

# Descendants of Celia and Robert Newsom Speak

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Received: 4 February 2020; Accepted: 1 April 2020; Published: 14 April 2020

**Abstract:** This paper deploys narrative inquiry and analysis to capture the oral history of two families' intergenerational memory of an African American woman named Celia who was hanged in 1855 for killing her owner Robert Newsom. It is the first scholarly investigation into the intergenerational memory of both black and white descendants of Robert Newsom, and the first to be conducted utilizing the theory of critical family history. Through the paradigm of Black Feminist Thought, the paper analyzes the power imbalances embedded in the narrative about family relations, especially those that conjure race, gender roles and class produced through oral history.

**Keywords:** race and gender; black womens' history; slavery

## 1. Introduction

We were half-way through the interview when Theresa McClain<sup>1</sup> leaned slightly towards me across the table and whispered in a soft but firm voice that she was so proud of Celia for defending herself and killing Newsom. It was the Spring of 2018 and this statement from the dignified, then 88-year-old great-great-granddaughter of Celia coaxed a smile from me as I noted that the most poignant and pertinent moment of the lunchtime interview I had worked so arduously to plan had likely taken place before we even got started. It had taken two years just to track down McClain, the oldest living descendent of Celia, a slave hanged in 1855 in Fulton, Missouri for killing her owner Robert Newsom. Newsom had subjected Celia to serial rape since he had purchased her in Audrain County, Missouri sometime in 1851, when she was 14 years old. She was 19, pregnant with Newsom's second child, and the mother of two daughters aged 3 and 9 months, when the trial began for his murder. Her case, now infamous, made two claims with which a pre-Civil War court would never agree: (1) that she be recognized as a woman, and (2) that the court acknowledge that her claim of self-defense, for physically and violently resisting Newsom's sexual exploitation, was justified.

McClain's guarded whisper was in itself an act of resistance. The murmured observation was a rejection of white society's preference for silence in order to avoid speaking candidly about America's history of slavery, racism, rape and violence. Theresa's recognition of, and praise for, an enslaved woman's violent act of self-defense, was unexpected. Her somewhat conspiratorial response at that moment is an example of "the cost of slavery to black humanity... [which] also manifest(s) in invisible scars..." (Turner 2017, p. 234), which would remain invisible and inaudible without oral storytelling.

Two years after our first interview, Theresa McClain still maintains that Celia's actions are proof that formerly enslaved people took measures to resist their oppression, contrary to the views of many slave-owners in that distant past, as well as those of some present-day whites. After listening to McClain's contention about resistant slaves during the 2018 interview, I initially thought, "Well everyone knows that!" But the historical record says otherwise. The misconception that slaves were

<sup>1</sup> To protect the privacy of the living descendants through the completion of my dissertation (projected Spring 2021) the names: *Maura Williams, her husband Harris, her cousin Sharon Craig and Theresa McClain* are identified through pseudonyms.

“generally obedient and content with their situation” (Kuswa et al. 2008, p. 170) has served to justify and defend slavery under a contrived notion that “slaves... had agreed to their position in society and had consented (indirectly)...” (Kuswa et al. 2008, p. 170) to a lifetime of bondage. While this particular exchange with McClain was brief, in it I recognized barely concealed fragments of pain and grief alongside ancestral pride and respect, emotions that have been previously intangible in the historical storytelling of Celia.

A quick inventory of cross-disciplinary historical and creative writing ventures indicates a pattern of following the basic storyline that originated in Melton McLaurin’s (1991) historical non-fiction, *Celia, a Slave*. The book intimates that the local community believed a slave named George, also owned by Newsom, was both an informant and accomplice to Celia’s actions. He was not indicted as an accessory to murder, but was sold on December 1, 1855 to an unknown party in Saline County,<sup>2</sup> Missouri, following Celia’s sentence to be hanged. McLaurin wraps up his version of events, lamenting “... Celia’s final resting place is unknown... [and] there are no records of what became of her children” (p. 136).

The text, while novel at the time, included no interviews with living descendants, black or white, to ascertain how descendants of Newsom recalled this chapter in their family’s history. Additionally, neither Newsom’s estate file (which notes the disposition of his property and slaves) nor the Missouri State Supreme Court cases are cited as primary source records. Interestingly enough, in the continuum of historical and hypothetical narratives about Celia (the exception being Halpern 2015), most have also overlooked the 1855 case<sup>3</sup> of the *State vs. Malinda, slave* (State of Missouri vs Celia, slave 1855, p. 67). In this case, *at least two witnesses*, including George, infer that Celia may have disclosed her homicidal plans to another female slave named Malinda. Amateur historian and former Callaway County Judge Hugh P. Williamson (1967) alleges in his self-published book *The Kingdom of Callaway* that Malinda “*had been under suspicion of being an accessory<sup>4</sup> to the murder of Robert Newsom*” (p. 27). Williamson also suggested “There was a considerable amount of testimony adduced against her. *The one which is the most interesting to us is that of George, the now well-established informer,*” (p. 27). George is reported to have said:

Malinda stayed in the same room that the girl now charged with murder of Mr. Newsom did while she remained there I stayed in an adjoining room where Malinda and Celia the girl above mentioned we stayed in were separated by a brick wall the wall did not reach the roof (Williamson 1967, p. 27).

Malinda’s case hints at the possibility that Celia *could have premeditatively planned to resist* sexual violence. To my mind, it also calls into question the assumption that George was Celia’s paramour, and that her actions followed upon *his demand* that “she quit the old man”—an assertion that McLaurin and other researchers have collectively accepted as fact. Interestingly, the Justice of the Peace records of Malinda’s testimony are missing. And those are not the only missing case files. An 1849 case with tenuous connections to Celia and involving another Newsom slave named Dick, are also lost. Further attempts to understand the power dynamics of the Newsom family and their slaves are hindered by the fact that an array of Callaway County judicial court records have continued to gather dust for a century and a half as they have lain unindexed and uncited. Unfortunately, the

<sup>2</sup> Probate Case of Robert Newson, Callaway County, Missouri, Missouri State Archives (microfilm); (C8816, Box 141, Folder 16) 1st Annual Settlement, Hugh A. Tincher and David Newsom, Administrators, Tuesday, 19 August 1856. Record Book F., p. 181. “Amount of sale of negro man George due 1 December 1855. \$1150.00. Expenses taking negro man to Saline County, Missouri and making sale of him \$20.00.” McLaurin also does not mention the sale of Celia’s children for \$495.00, a year later, in September of 1856.

<sup>3</sup> The exception is James A. Halpern, whose master’s thesis (Halpern 2015) Archaeological and Historical Investigations of the Robert Newsom Farmstead (23CY497), Callaway County, Missouri; See also (Williamson 1967); the author discusses “The Case of Dick (pp. 21–22) and “The Case of Melinda (pp. 27–28).

<sup>4</sup> Williamson (1967) wrote, “At the August Special term of court 1855...”, (p. 27) Newsom’s slave George testified to the Justice of the Peace, Thomas Patton, that the slave Malinda, a neighboring slave owned by Jordan Bush, “visited with Celia several weeks before Newsom’s murder” (p. 27).

existing court cases that have been indexed are insufficient records to alone deploy Critical Family History.

In this paper, I capture how the story of Celia has been re-told through oral history by living descendants of Robert Newsom and Celia.<sup>5</sup> Shopes (2011) notes that feminist scholars and activists have hailed oral history as a method to “inform and at times to intervene in movements for equality and justice” (p. 456). She argues further that, “women’s oral history was not merely about women, [but] it was by and for women (Gluck 2006, as cited in Shopes 2011, p. 456).

## 2. Background

My research utilizes oral history and critical family history, through the paradigm of Black Feminist Thought, to inquire into the intergenerational memories narrated by two 90-year old descendants. Oral histories allow narratives to be produced and mined not only for unknown facts and historical relevance, but also “interpreted for ways narrators understand and want others to understand their lives... place in history, [and] the way history works...” (Shopes 2011, p. 458). The ghosts of Celia have been persistent, and clues continue to be disinterred from their dusty resting places.

Celia’s case set the stage for the socially constructed idea of black women’s bodies as worthless and non-human. Scholars – including civil rights activist and federal court judge Leon Higginbotham -- have written extensively about the legal significance of Celia’s case as an illustration of how the legal system and slavery colluded to “place a higher value on white women than women of any other race” (Battle 2016, p. 110). As a consequence, black women were excluded from being recognized as women and mothers, over and against “the definition of *true womanhood* as a value system that recognized submissiveness, piety, domesticity, and purity” (Welter 1966, as cited in Battle 2016, p. 110).

There is ample research on the stressors that former slaves experienced in the aftermath of slavery, a century of Jim Crow laws, and contemporary systemic and institutionalized racism. Less is known about the historical and cultural trauma absorbed by white Americans whose ancestors were killed by slaves. Just whose narrative is enabled in the remembering of an unwitnessed traumatic event? Would black and white descendants share similar, or widely divergent memories of this traumatic event?

In the absence of archival records, McLaurin’s text becomes the only common “historical mnemonic [device] that aids [readers and descendants], especially those with no lived experience” (Wineburg et al. 2007, p. 67) or actual memory of the event. Celia’s story continues unfinished because historians have only focused on her trial and “sexual exploitation [which] made enslaved women dramatic symbols of the evils of slavery and valuable tools of the antislavery cause...” (Jones 2009 p. 126).

The research questions addressed in this paper are primarily focused on:

1. What kinds of memories survive among familial descendants that embody violent and publicly exposed (not to mention socially embarrassing) episodes of history?
2. How do descendants recount those stories? What is said, but more specifically and importantly, how is it explained?

Exploring Celia’s genealogical family history opens the possibility of unearthing what happened to her children. It is also an opportunity to study how the descendants of Newsom, black and white, re-remember how their respective families “navigated their family’s position in slavery and racial oppression...” (Sleeter 2015 p. 2) into the present. Their stories allow for a deeper examination of

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<sup>5</sup> Loretta Love Grover maintains an excellent website with a trove of invaluable primary source records archived on the site. For family tree information, personal correspondence archived on the Newsom family: <http://lbgenealogysite.com/getperson.php?personID=I2147&tree=lovegrover> (Robert Newsom Family Tree).

how the respective families interpreted, reconstituted and passed down oral histories of trauma. McLaurin (1991) wrote:

... the events of [Celia's] life before her fatal confrontation with her master, was not recorded... it is unlikely that [Celia's children]... remained with the Newsom family, for their presence would have been a constant and bitter reminder of the events of the summer of 1855 (p. 136).

### 3. Methodology: Narrative Inquiry

Sleeter (2015) has developed an inquiry process called critical family history (CFH), that is framed around heritage studies in order to interrogate how the intersections of "... race, class, culture, gender and other forms of difference and power" (p. 2) shape family narratives. It is a way of making visible the structural and institutional barriers that produce inequity. Significantly, it is an effort to understand narratives that connect the past to the present, while also recovering lost or silenced voices. Oral history interviews with the descendants were recorded and transcribed as a means of creating narratives with both a biographical and historical focus. An initial assumption during the course of my research was that descendants would have different perspectives but share a common historical understanding. The result was a narrative inquiry process that produced "new knowledge and insights into the past" (Shopes 2011, p. 451). The narratives also reflected the respective families' intergenerational memory of Celia, and in some cases excavated stories that conflicted with archival records (Dissertation pending 2021).

The questions were open-ended, subjective and conversational. The interviews captured both big stories—reflections on significant life events (Chase 2011, p. 424)—and small ones that emerged from hidden and untold reflections that "stepped outside of the narrative text" (Chase 2011, p. 425). The responses illustrated temporal reflexivity about past circumstances that reoriented the descendants' interpretations of familial relations in the present (Dissertation pending 2021). I developed esoteric clues, through the paradigm of *Black Feminist Thought*, in order to unveil the power imbalances and intersecting oppressions among family relations, that are concealed or enabled through "memories".

In defense of narrative inquiry as a methodology, Black Feminist scholar, Saidiya Hartman observes in an interview with Thora Siensen (2018): *On Working With Archives*:

... that narrative may be the only available form of redress for the monumental crime that was the transatlantic slave trade and the terror of enslavement and racism... the stories we tell or the songs we sing or the wealth of immaterial resources are all that we can count on" (pp. 1–2).

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) frames *Black Feminist Thought* as a form of intersectional understanding not grounded in any single theoretical tradition. It is an epistemological and theoretical effort to analyze the intersections of race, gender and class in the lives of Black women (p. vi). Framed from an Afrocentric perspective, Black culture and its social contributions along with the knowledge gained through the Black woman's experience, are centered as viable and empowering sources of knowledge production that impact relations of power. Collins (1998) situates this knowledge as an *insider-within* status, one that grants Black women the "... recognition, that they [are] both dually marginalized (as women and as Blacks) yet are able to move among a variety of communities" (p. 5).

#### 3.1. Data Sources: Research Participants and Questions

This paper is a provisional and beginning conversation with living descendants of Celia and Robert Newsom. While both are 90-year old heirs of Robert Newsom, Theresa is a direct descendant

of Celia's second child, sired by Newsom<sup>6</sup> as a result of rape; the third child was still born sometime during Celia's imprisonment after Newsom's murder. Maura, the second interviewee and heir, descends through one of the two sons born to Robert Newsom and his wife.

Readers will gain some idea of how the descendants have transmitted and interpreted the story of Celia intergenerationally through oral storytelling (Dissertation pending 2021), and how they position themselves in terms of race, gender and class. Most importantly, descendant interviews finally allow first-person testimony about what, *if* and how the story of Celia was passed down from generation to generation.

The text of the interview responses is narrated using Gee's (2010) style of the employment of stanzas or semiotic units (Wang and Roberts 2005, p. 55), which allow narrative analysis to ebb and flow coherently. Even with a very small block of text, a chronological framework unfolds and ends with a coda (closing). The stanzas allow the ruptures in memory to be more visible to the eyes and reading ears (or at least complicate the text). The blocks of text also enable the structure of the narrated event to illustrate the past into a time and space sensitive chronology that provides traces of intergenerational memory.

Narrative analysis aims to distinguish and analyze ways the interviewees situate their social position as narrators, as well as how the use of certain words and phrases in dialogue frames the content and context of discourse. While critical family history delves into the power dynamics of familial relations, the hybrid use of Wang and Roberts' analytical tools offers insight into how social power and status are reproduced and indexed by utterances i.e., contextual clues (Wortham 2001, p. 28) that regulate assumptions about race, gender and class (p. 36).

Wang and Roberts (2005) also suggest that narrative interviews can unearth how certain discourses become privileged as assumed realities, when historical texts become fragmented and inconsistent over time (p. 53). This results in a social-historical metanarrative that is out of sync with historical records, creating the potential to distort the intergenerational memory of certain events or, as in this case, the murder of Robert Newsom. The challenge for the researcher then becomes to develop a reintegration of the text and discourse so to validate or discredit the incongruent parts (p. 53).

For example, members of both families share some unfounded assumptions about living descendants as being the progeny of a stillborn child reportedly born to Celia after her escape from, and subsequent return to, jail. Additional confusion has been aided by historical inferences popularized in McLaurin's (1991) book claiming Celia, "... was hidden by those who engineered her escape until after the original execution passed, and then returned to her captors" (p. 125). However, a small news article entitled "Recovered?" in the *Brunswick Weekly* news *contradicts* McLaurin's claim that she was being cared for by certain individuals during her absence and was then *recaptured*. The storied themes that claim citizen support for Celia and George as her lover/accomplice, and the presumption that she protected him from prosecution, are often deployed in historical and popular culture writings, plays, blogs and other discursive speculations about Celia's story.

### 3.2. The Interviewees

Interviews with descendants were integral to understanding how the respective families shared intergenerational memories and oral history stories that connected them to Celia and shaped family identity in the aftermath of slavery.

<sup>6</sup> State of Missouri vs. Celia, A Slave: Case File No. 4496: Cross-examination of Jefferson Jones, 10 October 1855. "She said the old man had had sexual intercourse with her. Her second child was his..."

<sup>7</sup> Recovered: Brunswick Weekly Brunswicker, Saturday, 1 December 1855, p. 5: Recovered: the negro woman Celia whose escape from jail was noticed in our last, was brought to town last Sunday by Mr. H. Newsom, to whose house she came on the previous night. She had been out nearly a week, and during that time, as she states, she had lived on raw corn which she gathered from the fields. She was driven in by the cold and hunger. Being thinly clad and without shoes, and the nights very cool, she must have suffered considerably during her time of absence. The time for her executive, had not yet been appointed. Fulton Telegraph. This woman was under a sentence of death for murder and had succeeded in making her escape from jail.

### 3.3. Theresa, 90, Great-Great Granddaughter of Celia.

The first time I met Theresa was in the Spring of 2018, she was 88 years old. She picked me up from my hotel on a cool, late winter morning. Wearing leather driving gloves and a long winter coat that went past her knees, she chatted pleasantly over the blaring voices of *Morning Edition* on National Public Radio (NPR) as she drove us back to her place. She narrated over the radio commentators unaware that I struggled to hear her soft voice as she untangled memories of her hometown, family and recent losses.

Once we arrived at her apartment, she ensconced herself in her living room chair and suggested that we look through a box of photos and paraphernalia that belonged to relatives who had passed within the last two years. With my computer opened to videotape our discussion, she described years of photographs and memorabilia, one-by-one, recounting stories the images provoked. Each item she pulled out of the box had a story. As we chatted, I learned that Celia's descendants wanted to know why researchers remain interested in this historical chapter, and why there is not more investment in seeking out similar narratives about enslaved people from Missouri.

### 3.4. Maura, 90, Great-Great Granddaughter of Robert Newsom

In the Spring of 2017, I interviewed Robert Newsom's great-great granddaughter *Maura Williams*. Maura is also now ninety years old and one of Newsom's oldest living descendants. For the better part of her 65 years of marriage to her husband Harris, they raised four children and she assisted with the family business. While we chatted, Harris alternately sat quietly watching FOX News and intermittently interjecting side commentary and occasional guffaws into our conversation. Maura's cousin Sharon, two decades her junior, was also present. Like Harris Sharon interrupted with periodic, but limited comments, especially towards the end of the interview.

## 4. The Interviews

#### 4.1. Celia's Great-Great Granddaughter, Theresa (90)

I met Theresa for a second time when she traveled to St. Louis to attend a party for her last surviving childhood friend's 90th birthday. Theresa, also a nonagenarian, is never at a loss for words. For this weekend visit, her family had reserved a bed and breakfast apartment and urged relatives and old friends to drop in and say hello.

Throughout the day, Theresa effortlessly narrated story after story for her guests. At various intervals, she stood and steadied herself with her cane as she circulated through the room. In her hand she held a folder with a photograph of Celia's daughter Jennie, her husband George and all of their children. To relatives who dropped in, she pointed out each face, described who they were (if she knew) and explained that one of Jennie's daughters had blonde hair and blue eyes. In terms of Celia, other relatives explained that her story is a family treasure. No family decisions are made without consideration of what a particular course of action could mean to honoring, or dishonoring, Celia's legacy.

With the urging and financial support of an aunt, Theresa graduated from college, having earned a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry. Her aunt, an educator, inspired Theresa to become a scientist, instead of a teacher. Upon completion of college, she was hired as a coder in the aerospace industry. She was promoted into management in the 1960s, when very few blacks secured employment in the still predominantly white and male field of engineering.

She recounts having acquired leadership skills as early as high school, through participation in activities at the local integrated YMCA. It was here that she learned that her intelligence and verbal articulation were “valued” as an exception among blacks. In many instances, she explained matter-of-factly that she was considered an object of novelty, just because of her intellect and communication skills:

Theresa: And I discovered early, if you were black and could put two sentences together..

you got to be president...  
 I was president of so many things...  
 white people, are... not expecting that,  
 so you must be super-duper...  
 I thought it was a big joke.  
 All the time ... I got elected president to everything...  
 ... whites, thought] we were really not smart,  
 so ... finding one of you... that is smart,  
 you must be super smart

Traci WK: *So they thought they'd give you a chance?*

Theresa: Yeah. No! Not chance!  
 You're super smart, ...***you take over!***  
***It's not—you get a chance.***

About the election of President Obama she lectured slightly:

Theresa: Of course. You realize... people always tell me,  
 Well, you go to school,  
 you do your good job....work hard, you'll get ahead...  
 We didn't mean you should get that far ahead.  
 Now that is the problem.  
 You're not supposed to...be better than I am

Her capacity, intelligence and credentials as a supervisor of white men confused her subordinates. They had difficulty embracing her identity as a woman and her role as their manager:

Theresa: I had five white guys who worked for me.  
 [we met at a restaurant] some place... [off] the highway.  
 we're all sitting there having breakfast.  
 ... one of the guys said,  
 "My wife was asking me where I was going,  
 and I was trying to explain to her  
 where I was going and... what I was gonna do.  
 But women just don't get this.  
 I said, "What?"  
 [He said] "Well, you're different," [and went right on talking].

Traci WK: You didn't rank or count? You weren't a threat?

Theresa: No. You weren't really a woman, you know?  
 You're my boss... you can't-ergo  
 really be a woman and my boss at the same time.

Traci WK: How did you do that? Did you just like bite your tongue?

Theresa: ... you just go on... there's no way  
 you're gonna convert somebody who's 25 or 30  
 who thinks that stupid  
 with a woman sitting right across the floor from them ...  
 what are you gonna say, right?

Traci WK: Nothing.

Theresa: Women don't understand that [Shaking her head disapprovingly,  
 sarcastically] Women don't get that!

In terms of gender and the roles of women in her family as ambitious professionals, Theresa jokingly recounted that her grandfather was less sanguine about his granddaughters' meteoric intellect and professional ambitions. He, unlike her aunt, did not see women as competitive or

valuable employment prospects. She says he lamented: “You mean to tell me you little girls are the only ones who are qualified? They couldn’t find a man for these jobs?” Theresa shook her head and said, “He just didn’t get it.” While her grandfather was not exactly an advocate for women’s rights, her grandmother was very proud of the accomplishments made by her granddaughters, “She thought we were wonderful,” beamed Theresa. “Everything we did was wonderful. She was never critical of anything we did!” [Personal Correspondence, 22 December 2019]. Her aunt’s mentoring clearly allowed her to dismiss her grandfather’s deficit views that elevated and valued the competence of men over women.

While Celia’s descendants acknowledge their mixed-race ancestry, race and racism were not overlooked subjects within the family. However, Theresa lamented her grandmother’s animus towards whites, noting, “My grandmother was quite racist! She hated white people and in general mistrusted white society and wanted nothing to do with white folks.”

She recollects that her grandmother was embarrassed by the Celia story and disliked talking about the trauma that occurred. Theresa gained the bulk of her insight about Celia through her grandmother’s brothers and sister, who shared the history of the Newsom family and their enslavement roots in Fulton, Missouri. She cannot point to a single memory, but even as a child she remembers that stories about Celia were always swirling about during family gatherings. She recounted an aunt’s story of visiting the Fulton court house on the way home from Jefferson City where she was enrolled at Lincoln Institute in the 1930s. Her aunt, along with her grandparents, asked to look at records regarding Celia and Robert Newsom, and were interrupted by a clerk who took out a large checkbook and asked, “How much do you want to go away?” [Personal Correspondence, Theresa McClain, 22 December 2019]. They left angry and insulted.

Theresa and her sisters had white friends from school, and brought them home to meet her grandparents who, over time, became more tolerant and accepting of white people. As for her great grandfather, husband of Celia’s daughter Jennie (Newsom) Broadwater — she said he lacked empathy for poor whites and expressed a critique of them that burned with resentment. For emphasis, I’ve underlined the repetitiveness of the words: poor, white person and white people. The italicized words in **bold** signal judgment. She recounted in our first interview:

... great-grandfather he always said  
that poor white people **should be strung up**.  
... if you wanted to....**make him mad**,  
... let him see *some* white person  
on the street *begging*.  
Boy, **he might be ready to kick you**.  
He thought [it] was a *disgrace*,  
... *no excuse* for being poor and being white.

Theresa recollects as a child, having heard her great-grandfather’s musings about *poor* whites. Her retelling offers a glimmer of insight into his social identity, position and ideology about race and class gained over his almost century-long life. I suspect his resentment of whites is culled from his life including slavery (Dissertation pending 2021), the brief experience of emancipation, followed by reconstruction, and then the unwinding of emancipation into Jim Crow laws that legalized racial segregation. Whiteness, according to him, wrought exclusionary social and cultural privileges that, in his world as a black man, meant white people (even poor ones) were exempt from the pain or experience of being dehumanized, criminalized and subject to economic and social exclusion because of their skin color. The incidents Theresa recounts of her great grandfather’s anger and disgust are a meditation on race, class and whiteness, recognizing his antipathy towards whites who were unable to leverage their race privilege to their economic betterment.

In short, her great-grandfather, who was married to Celia’s daughter Jennie, lacked any empathy for impoverished whites. While Theresa did not embrace his racial resentment against poor whites, she understood from a young age that the social mobility she earned through her education and work experiences caused discomfort among some whites in her social and professional worlds. Her



responses to whites fearful of black intelligence are framed sarcastically and truthfully. “*You’re not supposed to...be better than I am,*” is an ironic twist to her great grandfather’s definition of disgraceful poor whites.

It is also a reminder that the political and social legacy of Celia and formerly enslaved black women, men and children is still largely defined by negative stereotypes. Theresa was ungendered by her work subordinates, who could not see her as both a woman and their boss, which harkens back to Celia’s own erased maternity, womanhood and humanity. Her retelling is ironic, in that she directly recounts a childhood experience of having heard the oldest family member’s unfavorable opinion of “poor whites” while she simultaneously re-lived the ways in which she was erased and ungendered by whiteness just as Celia was during slavery.

#### 4.2. Robert Newsom’s Great-Great-Great Granddaughter, Maura

Maura speaks with a kind of drawl some refer to as a “country-twang”, and a dialect that is direct, self-respecting, conservative, candid and lacking any hint of ego or performative flourish. I was introduced to Maura on 13 July 2017, by her cousin Sharon, who belongs to a local service organization where we are both members (Dissertation pending 2021). I felt Maura was extremely brave in her willingness to explore what she *does* remember with a complete stranger. She seemed responsive to her cousin’s urging that her participation in the discussion subject of Celia was historically important. I took my Yorkshire Terrier, *Oedipus George* aka Ed Kleekamp, hoping that his presence would offer some comfort during the interview.

In advance of our visit to meet Maura for the first time, Sharon prepared me by explaining that her cousin was politically conservative, and that she and her husband were frequent consumers of FOXNews. Sharon also told me she had directly expressed her concerns to Maura that she (Maura) might inadvertently say something “off-color” during the interview. By Sharon’s account, Maura was not put off, but rather claimed, “We try not to be like that!”

Maura’s husband Harris was mostly quiet during the interview. My dog Ed sat nestled comfortably on the couch against Maura’s left thigh, for the entire discussion. She stroked him gently as he snored, and with a soft voice she joined the conversation. If Maura was nervous, I did not notice. I suspect from some of her responses that there was a reticence towards expressing sentiments that she might be unable to explain in our encounter. She spoke slowly and answered each question deliberately and honestly. Her husband, while physically proximate, observed us with a gentle glance as if he was a distance away, neither staring nor interrupting his wife. They both exhibited a kind, quiet and loving disposition towards the other. I maintained an upbeat tempo in my voice and followed the momentum in responses, careful to match my tone and energy with hers. Throughout the interview, Maura frequently noted she did not know or recollect her Newsom family history. The general theme of our discussion was centered thusly:

I don’t know a lot about the family history because our family did not talk about *it*. And I was almost grown before I heard anything about *it*.

Unlike Theresa, storytelling did not come easy for Maura. Fortunately, a few of her memories warranted further exploration. She initiated the discussion about her family’s history by claiming a lack of memory, and that she was without any particular set of meaningful facts. There was a repetitiveness in her responses that I found genuine. Halfway into the interview, when pressed for details, Maura recalled being sat down by her parents at the age of about 14, so they could tell her the story of Robert Newsom’s murder by his slave Celia. “*I had my teens, almost grown before I knew anything about it,*” she commented. She did not use the words “murder” or “kill” rather the words “*it*” and “*that*” seemed to describe actions she deemed unspeakable and unspoken in terms of family lore.

Great grandfather [Robert Newsom]  
had children...by one of his slaves  
they were saying that was fine,  
even though, in that time, it wasn’t fine.

Because he was a widower...  
 he did not have a wife, so that was alright..  
 Because the other men... he knew had wives  
 and they still had their slave mistresses  
 ... that was not good.  
 ... that was basically what I  
 got out of it...the family spin on it.

In the notes of my initial transcription, I wrote the word “giggle”, after her statement “... *it wasn’t fine. Because he was a widower and he did not have a wife so that was alright.*” What exactly did the word “it” define? While analyzing the text, I realized that I suppressed a *nervous giggle*. I caught and contained an utterance that barely found its way out of my mouth. It was an attempted covert cover-up of my shock at her denial of sexual violence. She was implying that Newsom’s relationship with Celia was consensual, by referring to her as his *mistress*. This term implies sexual autonomy and consent, neither of which was available to slaves. When I asked her why she thought Newsom provided the cabin for Celia she replied:

*That* he thought a lot probably of his kids,  
*if* he did do the brick home and everything  
*that* he was trying to help his kids...  
 the children he had with *Cecelia*

Maura referred to Celia as *Cecelia* several times throughout the interview. She continued to use the words “it” and “that” as a form of collective memory, which she called the *family spin* on the story of Celia. For clarification, I asked if she’d read the book, *Celia, a Slave*, by Melton McLaurin (1991). She continued:

It was a good book. And like I say.  
 I haven’t enough background  
 to even know whether *it* [⊕] was all correct or not.  
 I just... I don’t remember,  
 they just didn’t talk about things years ago,  
 when I heard *that*...  
*that* he had children with her but that uh  
*it* [⊕] was ok because he was a widower.

My jaw dropped again, but not visibly... when she repeated the claim a second time, “*that he had children with her but that uh it was ok because he was a widower.*”

I have no idea why they decided to tell me.  
 I have no memory of anything  
 ... except them telling me about this.  
 Maybe they thought I might know something.  
 I don’t know.  
 If they knew, nothing was ever said  
 about *it* [⊕] *that* was just  
 my mother and dad *that* told me *that*...

I didn’t never hear my grandmother or  
 anyone else ever say a word about *it* [⊕]  
 or anybody else...No I never seen the family  
 talk about the legal case at all...

Maura also maintained that she “allowed” her younger brother to engage as the primary family historian researching their parents’ respective family histories, while she focused on the lineage of

her husband's Ohio family. She connected her brother's knowledge of Celia to McLaurin (1991) book claiming: "most of what he's got has come out of the book about *Cecilia*."

Her use of the words *no*, *didn't* and *don't*, were used in conjunction with distancing third-person pronouns like *they*, *them*, *anyone*, *anybody*. She also described overlapping intergenerational stories that coincided with the publication of McLaurin's book.

... nobody in the family ever talked about **it** [⊕].  
 when the book came out... everyone read **it** [⊕]  
*We talked about it some but... A long time ago.*  
**It's** [⊕] all new to us... a lot of that was all new to us...  
 we'd never heard anything about **it** [⊕]...  
 or think anything about **it** [⊕]  
*People didn't really know... until the book came out...*  
 And *I know* some of our family said,  
 "it's a shame [laughing] *our family*  
 didn't write *that* book instead of *some stranger*"

Along with frequent use of the words, "it" and "that" she also utilized third-person references as the authority and rationale for why she believed certain information was shared. Words such as *maybe* and *might* are upheld with indefinite pronouns like *anything*, *something*, *nothing*, *never*, *ever* or *at all* that do not refer to any specific person, thing or amount.

Interestingly enough, she reiterated her claim that her family did not talk about Celia's legal dilemma, while she simultaneously recognized McLaurin's book was the primary source of *her brother's knowledge about Celia*. Paradoxically, her statements countered forgetfulness and denial with the words *we*, *we've*, *us* and *our* as quantified by *all*, *some*, *new*, *alot* and *people*. These are all interwoven to set up the contradiction between "a long time ago" and an abrupt admission of contemporary memory, thus shattering denial by claiming the story of Robert Newsom and Celia could be better told by "some" family members. Maura claimed denial and unknowing not only for herself, but also for other family members, but then inserted a semi-retraction. Again, I attempted to ascertain whether or not curiosity inspired her to know more about Celia or if her forgetfulness was an act.

Traci WK: I just wonder if you were curious about um um about any of that...  
 it's interesting... did the family talk about race relations in Fulton—  
 what was it like in Fulton... growing up here..

Maura: When we were growing up?  
**It** [⊕] was different... because then  
*they* didn't go to school together, of course

Interestingly enough, she refers to African Americans as "they" and thus juxtaposes her race and social position within the context of segregation—and then the tone of the discussion shifted. As the interview began to wind down, Maura disclosed a formidable racialized memory, unrelated to Celia, from when she was eight years old. In this moment her engagement with memory piqued:

Maura: And *there's only one personal thing*  
*I can remember* after the 2nd World War  
 we were in Fulton, my dad and I  
 and there was a black guy  
 that had lived down the street  
 in Dixie... he'd been in the service...  
 here he came down the street  
 in his uniform... my dad went right up...  
 shook his hand... standing talked to him...  
 I was looking all around  
 I didn't know whether my daddy  
 should be that friendly or not.

The utterance of the word “it” caught my attention as a memory not associated with Celia, but to race in general. In all her forgetfulness a memory from her childhood involving an interaction between her father and a local black man surfaced. The exchange continued:

Traci WK: Ohhh. So you were afraid that other people would be violent...

Maura: *No. Not violent.* [interjects]  
**It [⊕]** was just like... **It [⊕]**...  
*maybe... that wud'unt right to do that*  
*... was just my impression.*

Traci WK: [following up quickly] ... So did anybody in your family give you that impression, I mean that's a positive experience in your mind?

Maura: Ah...well, it... showed  
*my daddy was a very good person...*  
*... I wudn't about only eight years old...*  
*... I was real little... ..*  
*for some reason... I don't know even why*  
*I had that impression... I didn't think*  
*he should really be that friendly.*

The discussion yielded an 80-year old recollection that contradicted claims of a faulty memory. I asked her why she thought her father should not have been friendly with the black man.

Traci WK: Can you remember... situations that... contributed to...  
 feeling that discomfort?

Maura: Nothing I can really think of.

Traci WK: Is there any other memory that you have... that really sticks with you... like... seeing [the black man]... You... knew his family right...

Maura: He lived down in a settlement  
 where the-the black people lived...  
 He and my daddy grew up together...  
 they were about the same age.  
*Down near the Cave place.*  
 I was down there one time...  
*I don't know why* that one stuck with me so much

Traci WK: Yeah you remember that pretty crystal clear.

Overhearing our discussion, Maura's husband removed his oxygen mask and quickly interjected that the black man "... inherited the place. Not saying for sure. He did the landscaping out front" [Personal Correspondence, 13 July 2017]. Her cousin, Sharon, chimed in, noting the two men grew up together.

Traci WK: Well, there's also if my memory serves me right there were also black(s) [who shared your surname].

Maura: Oh yes. We all knew... if they had our names,  
 they had been slaves of our ancestors  
 We all recognized that.

As the conversation ended, Maura responded to questions reflecting on integration of Fulton, Missouri schools and race relations:

Traci WK: How do you perceive... race relations... [have] things have changed...

Maura: Changed alot since I was growing up...  
 People are open and talk more.  
 ... the kids going to school [together],

- that made a difference.
- TWK: What about older people?
- Maura: There are some older people that *they were raised that way*.  
it's hard to change that way of thinking  
... some do better than others

And her church membership at her church:

- Traci WK: Did your church have *any role in pushing for like any kind of changes in the community* in terms of...
- Maura: We were a very small country church,  
*never got really... out of their own community doing anything...*  
church suppers... small church... *that's about all*

About the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., i.e. and the Civil Rights Movement:

- Maura: Family *was upset about it, thought it was terrible*.  
*But uh there wasn't really anything we could do about it*.
- Traci WK: Was there much activity... in the Black community...
- Maura: I don't remember. Anything. Maybe.  
Yea. There was a lot more going on than I realized at the time

#### 4.3. Mapping Maura's Use of the Word "It"



Maura's frequent use of the words "it" and "that" appear to be mechanisms for silencing the most difficult facets of her family's history related to the story of Celia. I interpreted the meaning of "it" and "that" as substitutions made in order to avoid the direct explication, or naming, of the violence of sexual exploitation and rape. For creative and analytical purposes, I also devised the symbol [⊕] to represent the word "it" in her narrative. I believe it captures what I call an esoteric clue (context that is only meaningful to me because of my social identity and positionality), that drips from her discourse and is re-integrated into memory and re-memory, leaving certain references unspeakable and unspoken.

I then mapped a chart (Table 1) of Maura's positioning claims throughout the interview, which followed a pattern of using specific pronouns and associating them with words that have cultural significance, i.e., social privileges. I applied the same charting references in (Table 2) for Theresa, although in contrast, she was explicit in the use of the language remembered when she addressed her grandmother and great-grandfather's race prejudice. Due to Maura's consistent responses of negation and denial, her narrative required a more extensive and detailed analysis.

The descriptive chart defines "it" and includes definitions derived from Wang and Roberts' (2005) analytical insights for utterances of *being* and of *doing* that allow for "a wide variety of narrative trajectories in narrative plots" (p. 57.) Each block of text delineates semiotic units of power/authority relations (p. 58). Maura's interactional positioning between the narrative and herself (Wortham 2001) requires the invocation of "certain words that echo certain social locations and ideological commitments" (Wortham 2001, p. 38). Each utterance piggybacks on intergenerational memory, through the power relations of the narrator (helper) and opponent (senders) who retain positions of authority. In other words, she has reconstructed the past, intergenerational stories and memory in such a way as to make it palatable and acceptable to discerning listeners who might find explicit references discomforting.

As for Theresa, (Table 2) almost all of her utterances relative to social positioning are the opposite of Maura. Specifically, Theresa does not distance herself from the actors in her retelling with pronouns that diminish the status or authority of her ancestors as framed by "*the word of no one in particular*." Rather, she explicitly names her aunt, grandparents and great-grandfather. She also validates their experiences without judgment and draws insight from their social identity and positionality as enacted through remembered "echoed" utterances, i.e., "poor, white people."

**Table 1.** Categories and the Repertoire of “It”<sup>8</sup>.

Maura	Interactional Positioning/Identity Construction
[⊕] = IT “A word about a word addressed to a word” (Wortham 2001, p. 22)	“A word about an [unspeakable] word” (Wortham 2001, p. 21)
That, because, alright, still	Engaging with a cultural valuations (Wang and Roberts 2005, p. 51)
they, somebody, nobody, anyone, other men, everything	“The word of no one in particular”
Then, back then, one time	Atemporal
Family spin	“Echo, with the voice of others...” Distancing, speaker’s attitude towards others and object of utterance (Wortham 2001, p. 21)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “IT” – what defines, drives and represents the various tenants of non-personhood.</li> <li>• “IT” and the possibilities that could be understood or claimed under this symbol, sign that mashes together the sign for male and female (Ochs 1979, p. 47)</li> </ul> 
if he did do the brick home and everything Now I don’t know <i>if</i> that is true or not He <i>probably</i> thought a lot about his kids If he built the cabin	Adjusting interactional speech “hedging” anticipating that the utterance might be mocked or challenged to head off subsequent speaker’s response” (Wortham 2001, p. 22).

According to Wortham (2001), the speaker enters a discussion with past voices, combining current position with positions/speakers from the past (p. 22).

**Table 2.** Mapping Theresa’s Recollections.

Great Grandfather on White People	Interactional Positioning/Identity Construction
Poor and White poor white people should be <i>strung up</i> . no excuse for being <i>poor</i> if you were white being <i>poor</i> and being white. no excuse for being poor and being white.	“Engaging in a cultural valuations about white people” (Wang and Roberts 2005, p. 51) Those in power vs. unprivileged Disruption of reproduction of Social Power “Certain worlds invoke/echo certain social locations and ideological commitments carried by earlier uses”
<b>Words:</b> <i>If, that, some, might</i> if you wanted to make him <i>mad</i> he might be ready to <i>kick you</i> . let him see some <b>white</b> person... <i>begging</i> He thought that was a <i>disgrace</i> .	Engaging with a cultural valuations (Wang and Roberts 2005, p. 51) Resentment of those in power vs. unprivileged <i>strung up, kick you, mad, a disgrace, begging</i> Thematically, words expressing anger and resentment using hedging phrases that Theresa sympathized with, but did not execute as a social position/ideology against whites.
Theresa Experiences with Gender	Woman and Boss

<sup>8</sup> Art by Traci Wilson-Kleekamp Fall 2019.

<p>You're not really a woman You're my boss, and you can't—ergo, really be a woman and my boss at the same time.</p>	<p>“Echo, with the voice of others...”Distancing, speaker's attitude towards others and object of utterance (Wortham 2001, p. 21) Resigned Indifference <i>there's no way you're gonna convert somebody who's 25 or 30 who thinks that stupid with a woman sitting right across the floor from them.</i></p>
<p>Everyone knows that, right?</p>	<p>The word of no-one in particular</p>

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Analysis of Interviews Using Narrative Analysis Tool

The dialogic and structural analysis that follows is not an attempt to essentialize either woman's experiences. Rather it attempts to reveal how knowledge and power relations in families perpetuate “interlocking and parallel systems” (Collins 1998, p. 2) that produce vast differences in our individual experiences and backgrounds. Collins (1998) also challenges feminists across the globe to reconceptualize their understandings of race, class and gender in order to develop new ways of connecting to each other and of transcending barriers (p. 3). McCall (2005) suggests that one way of disrupting the interlocking oppressions rooted in gender violence and material inequalities is to altogether deconstruct the “normative assumptions” (p. 1777) associated with the categories of race, class, gender and sexuality.

To both sharpen and broaden our standpoint or Black Feminist thought lens, Censer (1998) argues that historians should practice “*crossover history*... research that is inclusive of elite white women, (p. 269) in order to “move beyond one's... particular ethnic or social background,” (p. 269) thus deepening our understanding of race and class. In order to understand the complexity of identity, she also advised, “When we are all doing each other's history then we will register meaningful progress in the war against racism, sexism and class oppression” (p. 269).

Thus, the narratives of both womens' oral histories illustrate a wider landscape of their family through intergenerational storytelling and memory. On one hand, Maura used masked language potentially to cloak both the crimes of racism and rape, in order to shield her family's legacy from shame and embarrassment. From the perspective of critical family history and the exposing of hidden narratives, her decision to remain intentionally ahistorical by the withholding of explicit and critical stories of racism and slavery, created a blindness to the racial issues that propelled the Civil Rights Movement. Theresa, in contrast, shared her family stories while claiming the explicit language used by her grandmother and great grandfather in order to relay their assessment of whites. The act of looking at both narratives in tandem demonstrates how race, racism, gender and class are discursively shaped by the way each woman restructures their respective families' oral history of Celia.

### 5.2. Dialogic and Structural Analysis

Compared to Maura, the dialogic and structural analysis for Theresa was not as complex. First, Theresa was not reluctant to put all her knowledge and memory claims on the table. She simultaneously acknowledged her ancestors' oppression as slaves and their resentment of whites, and resolved that their worldview was not one she would embrace. She was able to put the past in conversation with the present, all the while refusing to validate white prejudice or her white work subordinates' dysconscious racism.<sup>9</sup> Building on her ancestors' sacrifices and her educational acumen, she also maintained memberships in women's organizations focused on strengthening her local community. For Theresa, her mindset was the key to having the kind of social and cultural privileges that can be taken for granted by the dominant culture. Her remark: *Everyone knows that,*

<sup>9</sup> King (1991) Dysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given (p. 135).

right?—is not a deflection or distancing from her identity, but rather peevish sarcasm and resigned indifference to her subordinates' ignorance and gender bias.

Using Wortham's dialogic approach, Maura's use of pronouns—*some, someone, all, anyone, anybody* and *somebody*—differentiate between storytelling and what is being narrated. Maura's reference to the *family spin* on Celia becomes what is dialogically narrated as the unspoken *IT*. The pronouns serve as *voices* of authority that echo and lurk behind the utterance *family spin*. Simultaneously, the pronouns also serve as a mechanism to disassociate or distance Maura from the Newsom family's historical positioning and past actions, in contrast to her social identity in the present. Her language reorganizes her family story and recumbent social status by claiming loss of memory or negations such as: "*IT wasn't discussed in the family.*" This also allows the confutation, unconscious or otherwise, of Newsom's rape of Celia by invoking his status as an unmarried white widower who was not locked into a monogamous legal marriage. Maura was provisionally restructuring her family's legacy and stating what was acceptable in the past, with the disjoiner *even then* to signal *Celia's rape was wrong, without mentioning the word rape*. But even so, she could not pronounce Celia's name correctly, calling her *Cecelia* and referencing "they said" as the authority that had reported "*Great grandfather had children... by one of his slaves*" thus allowing Celia's name to be erased and resulting in the rearrangement of intergenerational remembering. I wondered if mispronouncing Celia's name was a willful or an unconscious act of forgetting.

The use of Gee (2010) stanzas allows Maura's narrated events, as governed by self-negotiated spaces of silence, to squeeze in expressions of social belonging not only for herself, but her father. Her attempts to separate herself from the historical narrative of Celia, denials and negations to the contrary, are not as critically relevant as her varied frames of confessional acknowledgments, which allow for fluidity in her social positioning. Maura's denials required deeper interrogation.

### 5.3. Putting Intergenerational Memories into Critical Family History Context

As part of their respective intergenerational memories, Theresa and Maura constructed their social identities through certain utterances based on past discourses i.e., words (Wortham 2001, p. 21) and oral histories. Their narratives situate parallel intersectional experiences of class in relationship to gender bias and race prejudice, but in very different ways.

Whiteness worked in both women's recollection in ways that shape their social status in society and in their families. For Maura, race, i.e., whiteness was tied to the privileges of heteronormativity and private space. Her memories did not include any recognition of the sexual terror or exploitation Celia experienced. She related that her ancestor Robert Newsom's sexual indiscretion with a teenage slave, according to relatives, was ameliorated by his widowed i.e., unmarried status. She recognized the cabin, the space and place of Celia's so-called domestic space, not as a place where sexual violence occurred in private but rather as an edifice constructed through an act of concerned paternity directed at situating his illegitimate progeny more comfortably as "his children". Presumably, it never crossed Maura's mind that this cabin, situated only 50 yards from his home (McLaurin 1991, p. 60), served as a financial investment made to gain covert access to Celia's enslaved body and the possible reproduction of children in order to add to his stock of chattel property. The fact that Celia's children were sold off from the Newsom family in the year following her trial and execution,<sup>10</sup> did not seem to register in the family's intergenerational memory as an important clue to these other probable, and far less altruistic, motives for the cabin construction and location.

In terms of race, Maura's recollection of her father having shaken hands with a Black man asserts a privileged knowledge about whiteness in a time during which interracial relationships and fraternization outside of "service employment to whites" were viewed as taboo. Her father's ability

<sup>10</sup> Probate Case of Robert Newson, Callaway County, Missouri, Missouri State Archives (microfilm); (C 8816, Box 141, Folder 16) 1st Annual Settlement, Hugh A. Tincher and David Newsom, Administrators, Tuesday, 19 August 1856. Record Book F., p. 181; "Amount of sale of two negro children (due 1 September 1856) \$495.00. Credits: expenses in the sale of 2 children \$5.00. To keeping 2 little orphan negro children 5 months \$50.00."



to break with society's rules about interacting with Blacks made him a "good man," someone who stood outside of the rules of whiteness and anti-blackness. In this constructed memory, she sees herself and her father as standing outside of the racist ideologies of that time. Space and place also intersected with the same memory of her father's friendly gesture with a Black man, who she recounted as having lived, "*Down near the Cave place*," a segregated area where Blacks were known to collectively reside in the aftermath of slavery. Her church was also a geographic place of whiteness, socially distanced from the community at-large, and was not engaged in "change" issues. The most symbolic and meaningful shift in the interview came with her belief that her children benefited from school integration. Her inability to remember the experiences of Blacks during the 60s is a narrative example of what Ellsworth (1982, as cited in Shopes 2011) calls the *segregation of memory* (459). In what I considered a silenced story, gender bias could be the underlying cause that prohibited her from attending college, and not just cost.

Theresa's insider-within knowledge as a Black woman gave her an edge in reckoning with her social identity and ideologies about gender, race and class. Research on the narrative legacies of African American women (Etter-Lewis 1991, as cited in Grey and Williams-Farrier 2017, p. 509) details how the oral storytelling of Black women is a method to understanding an array of Black female experiences, shaped by both racism and sexism. Grey and Williams-Farrier (2017) also reflected on Battle-Walters (2004) study that introduced the "gendered racism concept to highlight the reason behind...emotions discussed in the [everyday] narratives" (p. 509) and experiences of navigating being both Black and female

Theresa's education was financed by her aunt, an educator and a child of formerly enslaved parents, who inspired her nieces to become scientists. Ironically, despite her whiteness, Maura was unable to attend college. While offered a scholarship, her family still could not afford the remaining tuition. The presumed privileges given to whites, along with power relations, can be disrupted in ways that reshape the trajectory of their respective family stories, as well as counter assumptions about race, cultural capital, economic and social mobility for both Black and white women.

Additionally, in contrast to Maura, Theresa attended a high school with a strong science focus, in an all-black neighborhood. Her immediate neighbors were doctors, attorneys, educators, as well as local leaders in the business community, government, and churches (Dissertation pending 2021). Theresa and her sisters attended state universities in the South, and she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry.

Theresa benefitted from her homogenous middle-class Black neighborhood, despite racial segregation. Her social mobility was influenced in part, by living amongst civic-minded Black professionals who were critical and active participants in undoing racial oppression (Dissertation pending 2021). The space and place of her segregated community provided her with the kind of social uplift that propelled cohesive relations and self-confidence in an era when Jim Crow flourished outside of her small, but socially vibrant enclave. In short, access to a quality education coupled with a forward thinking, financially independent aunt, produced what some might consider a counter-narrative. Theresa was the antithesis of the stereotyped Black woman in the 1960s, pathologized<sup>11</sup> by Patrick Moynihan in his 1965 report called *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. In contrast to many Black women of this era, she experienced economic, personal and professional advantages: a career, marriage, financial stability and a choice to opt out of bearing children.

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<sup>11</sup> In 1965, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan released a report on the state of Black families called *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. The report blamed Black women for the social inequality Black families faced noting: "In every index of family pathology—divorce, separation, and desertion, female family head, children in broken homes, and illegitimacy—the contrast between the urban and rural environment for Negro families is unmistakable." <https://web.stanford.edu/~mrosenfe/Moynihan's%20The%20Negro%20Family.pdf>. Daniel Geary wrote a synopsis of the report with a contemporary analysis in *The Atlantic Monthly* (24 September 2015): *The Moynihan Report: An Annotated Edition: A historian unpacks The Negro Family: The Case for National Action on its 50th anniversary* <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/the-moynihan-report-an-annotated-edition/404632/>.

In terms of the workplace however, Theresa reflected on racism's legacy. She recounted the challenges she faced as a scientist in a white, male dominated field, where she was treated as a non-person; her white subordinates could not embrace her as both Black and female; or Black and their boss. Her response to gendered-racism by her colleagues and subordinates was to soldier on and to dismiss their ignorance, most likely in an effort to diffuse being labeled as angry, "mean or cold" (Grey and Williams-Farrier 2017, p. 511). While Maura lamented how her lack of insider-knowledge as a white woman was limited by familial silence: "*They just didn't talk about things years ago.*", Theresa candidly and straightforwardly discussed racialized experiences within her family. She offered "hindsight" about her engagement with whites in a professional world that included very few Black women or men.

## 6. Conclusions

For critical family history historians, this narrative tale is attentive to the ways that whiteness is operationalized to *forget* through *re-remembering*. Oral storytelling, in my view, is an opening for researchers to ask themselves, "how do I think about memory or in what ways is memory influencing my relationship with this other human" (Hendry et al. 2018, p. 48)? How often do we ask family members to discuss memories that meet at the intersections of race, class and gender? Before casting judgment on whether or not one-storied narrative is better or more interesting than the other, it is imperative to consider them both in tandem—contrasting the forms of memory that are being engaged and influence meaning-making for the Newsom descendants (p. 48).

Additionally, there are big and small stories embedded in the narratives still to be mined for further inquiry. The retrieval of new knowledge about the asymmetries of power within families recognizes that "stories are rooted in relationships... history, community, culture, place, space, and time..." (Hendry et al. 2018, p. 97) and discursive practices that are always changing to fit the moment of interpretation. Simultaneous deep listening for moments of dissonance, tension and ambiguity, tenders moments to analyze undervalued and under-theorized sources of power. The re-told stories also indicate how family dynamics, including issues of identity, "are... rooted in systemic and structural relationships between those with power and privilege, and those who are marginalized and oppressed" (Hendry et al. 2018, p. 47). Maura's memory of her father shaking hands with a Black WWII veteran is an example of this. Delving into that story led to the discovery that the veteran's ancestors had been slaves and servants in Maura's family. Theresa, at a similar early age, remembered her great-grandfather's antipathy towards "poor white people." Born the child of former slaves in 1852, Celia's posthumous son-in-law George, and his siblings, benefitted from his father's purchase of a piece of property that stayed in the family for over 100 years [Dissertation pending, 2021]. That investment created a mechanism for the transference of generational wealth not commonly seen among descendants of the formerly enslaved [Dissertation pending 2021]. In both instances, the archives had to be pressed for answers and records.

McLaurin (1991), academic historians, and an array of artists have written and cited narratives about Celia without the tools of genealogical inquiry. Historians have yet to critically assess whose narrative continues to be enabled and erased by excluding insights that could be obtained from intergenerational memory and oral history. The nonagenarians' stories indicate it is time for the Celia story to be re-told.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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