other impressions, expressions or influences you have to share regarding the subject and purpose of the study.

By consenting to participate, I agree that I will not divulge any personal information that you provide me, such as your name, email address, or your place of employment, or any other identifying information of a personal nature that you may divulge in your interview responses. I further agree that only your profession as a writer for relevance to the study will be used.

You have the right to ask and to have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions or concerns, you may contact me via the email address at the top of this consent letter. This research has been reviewed according to Gwynedd-Mercy University's IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Again, thank you very much for agreeing to participate. Your contributions and assistance will assist me greatly in examining how African American writing is perceived in the 21st century, with the hope of gaining more interest in the subject for further study.

By typing your name and date on the line provided on this consent form, you are consenting to participate in the study. Please return the completed consent form with your name and date to smith.c4@gmercyu.edu.

[Adobe Sign Electronic Signature]
Participant Name

[Adobe Sign Electronic Date]
Date

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