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DOMESTIC WORKERS' RESISTANCE

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Introduction

The present thesis focuses on black domestic workers who were employed by white people in the United-States, and more particularly in the segregated South. The main focus of this study are the various resistance strategies used by domestic workers in order to resist subordination and oppression. The resistance of domestic workers is an interesting topic for a thesis because it is a subject that has not been considered by many scholars so far. For example, Alana Erickson Coble, Faye E. Dudden, David M. Katzman, Vanessa H. May and many others, preferred to study the history of domestic work in the United-States.[1]

In *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America,* Faye E. Dudden explores the evolution of domestic service during the nineteenth century in the United-States. In this book, Dudden puts the region of the South aside and mostly focuses on the North where black domestics were a minority. During the nineteenth century, the majority of Northern servants were Irish immigrants but Polish or Scandinavian domestics were numerous too. Dudden studies the evolution of household service from "help" to "domestics" and the reasons why this evolution occurred. For example, important changes in American society such as industrialization modified the way domestic service worked. This book is also grounded on sociological studies and women's studies. Indeed, reflecting on the change in household service is a way to study how American women experienced the significant social changes of the nineteenth century. In the introduction Dudden refers to the historiographical debate about the transition from "help" to "domestics". She explains that it is important to take into account "the help" when studying household service, and that it is something that some scholars such as David Katzman have failed to do. Dudden argues that he did not study the transformation from "help" to "domestics" and considered household service of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a whole which is not an accurate approach according to her. However, even if he does not refer to "help" and "domestics" as to distinct concepts, Katzman explains that he studies the transition from "live-in" to "live-out" and that he chose

[1] Alana Erickson Coble, *Cleaning up: the Transformation of Domestic Service in Twentieth Century New York*. (New York: Routledge, 2006); Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1983); David M. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Vanessa May, *Unprotected Labor: Household Workers, Politics and Middle-Class Reform in New-York, 1870-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011)

to study the period from 1870 to 1920 because it was the "key period in the transition" of household service. [2] This means that Katzman took into account the fact that domestic service evolved between the nineteenth and the twentieth century and that this transformation was due to the rapid modernization of American society.

Katzman describes his work as "an exercise in historical sociology" because he considers that historical elements are "too often absent from the sociology of work"[3]. More precisely, for the sociological part Katzman studies the relationship between employers and their domestics. Then, he tries to put household service within the context of industrialization and to explain how it modified the occupation. Katzman uses a lot of statistics in order to give support to his arguments and the whole Chapter 2 is "a statistical overview of domestic service."[4] He also quotes some domestics because he thinks that "previous historians have paid little attention to the words of servants" and that "the statements of mistresses have dominated the literature"[5] It is a reference to the historiographical debate about domestic service. Indeed, historians who are part of the first wave of historiography favored the point of view of the white families who employed domestic workers. For example, Daniel E. Sutherland relies more upon employers' writings (manuscripts, diaries etc.) than upon domestics' accounts even if he uses them too.[6] On the contrary, Katzman is part of the second wave of historiography and adopts a bottom-up approach. He focused on the accounts of domestic workers themselves.

Both Katzman and Sutherland address the issue of the "servant problem" which refers to the shortage of cheap domestic workers that occurred in the nineteenth century in America: the middle-class grew quickly because of the rapid evolution of society (industrialization, modernization, and urbanization) but the number of domestic workers did not grow as quickly. As domestics became rarer and rarer, it became more expensive to employ domestics. Of course this was only a problem for the middle-class since money was not an issue for members of the upper class. In his book, Katzman explains the causes of this "servant problem". He also studies the various reforms that were established in order to overcome this problem. Sutherland tackles this issue from another point of view and points out the fact that there was also a shortage of good employer. He explains that the "servant

[2] Katzman, xvii.
[3] Ibid, xviii.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Daniel E. Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants: Domestic Service in the United States from 1800 to 1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981)

problem" came from both employers and domestic workers since they both expected too much of each other.

In *Unprotected Labor: Household Workers, Politics, and Middle-Class Reform in New York, 1870-1940,* Vanessa H. May used various sources such as economic works or newspaper articles in order to study the reforms of domestic service through time. Like David M. Katzman, she addresses the issue of the "servant problem" and refers to historiographical debates among scholars. She argues that recent studies proved that the problem was not domestics themselves but the fact that domestic service was not organized and standardized as other jobs. Employers being too demanding and rigorous also prevented working-class women from entering this occupation. May argues "These analyses redefined the 'servant problem' as a mistress problem"[7].

In *Cleaning up: the Transformation of Domestic Service in Twentieth Century New York,* Coble studies the evolution in the relationship between employers and domestic workers. Just like May, Coble used various sources such as newspapers, advertisements, magazines, sociological studies, oral histories, government and reform organization files as a basis for her research. Coble argues that, as the number of American women entering the labor force was increasing ("In 1920, 23 percent were employed outside the home; by 1950 that figure had risen to 33%, and in 1986, 55 percent"), more and more working women needed a domestic to clean up their houses. [8] Thus, society's opinion on domestic service changed and people learnt to appreciate the real value of domestic work. Coble also used a lot of statistics like Katzman, but she warns the reader about the need to be cautious when interpreting statistics. Indeed, she explains that a lot of domestics did not report their occupation, thus they could not be taken into account in censuses. Coble based her analysis on New York because according to her it is important to focus on a particular place in order to compare it to the rest of the country. She argues that New York is an interesting place for the study of domestic service because it is the place where a large majority of immigrants entered the country. New York also attracted a lot of black migrants coming from the South. Then, there was a large market for domestic workers in New York in the first part of the twentieth century. Coble also takes into account the shift from "help" to "domestics" just like Dudden. However she focuses on the transformation of the occupation in the twentieth century while Dudden focuses more on the nineteenth century.

[7] May, 19.

[8] Coble, 3-4.

Dudden also studied the relationship between servants and their employers. The aim is to explore both sides of household service and to understand its patterns from the point of view of the employer and from the point of view of the domestic too. For this reason, Dudden's work could be compared to Judith Rollins' book, *Between Women: Domestics and their Employers*. Rollins also studies the relationship between domestic workers and their employers. Rollins adopts a sociological approach but her book also includes a historical part. Indeed, Rollins analyses the background of domestic service all around the world in order to make us better understand the evolution of this occupation. Then Rollins examines the different aspects of domestic work itself such as the physical difficulty of the work, the pay and the hours. And finally she studies the employer-domestic relationship. She explains what it is like to be a domestic servant and what it is like to be an employer. Rollins interviewed forty women, twenty household servants and twenty employers, all based in the Boston area. She explains in the introduction that she "decided that forty interviews should yield a satisfactory picture of the complexities of the dynamics and the women's attitudes toward them."[9] She also wanted to study a wide range of women and this is why the domestics she interviewed were aged from twenty-five to eighty-two and the employers were aged from twenty-nine to seventy-six. The women came from different backgrounds, some were more educated than others, some came from the countryside, others had always been living in Boston. All their accounts allowed Rollins to provide both a historical and sociological study of domestic service. What is also very interesting is that Rollins herself worked as a domestic worker from September 1981 to May 1982. She worked for a total of ten employers and did this field work in order to gain "enough familiarity with various styles of interaction to sufficiently enhance [her] understanding of the literature and ability to hear and comprehend the information shared in the interviews."[10] She compares the experience of the women she interviewed with her own experience in order to make a proper analysis of specific patterns of domestic work such as the reasons why women enter domestic service or how some of them resisted oppression. The aim of the book was to demonstrate that the complex relationship between domestic workers and their employers mixing opposite feelings such as anger, compassion, indifference or affection created the uniqueness of this occupation.

Premila Nadasen for her part, studied domestic workers' resistance in her book, *Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a*

[9] Judith Rollins, *Between Women: Domestics and Their Employers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 9.

[10] Ibid.

Movement. She studied domestic workers' organization and activism which were very important means of resistance, especially during the Civil Rights Movements. This book is meant to challenge assumptions that domestic workers were unable to organize themselves in order to fight for their rights. Nadasen analyses the importance of the black community and the importance of "storytelling" (sharing one's story with other members of the community) which was a form of activism since it contributed in fighting stereotypes about black domestics and black women in general.[11] As many other scholars, Nadasen uses the accounts of black domestics themselves in order to deliver the most objective works possible. She also writes that her book "contributes to histories of labor and political organizing." [12] This work is both historical and sociological because the author tries to give a faithful account of the history of domestic workers' organizations and to expose the attempt of domestic workers to fight for better working and living conditions. It refers to women's solidarity that contributed to their empowerment.

Nevertheless, organization and activism were not the only ways of resisting for black women as Kumea Shorter-Gooden and Charisse Jones argue in their book entitled *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America.* They describe the various coping strategies used by African American women:

1. *Battling the myths.* Black women alter their behavior in order to disprove and transcend society's misconceptions about them.
2. *Scanning, surveying, and scrutinizing the environment.* Many Black women cope by carefully monitoring how they are being perceived at every turn.
3. *Walling off the impact of discrimination.* By downplaying, ignoring, or denying the role of sexism and racism in their lives, many Black women are able to transcend the pain and suffering they would otherwise experience.
4. *Seeking spiritual and emotional support through churches, religious communities, friends and family members*. By finding a higher purpose and building emotional connections in their lives, many Black women find they can rise above the daily onslaught of sexism and racism.
5. *Retreating to the Black community and abiding by the home codes.* Black women often return to the Black community for relief and solace, but then may be faced with pressure to abide by a different set of cultural conventions and codes.
6. *Fighting back.* They may directly challenge and work to overturn racism and sexism.[13]

According to Richard S. Lazarus and Susan Folkman, there are two types of coping strategies: cognitive coping strategies (when people change their way of thinking) and behavioral coping strategies (when people change their behavior).[14] Cognitive strategies are

[11] Premilla Nadasen, *Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement* (Boston: Bacon Press, 2015) 3.

[12] Nadasen, 3.

[13] Charisse Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden, *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2004) 93-94.

[14] Richard S. Lazarus and Susan Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping* (New York: Springer, 1984) 178.

internal and behavioral strategies are related to actions, thus they are external coping strategies. Black women and domestic workers in particular used internal strategies that helped them to stay strong. The third and the fourth strategies listed by Shorter-Gooden and Jones "*Walling off the impact of discrimination"* and "*Seeking spiritual and emotional support through churches, religious communities, friends and family members*" are examples of cognitive coping strategies because they take place in a black women's minds. On the other hand, the first and the sixth strategies, "*Battling the myths*" and "*Fighting back"* are examples of behavioral coping strategies because they imply changes in black women's behavior.

The aim of this thesis is to study how black domestic workers managed to resist oppression, discrimination and submissiveness. To do so, it is important to present the various types of oppression domestic workers suffered from. First, domestic workers were very often economically exploited by their employers. Their salary usually did not reward all the work they did. Indeed, domestic workers had a tremendous amount of work to do in one day.[15] They performed different tasks such as nursing children, cooking, washing clothes, ironing and housekeeping. They worked very hard all day long and usually they were not rewarded for the work accomplished.[16] Most of the time they did not receive a salary that would compensate for all the constraints of the occupation. Indeed, domestic work has always been considered as the lowest occupation. It was not recognized as real work because it took place in the private sphere and it was usually performed by women from the lower class and immigrants. Thus, a great number of employers did not want to pay their domestic workers fair wages.[17]

Black domestic workers, who are the main focus of the present study, became a majority in the South of the United States by the end of the eighteenth century because of slavery, and during the nineteenth century, black people "became associated with servitude generally".[18] In addition to economic exploitation, black domestic workers, and black people in general, were the victims of racism even after the abolition of slavery in 1865. The 13th Amendment which was ratified in December 1865 abolished slavery. The 14th Amendment was adopted in 1868 and was meant to guarantee citizenship for black people and equal protection of the law. Finally, the 15th Amendment ratified in 1870, guaranteed the right to

[15] Rollins, 71.
[16] Ibid, 70.
[17] Susan Tucker, *Telling Memories among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Segregated South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988) 84.
[18] W.E.B Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899. New York: Shocken Books, 1967) 136.

vote for all citizens including black people.[19] Despite those evolutions, black people were still considered as inferior by a large number of white people especially in the South. In the mid-1870s there were state elections and the Southern Democrats won. They obtained a deal with the federal government who agreed not to interfere with the South.[20] A number of measures were established in order to prevent black people from benefiting from equal rights and white supremacy was reestablished. The Southern States imposed a new tax called the poll tax as a condition to be able to vote. Many black people were too poor and could not pay, thus they were denied their right to vote.[21]

In 1896, the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court case was issued and the Supreme Court declared racial segregation constitutional as long as black and white people were treated equally. Thus, the "separate but equal" doctrine was used as a justification for racial segregation which quickly became an institution in the South. Black people were reduced to an inferior status and were not considered as real citizens. White supremacists established segregation laws called "Jim Crow Laws" that were used to control black people, to put them in a position of inferiority and to maintain them at the bottom of society.[22] Because of segregation, black people were separated from white people in all public places such as transportation or education and even if accommodations were said to be equal, they were not.[23] White supremacy is a racist ideology that is based on the belief that white people are superior to people of other races. Black people were the victims of this ideology. Even when they were as poor as black people, white people considered themselves superior because of their race and treated black people as inferior. Paternalism was part of the white supremacy ideology. In his article, Kevin M. Ritchlin explains the role of paternalism in Southern culture: "By 1861, paternalism defined the South's internal structure, and was used as a justification for its social stratification. Paternalism placed southern white males at the head of the southern family, serving as its protectors, providers, and punishers."[24] White women were represented as weak in order to reinforce white men's position of power and to justify their

[19] George Anastaplo, *The Amendments to the Constitution: a Commentary* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995) 168.
[20] Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965) 211.
[21] Mark Schultz, *The Rural Face of White Supremacy Beyond Jim Crow* (Champaign: University of Illinois, 2005) 184.
[22] Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York : Anchor Books, 2008)
[23] Richard Wormser, *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005) xi.
[24] Kevin M. Ritchlin, "Dismantling of paternalism: Southern white slaveholding women's and slaves' responses to slavery during the Civil War" (Master's Thesis, The University of Montana, 1996) 1.

domination. According to Ritchlin paternalism was used to maintain white women under the control of white men:

> [Paternalism] relegated women to a subordinate status in relation to white men. […] The southern mistress was defined as pious, subordinate, meek, and fragile. White women's proper place was in the home raising and caring for the master's children. In return white males were responsible for maintaining the economic and social status and integrity of southern mistresses.[25]

In *Southern Women,* Virginia Kent Anderson Leslie explains that the purpose of paternalism was not only to control white women but also to justify the domination of black slaves by white men. She writes that paternalism and the myth of the "Southern Lady" were used to "keep the gender/class/race ruling"[26] of the Southern society. Black slaves were described as childlike and unable to take care of themselves. Thus, white men used those stereotypes to justify slavery. The master was presented as his slaves' protector: he was the one who tried to civilize and educate them. Slaveholders used paternalism to prove that slaves had better living conditions under the protection of their masters than as free men and women.[27]

White supremacy also had consequences for black domestic workers. Many white employers did not allow their domestics to enter through the front door, to use the family's bathroom or to eat with the white family at the table for example.[28] These restrictions showed to the domestics that they were not equal to their employers. The belief that black people and white people were different also led to the establishment of many stereotypes. As a consequence of the white supremacy ideology and paternalism white people believed that black people never became grown-up adults and that they remained children forever.[29] This was used to justify the assumed inferiority of black people. Thus, white children were taught not to consider the domestics as their equals. Black women were also said to be stronger than white women. Indeed, the southern white woman was considered as extremely weak physically and emotionally whereas black women were perceived as stronger.

Other stereotypes, such as the one of the mammy, were used by white people as proof of the good relationship between white and black people. The mammy was usually represented as an overweight dark-skinned woman with the typical uniform of a domestic

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[25] Ritchlin, 1.

[26] Virginia Kent Aderson Leslie, in *Southern Women* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 19.

[27] Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974) 4-7.

[28] Katherine Van Wormer, et al, *The Maid Narratives: Black Domestics and White Families in the Jim Crow South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012) 185.

[29] Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New-York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999) 18.

(headscarf and dress) and displaying a wide smile.[30] This stereotypical image depicted domestic workers as happy with their situation and as loyal to their white families. Thus, it could be a justification for their exploitation. Patricia Hill Collins, K. Sue Jewell, Micki McElya, Kimberly Wallace-Sanders and others analyse the stereotypes that were used by white people to control domestic workers.

In their works, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* and *From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of US Social Policy*, Collins and Jewell dedicate a chapter or two to the subject of controlling images.[31] They study stereotypes from a feminist point of view. Both authors describe the specificities of each stereotype one by one and describe their impact on black women's life. Jewell also insists on the fact that the media are responsible for the spread of the images that control black women's lives. The goal of these authors is to inform the reader about the falseness of what these images describe and to show that they were created to prevent black women from evolving in society (social mobility of black women could have been a threat for white supremacy.)

In her work *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America,* Micki McElya adopts a historical point of view to study the stereotypes about black women and domestic workers. She examines how the image of the mammy evolved through the twentieth-century and reinforced racial hierarchy in the United-States. McElya explains that the mammy image evolved at the same time as American society. She argues:

> The myth of the faithful slave lingers because so many white Americans have wished to live in a world in which African Americans are not angry over past and present injustices, a world in which white people were and are not complicit, in which the injustices themselves—of slavery, Jim Crow, and ongoing structural racism—seem not to exist at all. The mammy figure affirmed their wishes.[32]

McElya studies the iconography of the mammy by exploring different ways of representing her: Aunt Jemina on the pancake box, filmic representations of the mammy, monuments etc. The author mixes cultural and political history by explaining that controlling

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[30] K. Sue Jewell, *From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of US Social Policy* (London: Routledge, 1993) 39.

[31] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Harper Collins Academic: 1990); K. Sue Jewell, *From Mammy to Miss America and beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of US Social Policy* (London: Routledge, 1993)

[32] Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007) 3.

images be used for political purpose, that is to say in this case maintaining the privilege of the white population.

In *Mammy: a Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory*, Kimberly Wallace-Sanders adopts more or less the same method as McElya. She studies the evolution of the mammy image during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Wallace-Sanders analyses how the mammy is represented in literature and in visual arts in order to show how the various representations of this stereotype reflect the evolution of American society. The aim of this work is to demonstrate that stereotypes about African American women never stopped evolving because they developed at the same time as American society.

Black domestic workers in the United-States were obviously very vulnerable. They suffered from both racial and sexual oppression. Indeed, they could be the victims of sexual harassment from their white employers. Van Wormer, Jackson and Sudduth argue that "psychologists might say that since white males often started life nurtured by warm black women, it would be natural for them to feel drawn to black women later."[33] Because of the context of segregation, white men were not likely to be punished if they raped black women. Besides, the belief that black people were inferior (even more black women who were black *and* female) could enhance white men's sense of entitlement towards black women. Danielle L. McGuire explains that "when African Americans tested their freedom during Reconstruction, former slaveholders and their sympathizers used rape as a "weapon of terror" to dominate the bodies and minds of African-American men and women."[34] Rape was used to uphold white supremacy and to maintain black people under control. As white men were powerful, black women could think that nobody would believe them if they accused a white man of rape. Moreover, it was even more difficult for domestic workers as they could not risk losing their jobs by making this kind of accusation. But as McGuire argues:

> Black women did not keep their stories secret. African-American women reclaimed their bodies and their humanity by testifying about their assaults. They launched the first public attacks on sexual violence as a "systematic abuse of women"[35] in response to slavery and the wave of lynchings in the post-Emancipation South.[36]

[33] Van Wormer, et al, 181.

[34] Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape and Resistance-A New History of the Civil Rights Movement From Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc., 2010) xviii.

[35] Maria Bevacqua, *Rape on the Public Agenda: Feminism and the Politics of Sexual Assault* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000) 21.

[36] McGuire, xix.

Even if accusing white men of rape was risky, many black women dared to testify in order to raise awareness about the major issue that was interracial rape. Indeed, as Mc Guire explains in her work, black women were assaulted by white men everywhere and could never feel safe:

> As Reconstruction collapsed and Jim Crow arose, white men abducted and assaulted black women with alarming regularity. White men lured black women and girls away from home with promises of steady work and better wages; attacked them on the job; abducted them at gunpoint while traveling to or from home, work, or church; raped them as a form of retribution or to enforce rules of racial and economic hierarchy; sexually humiliated and assaulted them on streetcars and buses, in taxicabs and trains, and in other public places. [37]

These forms of oppression did not concern all domestic workers. Some of them were happy with their situation and reckoned that their employers treated them well. Nevertheless, many domestic workers were the victims of abuse and did not dare to protest because they feared their employers' reactions. They could not risk losing their jobs because they had to make money in order to provide for their families. Many of them played the role expected by their employers: the role of a submissive and loyal servant. They did not dare to rebel.

However, this thesis focuses on domestic workers who actually tried to resist the different forms of discrimination they were the victims of. As explained previously, a great number of domestic workers suffered from economic and sexual exploitation and were also the victims of racial, gender and class discriminations. The following study analyzes and explains the different forms of resistance strategies used by domestic workers in order to survive and emancipate themselves. To do so, testimonies of domestic workers collected for the most part in *Telling Memories Among Southern Women, The Maid Narratives: Black Domestics and White Families in the Jim Crow South* and *Between Women: Domestic and their Employers* are studied.

Susan Tucker, the author of *Telling Memories Among Southern Women*, describes her book as a personal one. Indeed, she was a white child who grew up in the segregated South and had black "nurses". She wanted to write the stories of the women, like the ones who took care of her, who worked as servants for white families. Tucker's book is also personal because she interviewed these women in order to get the truth about domestic service from the mouth of those who really experienced it. She also interviewed members of white families who once owned slaves and then employed domestic servants. This is very interesting because it allows the reader to get both sides of the story and not only the point of view of black women. The

[37] Ibid, xviii-xix.

women Tucker interviewed were domestic servants themselves or sometimes their descendants and she studied both the period of the Old South and the segregated South.

In the introduction of *The Maid Narratives: Black Domestics and White Families in the Jim Crow South*, it is explained that oral history is a way to "get at the truth -or truths- as only personal history can."[38] This book is also a personal one because one of the authors, Katherine van Wormer, was a white child during segregation and black nurses took care of her. The other two, David W. Jackson and Charletta Sudduth, were black children who grew up in the segregated South and some members of their families worked as domestics. Just like Susan Tucker, the authors asked both black and white women to tell their memories about domestic work as they experienced it. The authors did not concentrate on the Old South but more on the period of segregation and precisely from the 1920s to the mid-1960s. This book is not only a collection of testimonies such as Tucker's book, but the authors also give their interpretations of these memories and inform the reader about the recurrent themes in the narratives they heard.

Those testimonies are used as the basis in order to illustrate the present thesis' arguments about domestic workers' resistance strategies and to understand the complexities of domestic service. The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that domestic workers always had a spirit of resistance despite white people's idealistic vision of domestic workers as loyal, submissive and obedient. The goal is to examine the evolution of domestic workers' resistance as well. Their strategies evolved over the years and domestic workers' resistance transformed especially during the Civil Rights Movement. The development of the thesis relies on the secondary sources presented previously in order to provide a scientific support to my personal arguments.

As a result of my research and readings, I came up with my own classification of the different resistance strategies used by domestic workers. First, some factors helped domestic workers to empower themselves in order to survive and to resist oppression: being part of a community, faith, self-definition or pride for example. This first category is the equivalent of the cognitive coping strategies: they are internal. On the other hand, domestic workers used active resistance strategies. First, they relied on resistance strategies that did not include direct confrontation with their employers but that allowed them to emancipate themselves, such as

[38] Van Wormer, et al, 4.

living out or migrating to the North of the United States. Then, domestic workers also used confrontational resistance strategies. At an individual level, they protested when their employers did not respect them by leaving their jobs or simply by daring to orally express their dissatisfaction. Finally, they tried to resist at a collective level through domestic workers' organizations or activism (especially during the Civil Rights Movement). These last three categories correspond to various kinds of behavioral coping strategies. Thus, my classification of the various domestic workers' resistance strategies that corresponds to the four parts of the present thesis is: 1. Psychological resilience. 2. Non-confrontational resistance strategies. 3. Confrontational resistance strategies at an individual level. 4. Confrontational resistance strategies at a collective level.

I. Psychological Resilience

After the Civil War and the end of slavery in 1865, discrimination still prevented black women from entering other occupations than domestic service. Thus, during the following decades, the number of black domestic workers never ceased to increase whereas the number of white domestics declined considerably. In *Seven Days a week,* David Katzman explains: "Unlike white women, for whom household labor provided a bridge between leaving their parents' home and getting married, many urban black women could expect to be wage earners most of their lives, regardless of whether they were married or not." In 1890, black women represented 24% of all domestic workers and in 1920 they represented 40% whereas the percentage of white domestic workers declined by one-third.[1] Domestic workers had to face racism and, especially in the South, white supremacy. Consequently, they relied on various aspects of their lives in order to remain psychologically resilient. The first factor that helped them to survive despite the harsh working conditions was the Black community.

1. The Black Community

The relationship between a domestic worker and her employer was a subordinate-superordinate relationship. As argued by Erving Goffman, this kind of relationship is "governed" by "asymmetrical rules of conduct". Goffman explains: "An asymmetrical rule is one that leads others to treat and be treated by an individual differently from the way he treats and is treated by them."[2] In the case of domestic workers, the fact that employers called their domestics by their first names or "girl" and that domestics called their employers "Ma'am" can be an example of asymmetrical rule.

Employers could be very intrusive and sometimes they did not respect their domestics' privacy but in asymmetrical relationships "the superordinate [has] the right to exercise certain familiarities which the subordinate is not allowed to reciprocate."[3] Thus, domestic workers had to know how to act in order to be respectful and to please their employers. They should not represent a threat for their employers. Domestics should not penetrate what Georg Simmel has defined as "the ideal sphere":

[1] Katzman, 72.
[2] Erving Goffman, "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor." American Anthropologist 58.3 (1956): 476
[3] Goffman, 481.

> Although differing in size in various directions and differing according to the person with whom one entertains relations, this sphere cannot be penetrated, unless the personality value of the individual is thereby destroyed. A sphere of this sort is placed around man by his honor. Language poignantly designates an insult to one's honor as 'coming too close;' the radius of this sphere marks; as it were, the distance whose trespassing by another person insults one's honor.[4]

If domestic workers did not want to offend their employers they could not cross the line of "the ideal sphere" and, as already said, they could not be as familiar with their employers as their employers were with them. Erving Goffman's definition of familiarity is interesting in order to fully understand this notion:

> Where an actor need show no concern about penetrating the recipient's usual personal reserve, and need have no fear of contaminating him by any penetration into his privacy, we say that the actor is on terms of familiarity with the recipient. […] Where the actor must show circumspection in his approach to the recipient, we speak of nonfamiliarity or respect. Rules governing conduct between two individuals may, but need not, be symmetrical in regard to either familiarity or respect.[5]

The asymmetry within the employer-employee relationship reflected the inequality between them. Domestic workers had to show their employers that they recognized them as superiors and their behavior had to reflect their own inferiority. This is how the occupation worked and domestics had to respect the rules if they wanted to survive and keep their jobs.

Judith Rollins explains that the domestics she interviewed agreed on the fact that "employers liked subservient behavior and did not like a domestic's being too educated or intelligent, too materially well off, or too attractive."[6] Many employers liked the fact that their domestics were inferior to them. If they were ignorant, employers had the feeling that they could better control them. Thus, domestic workers could never behave in a way that would have threatened their employers' superiority.

The black community was important in order to teach young children how to act in the segregated society. Adults taught their children the "rules of conduct" that were essential to survive in the segregated South as Hazel Rankins explained to David W. Jackson:

> […] you knew your boundaries; they were white and you were black. Your parents would make sure that you knew certain things, that you knew your place. You knew your place and you did what you were supposed to do, and if you did anything else you would be in trouble. […] You knew your boundaries and you didn't cross 'em, you knew what to do and from being a little child.[7]

Children were educated by their parents according to the segregation system. They were taught to accept their inferiority within society. Young boys were taught to remain respectful

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[4] Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Trans. Kurt H. Wolff. (New York: Free. London: Collier-Macmillan, 1967) 321.
[5] Goffman, 481.
[6] Rollins, 147.
[7] Van Wormer, et al, 160.

towards white people and particularly towards white women. Indeed, lynching was a common practice in the South at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, in order to maintain white supremacy.[8] Mark Schultz argues:

> Jim Crow-era lynchings have become the most powerful symbol of southern antiblack violence. It has been reported that during the height of lynching in the United States, from 1889 to 1918, 3,224 persons died at the hand of mobs. Of that number, 2,834 were murdered in the former states of the Confederacy.[9]

For example, in 1955 Emmett Till, an African-American teenager, was murdered because a white woman said he offended her in a grocery store. His behavior was considered as inappropriate and disrespectful and he was punished for that.[10] Parents were afraid for their children, so they made sure that they fully understood the hostile environment they lived in. Thus, young girls were also taught the "rules of conduct" that governed domestic work. The black community helped domestic workers to better understand the occupation and to endure the very hard working conditions. Advice given by their families and friends also helped them to know how to act in white people's houses. Indeed, domestic work usually went on from generation to generation in black families and young girls could consult their grandmothers, mothers, aunts, old sister in order to know how they were supposed to behave towards their white employers. Domestics were supposed to be respectful and deferential and they should not confront their employers if they wanted to keep their jobs. Thus, they learnt from their mothers, aunts and others how to play the role of the perfect employee.

We can assume that playing the role of the perfect domestic as expected by white employers was very difficult and annoying for many domestic workers. This is why coming back to their communities and families after work certainly was a relief for them. When they were in white people's houses they could not be themselves nor could they openly express their thoughts and opinions. Being among their own after a day of work helped them to endure their lives as domestic workers. Even when they were at work without their loved ones, domestic workers thought about them in order to give meaning to their work, as Willie Mae Fitzgerald told Susan Tucker: "I thought of my little children. I stayed. I was quiet. That's how I worked."[11] Like many other domestics, Willie Mae Fitzgerald needed money to provide for her children. She could not afford to lose her job. Thinking of her family helped her to bear the humiliation of being treated as an inferior. Domestic workers' families gave

[8] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race." *Signs*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1992): 264.
[9] Schultz, 132.
[10] Timothy B. Tyson, *The Blood of Emmett Till* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2017)
[11] Tucker, 154.

them the strength to carry on even though their lives were often very difficult and their jobs were exhausting.

When she was a child, Susan Tucker noticed that Mattie, the black domestic worker who took care of her, acted differently towards white people than towards people of her own community. Susan Tucker explains: "[…] she was returning to a community that was her own. There, she had her own language, we heard this in her changed voice. And there-but this we only barely glimpsed-she took off her mask, a mask that all black domestics, to some degree or other, wore in white homes."[12] This idea of a mask worn by domestic workers in white homes is very interesting because it is a good illustration of their working conditions. Indeed, domestic workers had to wear the mask of the "stereotypical southern servant."[13] In other words, they had to be play the role of the "mammy", loyal and respectful, in order to please their employers. This behavior reinforced their employers' sense of superiority. According to Jacklyn Cock, "the domestic worker's main mode of adaptation is the adoption of a mask of deference as a protective disguise."[14]

Katherine van Wormer also refers to a mask worn by domestic workers in white people's houses. She writes that "the mask that many black people wore reflected their position of powerlessness in the white world. In their own communities, the mask came off."[15] When they returned to their community they could finally act naturally and express their feelings. They could talk about what they really thought about the job and about their employers. Indeed, black people talked about the behavior of whites towards domestic workers. If white people had a bad behavior towards their employees, all the other domestics of the community would know about it and nobody would want to work for the disrespectful family. Susan Tucker explains: "A certain line was drawn—call it a line of decent behavior—that, if crossed by white women, meant they were not acceptable as employers." [16] This "line of decent behavior" was implicit but employers knew that they could not cross it if they did not want to be categorized as bad employers. Although the domestic-employer relationship was an asymmetrical relationship and domestics were not in a position of power, it does not mean that they could not try to resist against abuse of power.

[12] Tucker, 72.
[13] Ibid, 112.
[14] Jacklyn Cock, *Maids and Madams: Domestic Workers under Apartheid* (London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1989) 103.
[15] Van Wormer, et al, 37.
[16] Tucker, 211.

This question is discussed by Jacqueline Jones in her book *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow:* "Black communities frequently demonstrated their own "code of color ethics, which stipulated that a person should not work for a white women who was a well-known unscrupulous employer, or one who was particularly '"finicky" of hard to please."[17] This "code of color ethics" similarly to the "line of decent behavior" was defined by black women and white women should not transgress it. An employer that humiliated her domestic and asked her to perform too many tasks without paying her a fair salary was considered as crossing the "line of decent behavior" and not respecting the "code of color ethics".

Sometimes domestic workers did not have a choice and had to keep working for families who did not respect them but when they could, they left and warned the other domestics of the community about the employer's abusive behavior. Jones also writes in her book: "In fact mutual support and cooperation among blacks gave the appearance of an "organization", provoking among white women constant discussion of "the servant problem" and ways to combat it."[18] Indeed, domestic workers have been seen for a long time as impossible to organize because the work took place in the private sphere and domestics were isolated and marginalized.[19] Nevertheless, even if organization was difficult to establish within domestic work, the black community itself was a real organization. Each member of the community tried to help others and this was a real strength in the fight against segregation but also for domestic workers to overcome subordination. The support of their families, friends and community helped domestic workers to get stronger. When they were with their own community they could be themselves contrary to when they were in their employers' homes. They were free to be themselves and they did not have to act as the perfect employee. In summary, the black community was essential for domestic workers' psychological survival. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham explains in *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*: "From the early days of slavery, the black church had constituted the backbone of the black community. Truly African-American in its origins, it provided a spiritual cohesiveness that permitted its people to absorb, interpret, and

[17] Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women Work and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985) 133.
[18] Jones, 133.
[19] Nadasen, 4.

practice the Christian faith—to make it their own."[20] Thus, the black church and religion was also an important aspect in black domestic workers' resilience.

2. Religious faith

At the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, black people were not accepted in many public place because of Jim Crow Laws. Thus, black people had to find a way to escape discriminations and the black church was a place where they could go without being the victims of segregation. As explained by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, the black church "housed a diversity of programs including schools, circulating libraries, concerts, restaurants, insurance companies, vocational training, athletic clubs […]"[21] This is why the black church "came to signify public space" for black people.[22] The church was the heart of the black community. It was the only place where black people could gather without being afraid of being rejected.

In 1964, E. Franklin Frazier defined the black church as a "nation within a nation."[23] Indeed, the black church developed its own functioning, similar to the functioning of a nation, with services and institutions that were accessible to the black community. Thanks to the church, black people had the feeling of belonging to a community. The black church allowed the black community to develop and perpetuate its own identity.

In 1900, the Woman's Convention was created by some black women as an alternative to the National Baptist Convention created in 1895. Indeed, the National Baptist Church encouraged black people to express their opinions but women were not put on the same level as men. Thus, black women created the Woman's Convention in order to fight subordination that was imposed upon them not only by white Americans but also by black men. The church became a place where black women could fight for black people's rights but also for women's rights. They struggled for voting rights, equal educational opportunities and so on.[24] For many black women being active in the church was a way to feel important. It helped them to find a meaning in life. For some domestic workers, the church was the only place where they could voice the problems they encountered at work.[25] They could talk with other women and share their experiences. This helped domestic workers to fight against the loneliness they could feel

[20] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994) 5.
[21] Higginbotham, 7.
[22] Ibid.
[23] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America (*New York: Schocken Books, 1964) 34.
[24] Higginbotham, 13.
[25] Tucker, 121.

at work. The church made domestic workers feel supported and inspired them to fight for their rights.

In 1900, Fannie Barrier Williams, one of the leaders of the National Association of Colored Women, explained that the church was primordial for black women to understand that unity was their strength. She argued that black women's organizations and activism have their roots in the church.[26] Indeed, Baptist women's conventions such as the Woman's Convention encouraged black women to fight against discriminations. The church also taught them how to organize and to pool their strength in order to improve black women's condition.

Faith was an important aspect of domestic workers' survival because it helped them to remain optimistic and to maintain hope even though their situation could sometimes be very difficult to bear. This question is discussed in Susan Tucker's book *Telling Memories among Southern Women.* For example, Winnie Hefley's testimony on page 31 shows the importance of religious faith in domestic workers' resistance:

> After she left Mobile, I just picked up days work with different people. I worked for some nice people, but with days work you wake up in the morning and you don't know which way you're going. But I love people. I'm not partial with people. I try to live a Christian life, and the Bible teaches you to overcome evil with good. If anybody treat you mean, you just be nice and good to 'em right on and then you can break 'em down. They'll get shame, or they'll see something in you. The Bible tell you to hold your peace, and then you don't have to be accounted for, for no fusses, for no quarrels.

Faith helped Winnie Hefley to strengthen herself and to focus on the positive aspects of life. Through her testimony she understands that she cannot control the way people treat her but she can control the way she acts towards others and she knows that it can have an effect on them. Faith helped her to understand that being good and remaining positive is always a way to fight against oppressive people. This was the case for many domestic workers, faith made them understand that positive thinking is the key to survive in a difficult and painful situation.[27]

Christian people think that it is a sin to hate others, this is why Christian domestic workers tried not to hate their employers who abused them. It could make black women feel better when they were able to act lovingly despite the offending behavior that white people usually had towards them. Many domestic workers believed that would have access to heaven after their death contrary to their white employers, as Susan Tucker argues: "they felt that

[26] Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Club Movement among Colored Women of America," in Booker T. Washington et al, *New Negro for a New Century* (Chicago : American Publishing House, 1900) 383.
[27] Van Wormer, et al, 117.

they knew which white people would and would not 'find their way to heaven.'"[28] Indeed, Christian people believe that God is fair and righteous in his judgments. Thus, many Christian domestic workers were convinced that it was unnecessary to respond to white people's hatred with hatred. They believed that God could see everything and that He was the witness of white people's sins and that the latter would be punished in due course. Hatred is a sin and as Judith Rollins argues, when a domestic worker responds to hatred with love, "[it makes] the domestic feel superior in these ways: hers will be the final victory in the hereafter; she is demonstrating that she is spiritually superior to her employer […]"[29]

Domestic workers belonged to the lower class and were inferior to their employers from an economic point of view but this does not mean that they had to be inferior in every aspect of life. This is why domestic workers tried to be spiritually superior to their employers. They tried to live the most decent and respectable existence and to focus on the best parts of life. Faith brought hope and comfort in black people's lives, as Gloria Kirkland Holmes testifies:

> Our parents had instilled in us the importance of being grateful to God for every little blessing that came our way. There were many blessings that others may have considered to be unfair, unjust, unequal, and degrading. Instead we looked at life with as much hope as an established and mature adult.[30]

Religious faith allowed black children to value the most important aspects of their lives such as their families, friends and communities, and not to concentrate on what was unfair and degrading as racial segregation for example.

When domestic workers were treated badly by their employers, when they were exhausted or when they thought that they were in a desperate situation, they could pray in order to ask God to help them. For example, Gloria Kirkland Holmes worked in her employers' summer home in the mountains of North Carolina when she was young. It was very difficult for her because the lady, "Ms. Elsie" as Gloria Holmes called her, was very mean and she was far from her family. Nobody could help her and she had the feeling that her situation was hopeless. Her faith was the only thing she had to help her not to go into depression. Holmes explains: "At times, she would yell at us. I thought to myself, "How could this woman be so mean, knowing we were so far away from home. Lord, am I going to make it here for an entire summer?" I knew how to pray and asked God to please help me."[31]

[28] Tucker, 197.
[29] Rollins, 169.
[30] Van Wormer, et al, 163.
[31] Ibid, 165.

Praying could help domestic workers to maintain hope in difficult situations. The belief that God was hearing them made them feel supported and less alone.

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham argues that "as the 'invisible institution' of the slaves, the church had long promoted a sense of individual and collective worth and perpetuated a belief in human dignity that countered the racist preachings of the master class."[32] Many white Christian leaders of the South used the Bible to justify slavery. They based their arguments on the references to slavery that can be found in the Old and New Testaments, such as: "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." (Ephesians 6:5-6). By contrast, religion allowed the black community to see the best in people. It helped them understand that even if white people sought to dominate them, they were as worthy of respect as any human being. Thanks to religious faith, some black domestics felt superior to white people in a spiritual and moral sense. Indeed, religion teaches a certain kind of value system including respect and love. Many black people measured one's worth according to these moral values and thus they considered some white people morally inferior to them if they did not lead a respectable Christian life (if they concentrated more on material wealth than on what really matters in life, like family for example).[33] Religion helped domestic workers to compare themselves favorably to their white employers and to gain self-confidence and self-esteem.

3. Sense of Self-worth

a. Self-Definition

As explained previously, black women and domestic workers have always been the victims of stereotypes such as the mammy, which maintained them at the bottom of society. These images were created by powerful white men, and then conveyed through mass media. As K. Sue Jewell explains, the mammy's "comportment connotes satisfaction and contentment with her station in life, wherein she is consigned to perform domestic duties." [34] This idea that African American women were satisfied with their lower status was used to perpetuate their exploitation. It is important to study how black women used self-definition to fight against those stereotypes.

[32] Higginbotham, 5.
[33] Tucker, 121.
[34] Jewell, 38.

Judith Rollins explains in *Between Women: Domestics and their Employers* that the domestics she interviewed "appeared to have retained a remarkable sense of self-worth [and] skillfully deflect these psychological attacks on their personhood, their adulthood, their dignity, these attempts to lure them into accepting employers' definitions of them as inferior".[35] Many black women did not directly confront racism and oppression because they could have the feeling that it was useless as the social norms were built according to segregation. Many thought that it was impossible to challenge those norms. However, they developed internal coping strategies and a consciousness that allowed them to create their own definition of black womanhood and to eventually challenge the established order of American society.

Collins points out that: "Black women's lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African-American women with our objectification as the Other"[36]—the "Others" are "strangers [that] threaten the moral and social order. But they are simultaneously essential for its survival because those individuals who stand at the margins of society clarify boundaries. African-American women, by not belonging, emphasize the signification of belonging."[37] It means that black women needed to understand that the way society portrayed black womanhood was not realistic and that the aim was to maintain them under control. They had to trust their own representation of black womanhoood in order to take pride in their situation as black women and not to be influenced by the stereotypes conveyed by the mass media. Jewell argues in her book that "the Black media have had a tremendous impact on the presentation of balanced and accurate portrayals of African American women."[38]

Black women were represented as mammies, masculine, and stronger than white women in order to perpetuate their exploitation and the main image associated to white women was the image of the lady. Anne Firor Scott describes this image in her work *The Southern Lady From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930*:

> This marvelous creation was described as a submissive wife whose reason for being was to love, honor, obey, and occasionally amuse her husband, to bring up his children and manage his household. Physically weak, and "formed for the less laborious occupation," she depended upon male protection. To secure this protection she was endowed with the capacity to "create a magic

[35] Rollins, 212.
[36] Collins, 94.
[37] Ibid, 68.
[38] Jewell, 51.

> spell" over any man in her vicinity. She was timid and modest, beautiful and graceful, "the most fascinating being in creation… The delight and charm of every circle she moves in."[39]

The image of the lady was in total contrast with the representation black women. It was the perfect example of womanhood for white men. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham argues in her article "African American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race" that the image of the lady was used in trains as an indicator of class:

> During the late nineteenth century, segregated railroad trains were emblematic of racial configurations of both class and gender; the first-class railroad car also was called the "ladies car." Indeed, segregation's meaning for gender was exemplified in the trope of "lady." Ladies were not merely women; they represented a class, a differentiated status within the generic category of "women." Nor did society confer such status on all white women. White prostitutes, along with many working-class white women, fell outside its rubric. But no black woman, regardless of income, education, refinement, or character, enjoyed the status of lady.[40]

Black women could never aspire to be considered as ladies because it was only intended for respectable white women. Black women's race and gender determined their status. As blacks they were considered as inferior to all white people and as women they were considered as inferior to both black and white men. Higginbotham explains that the exclusion of black women from the definition of the "lady" reflects the racialized representation of sexuality. She explains:

> Violence figured preeminently in racialized constructions of sexuality. From the days of slavery, the social construction and representation of black sexuality reinforced violence, rhetorical and real, against black women and men. That the rape of black women could continue to go on with impunity long after slavery's demise underscores the pervasive belief in black female promiscuity.[41]

The image of the "bad-black-girl" represented the supposed lack of virtue of black women. K. Sue Jewell describes the effect this image had on society's perception of African American womanhood: "The bad-black-girl reinforces cultural stereotypes regarding the hypersexuality of the African American female, who yearns for sexual encounter."[42]

Since slavery, African American women had been oppressed because of their race, class and gender. Thus, it was very important for their survival to counter the controlling images that represented them. This is what Chezia Thompson-Carger explains in her work, **"**Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress and Indigo*: Resistance and Mystical Women of Power". She argues that challenging controlling images is a way to resist gender, race and class oppression for black women: "Re-envisioning the mythology of what constitutes

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[39] Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1995) 4.
[40] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race." *Signs*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1992): 261.
[41] Higginbotham, 264.
[42] Jewell, 46.

womanhood is a major act of revolt and a necessary step in the politics of liberation for African-American women."[43]

Domestic workers could use the rejection of controlling images in order to fight against objectification. Indeed, Corinne Cooke's testimony in *Telling Memories among Southern Women* demonstrates that domestic workers used self-definition to resist against stereotypes: "And I wanted so for Becky to be called Mammy, but Becky said no, she was not Mammy-she was Becky. I don't know why. She said she had a hard enough time being Becky. She didn't want to be Mammy."[44] Corinne Cooke's domestic worker, Becky, used self-definition to reject the image of the mammy. She did not accept to be assimilated to this controlling image and defined her own identity. Collins argues that "identity is not the goal but rather the point of departure in the process of self-definition."[45] This was the case for Becky who understood that her name defined her as an individual whereas the word "mammy" would reduce her to a stereotype. By asking her employer to call her by her first name instead of "Mammy", Becky showed her that she was the one who could define her identity: she was a woman and not just an obedient domestic worker. She decided to resist and to show her determination to be treated as a person worthy of respect.

Susan Tucker also interviewed a woman, Martha Calvert, who did not accept being called by her first name and wanted to be called "Ms. Calvert" by her employers. She told Susan Tucker:

> My employer, she introduced me to her mother as "Ms. Calvert." And I know they had a talk about that, 'cause they called *her* "girl" Lena. But her daughter was younger than me and if I'm gonna call her Ms. So-and-so, she's gonna call me Ms. too. It's as simple as that. We'll be on first names, or we'll be formal. [46]

Martha Calvert did not accept to be treated like a little girl by her employer. She refused society's definition of black women which suggested that they never became grown up adults. Just like Becky, Martha Calvert defined herself as a woman worthy of respect and this is why she wanted to be called "Ms. Calvert." She considered that if she treated her employer with respect she should be treated with respect in return. Calvert dared to challenge the "rules" of domestic work. Indeed, employers usually called their domestics by their first names and domestic workers called their employers "Mrs." and "Mr." She used self-definition to fight this norm that, like many others, was used to oppress and dominate black women.

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[43] Chezia Thompson-Cager, "Ntozake Shange's *Sassafras, Cypress and Indigo:* Resistance and Mythical Women of Power." *NWSA Journal* 1(4): 591.
[44] Tucker, 100.
[45] Collins, 106.
[46] Tucker, 42.

Black women not only defined their identity individually but also collectively. Indeed, as Collins argues: "Self is not defined as the increased autonomy gained by separating oneself from others. Instead, self is found in the context of family and community."[47] It was within their community that black women could really create their own definition of black womanhood and define their identity. Black women praised black femininity and tried to challenge the dominant ideology that defined black women as inferior. Collins explains: "For African-American women the listener most able to move beyond the invisibility created by objectification as the Other in order to see and hear the fully human Black woman is another Black woman."[48] Only black women can truly understand the condition of black womanhood and the sufferings of one another. This is why black women were very important for each other. They could help other black women to define themselves and to understand that they should fight the controlling images conveyed by society. Black women often encouraged each other and for example, older women could encourage younger women to get an education. Indeed, Patricia Hill Collins explains that she decided to pursue her doctorate because in 1978 she participated in a seminar and an older black woman told her: "Honey, I'm real proud of you. Some folks don't want to see you up there [in the front of the classroom] but you belong there. Go back to school and get your Ph.D. and then they won't be able to tell you nothing!"[49] This woman encouraged Patricia Hill Collins to show that a black woman was able to get a Ph.D. She told her not to let racism and stereotypes about black women define her future. What this woman told Collins meant that if she got her Ph.D. she would go against racist people's will to see all black women uneducated and she would define black women as as intelligent and able to get an education as other people. Thus, this older woman did not want Collins to believe the definitions created by white supremacists and encouraged her to define herself as an educated woman.

Marita Golden experienced something similar when she rode the bus to go to college in 1968. There were many domestic workers who rode the bus with her and those women encouraged her in her desire to get a college education. Golden explained: "The spirit of those women sat with me in every class I took."[50] Those domestic workers helped Golden to understand that she had to persevere in order to prove that black women were not condemned to do domestic work forever. Inspired by these women, Golden decided to use self-definition in order to challenge the stereotypes that maintained black women at the bottom of society. She

[47] Collins, 105.
[48] Ibid, 98.
[49] Ibid, 97-98.
[50] Marita Golden, *Migrations of the Heart* (New York: Ballantine, 1983) 21.

explained: “I accepted [those women’s] encouragement and hated America for never allowing them to be selfish or greedy, to feel the steel-hard bite of ambition…”[51] Thus, she was motivated to acquire a college education to prove that black women are the only ones who can decide of what they are capable of.

As Golden said, those women were proud of her. Pride was an important aspect of black women’s resistance against discriminations. Collins argues that “self-definition speaks to the power dynamics involved in rejecting externally defined controlling images of Black womanhood, the theme of Black women’s self-valuation addresses the actual content of these self-definitions.”

b. Pride and Self-esteem

According to Nathaniel Branden self-esteem is “a profound and powerful human need, essential to healthy adaptiveness, that is, to optimal functioning and self-fulfillment.”[52] Branden’s analysis allows us to better understand the difference between self-esteem and pride:

> If self-esteem pertains to the experience of our fundamental competence and value, *pride* pertains to the more explicitly conscious pleasure we take in ourselves because of our actions and achievements. Self-esteem contemplates what needs to be done and says, “I can.” Pride contemplates what has been accomplished and says “I did.” [53]

Pride and self-esteem were very important for domestic workers and black women in general in order to overcome discrimination. In the previous example, it is obvious that the domestic workers who rode the bus with Marita Golden were proud of her because she went to college. The pride perceived in the domestic workers’ eyes made Marita Golden more confident and encouraged her to achieve her goal to get a higher education. Patricia Hill Collins explains that “African-American women as sisters and friends affirm one another’s humanity, specialness and rights to exist.”[54] In a society in which black women have always been denigrated, they have quickly understood the necessity of valuating black womanhood in order to overcome discrimination and subordination. Aletha Vaughn testified about the way domestic workers were treated by their white employers: “Just because you’re working for ‘em as an individual, they don’t see that they’re not any more than you are. They treat you like some type of animal instead of a person.”[55] Thus, black women needed to be proud of

[51] Golden, 21.
[52] Nathaniel Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994) xv.
[53] Branden, 40.
[54] Collins, 97.
[55] Tucker, 207.

themselves and to be aware of their self-worth so that they could remain psychologically resilient.

Black women have always been proud of their skin color and of their female identity, as Collins explains: "The right to be Black *and* female *and* respected pervades everyday conversations among African-American women."[56] Black women become aware of their self-worth by speaking with other black women. They have understood that self-respect is a key step toward the end of discriminations. Indeed, if they have respect for themselves, then other people will be more incline to have respect for black womanhood too.

For domestic workers pride and self-esteem was very important because they were treated as inferior not only because of their condition as black women but also because of their jobs that was considered low and demeaning. Self-respect helped domestic workers to be less psychologically and emotionally affected when their employers denigrated and humiliated them. For instance, Judith Rollins explains that Anne Ryder, a domestic worker she interviewed, seemed to "separate her sense of self—strong and intact—from her assessment of her occupation—low and valueless."[57] Anne Ryder did not perceive her job as admirable. She was not really proud of being a domestic worker. She did it because she had to work in order to survive. Nevertheless, even if she was not proud of her condition as a domestic worker, she was proud of who she was as an individual: a strong and self-confident woman.

On the contrary, some women did not consider domestic work as degrading and took pride in their condition, just like Linda Barron who was interviewed by Susan Tucker:

> Those kind of things make domestic workers- they don't think high of themselves. At one time I looked upon domestic work as a job that was not skilled and then I looked at the white people there, and I saw I was not really that less skilled than they were. […] After a while, standing up and saying things like this, I decided that domestic work is not bad as some people would say it would be.[58]

Linda Barron compared herself to white people and understood that she was not inferior to them. It led her to become self-confident. She had a high esteem of her job and thought that it necessitated skills. She explained: "I really would say I'm a domestic engineer because of the fact that if you're an engineer, you've got to put all kinds of stuff together. You're going to the lower part of work to the higher part of work. I think it is a profession."[59] Domestic work was not always considered as "real work" by society, thus it was important for

[56] Collins, 108.
[57] Rollins, 146.
[58] Tucker, 258.
[59] Ibid, 258.

domestic workers to give some credit to their occupation and to be proud of what they did every day for a living.

Judith Rollins argues that "no domestic [she] interviewed or observed gave any indication she believed herself inferior to her employers. (A few even indicated they considered themselves superior in their more humane value system and in some of their capabilities, particularly childraising.)"[60] Indeed, as already said in the introduction, the belief that black women were stronger than white women has been widespread in the United-States since slavery. Many white women thought that they would never have been able to do all the work their domestics did. They perceived black women as stronger physically but also morally and emotionally. It was believed that black women could endure more hardship than white women. Black women benefited from these perceptions white people had of them because it helped them be proud of themselves. Thanks to those pre-conceived ideas, black women understood that it was possible to be better than white people even if they lived in a society in which black women were always depicted as inferior to whites.

Moreover, domestic workers often were their employers' confident, the latter told them about all their concerns and secrets. This led domestic workers to compare their employers' problems with their own and they often understood that they were able to overcome more important obstacles than white women. Tucker says: "They believed themselves to be the stronger women emotionally. They saw their emotional support of white women as reflecting their religion and their decency. They saw that they possessed something that was of greater importance than material wealth and white skin."[61]

Many black women saw themselves as equal to white people and did not accept being treated as inferior, just like the interviewee named Clelia Daly who said: "But I also thought I was good as anybody now. I always thought I was as good as white people. I came just like them."[62] Usually, domestic workers did not feel inferior to whites but they did not show it directly to their employers, just as a woman interviewed by Hortense Powdermaker testified: "When I'm around them, I act like they are more than I am. I don't think that they are, but they do. I hear people say that's the best way to act."[63] Just like this woman, many domestic workers kept their self-esteem for themselves but it gave them some strength and helped them

[60] Rollins, 170.
[61] Tucker, 147.
[62] Ibid, 200.
[63] Hortense Powerdermaker, "The Channeling of Negro Aggression by the Cultural Process" *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 48, no. 6, 1943, pp. 750–758. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2770232, 754.

to be more resilient. Nevertheless, even if the majority of domestic workers did not show pride in their attitude, some of them actually did, like for example, Ora Jane Caise, the domestic who worked for Hal Chase's family (a man interviewed by David W. Jackson). Hal Chase remembered:

> She was always superior in the sense of being above some others who used the term [nigger] or said 'You have to go to the back of the bus.' She would walk. There was no way she would sit in the back of the bus. People like her were the reason young people got involved in the so-called civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s.[64]

Ora Jane Caise's pride was visible in the way she behaved. She was too proud to accept to sit in the back of the bus because it would have confirmed her inferiority. Thus, she preferred to walk home, even if she was tired, than undergo the humiliation of being relegated to the back of the bus because of her skin color.

As explained previously, self-esteem was also a matter of religious faith for domestic workers. They compared themselves to their employers and would often find out that their employers did not possess moral values such as humility or respect that are required to be considered as a good person in the eyes of a Christian. They compared themselves to white people according to what they saw in their employers' houses. Thus, the knowledge domestic workers had about their employers' intimacy helped them to be more confident and to understand that they could be superior to white people in many ways.

4. White People's Weaknesses

a. Knowledge of White People's Intimacy

Judith Rollins argues that one of the "most powerful protections" domestic workers had against white defining them as inferior was their "intimate knowledge of the realities of employers' lives".[65] Domestics knew all about their white employers' life because of their presence inside the family's intimacy. By contrast, white families were largely ignorant of their domestics' lives. Thus, the latter could keep secrets from their employers whereas they often knew their employers' biggest secrets. Susan Burdon Hudgens testified about this difference of knowledge of each other's lives between domestics and their employers: "I was acutely aware that [Elizabeth Griffin] had a life very separate from ours, with her own friends, church, music, and social community that we knew little about. […] She knew so much about

[64] Van Wormer, et al, 217.
[65] Rollins, 212-213.

me, so much about all of my family and our weaknesses and strengths." [66] Susan Burdon Hudgens and her family had a very close relationship with their domestic worker. Elizabeth Griffin worked for them for more than forty years. Hudgens said several times that she loved Elizabeth Griffin and she assumed that it was a reciprocal love. Indeed when she talked about Elizabeth Griffin's feelings she said: "She loved us dearly."[67] Despite this special bond between Hudgens' family and their domestic, they knew almost nothing about her private life. Susan Burdon Hudgens explained that they were "separate yet inseparable."[68] Separate because Elizabeth Griffin did not eat with them and had a different bathroom for example. But also because she had a life totally separated from her employers when she left work. Thus, Hudgens' family did not know anything about Elizabeth Griffin's family and friends or about her living conditions.

On the contrary, as Susan Burdon Hudgens told it, Elizabeth Griffin knew everything about her employers' lives: "She was an outsider who was an insider. […] She probably had a better understanding of the inner dynamics of our family than we did."[69] Elizabeth, like all other domestic workers, spent many hours in the house of her employers. She was present in their intimacy and knew all about their habits. Hence, domestic workers knew about some aspects of their employers' lives that were supposed to be private and that nobody outside the family knew about. As Susan Burdon Hudgens explained, Elizabeth Griffin knew about their strengths but also about their weaknesses.

For example, domestics could be the witnesses of infidelities or alcoholism. Louvenia Walker once worked for a woman who was an alcoholic. She told Susan Tucker: "She'd come in and just fall out, and scare you to death, 'cause if you never been round people that drink and get drunk, it's scary."[70] Domestic workers could be judgmental toward their employers concerning what they heard or saw in their houses, like Louvenia Walker who said about her alcoholic employer: "I'd be ashamed, you know—to have a nice house and be a good looking lady and do that kind of thing."[71] Walker, like many other domestic workers, knew that her employer was not as perfect as she would be in public in order to make people think that she was a respectable lady. When Walker said that she would be "ashamed" to act like her employer, it shows that she considered herself as having a better behavior than this woman.

[66] Van Wormer, et al, 244-245.
[67] Ibid, 241
[68] Ibid, 245.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Tucker, 125.
[71] Ibid, 126.

She preferred to be a domestic and to have a decent behavior than being a rich lady and acting disgracefully. Being present in white people's intimacy, often made domestic workers understand that white people were not better than black people and that sometimes it was even possible to be superior to them in many regards.

Employers very often used domestics as confidantes. They did so because they considered domestic workers as inferior and they did not care about their opinion. Judith Rollins explains: "The employer does not care of what the domestic thinks of her […] a person cannot be hurt or insulted by the judgments of those she genuinely believes to be her inferior."[72] Many white women admitted telling their domestics secrets they would never have told their mothers or best friends. Jane Louis, a former domestic, told Judith Rollins:

> Most employers like to talk to the people who work for them because you're not in their circle, you're not going to tell anybody who's important to them. I've been like a confidante… They talk to you anyplace. A white person will go up to a black stranger and tell them very private things—because they know it's not going to go.[73]

If their employers needed it, domestic workers could give them emotional support by listening to them or giving them some advice. The fact that white people confided their secrets and problems in their domestics whereas they did not confide in their family is a proof that domestic workers were not significant for them. Indeed, employers could not imagine domestics speaking to people from their close circle and could even less imagine them telling their secrets. Being treated as insignificant by white people could be humiliating and degrading for domestic workers. But being their employers' confidantes could also help them to be more confident. Once again, as they knew all the details of their employers' intimate lives, domestics could compare themselves to them. Some women, like Martha Calvert, thought that their employers' problems were insignificant compared to what they had to go through. They thought that their employers had nothing to complain about considering the quality of their lives. Martha Calvert told Susan Tucker:

> And with this lady I had to listen sometimes to such worthless garbage. She came in one day and said how her friend Ann and her husband make so much and they only pledged a thousand dollars to the charity and she is just hurt and devastated because that is her good friend. And to make matters even worse, she went to her masseuse, and he couldn't take her then, because he had just been called out on a home assignment. Then to make matters even worse, she couldn't even go get her hair done, because it was Monday. And I'd feel like telling her, 'You know what I could do with that thousand dollars?'[74]

[72] Rollins, 167.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Tucker 41.

The lady complained about things that seemed superficial to Martha Calvert. Indeed, domestic workers were very poor and money was always a concern for them. They only earned enough money to survive, thus complaining about a massage, like Martha Calvert's employer, could seem rather trivial for them. When their employers told them about their problems, domestics often understood that they were able to overcome more difficult challenges than white people who were used to living in comfort. Comparing themselves favorably to their employers helped domestic workers to be more self-confident.

Sometimes white women confided in their domestics about their loneliness and were often emotionally dependent on their household workers. Thus, domestics understood that white people might have better living conditions than black people but were not always happier than them.

b. Dependence on Domestic Workers

Domestic workers and employers were dependent on each other. On the one hand, domestic workers were economically dependent on their employers. On the other hand, white women needed domestic workers to maintain their houses. Many white women admitted that they would not have been able to do so without the help of a domestic worker. Indeed as Flora Talmage Landwehr explained to Katherine van Wormer, "I remember that my mother depended on these women to help her; running a household was very labor intensive."[75] White women needed help to do the laundry, cleaning, taking care of the children and preparing food. The whole running of the household was based on the work achieved by domestic workers.

Sometimes, white women needed domestic workers to take care of them because they were unable to do so themselves. For instance, Winnie Hefley was interviewed by Susan Tucker and told her that her employer was an alcoholic and that she could not do anything by herself: "She couldn't cook or clean up. When a person get in that drinking spell, you know how they get so unclean."[76] This woman was totally dependent on Winnie Hefley. The latter helped her remain clean and feed herself. Without Winnie Hefley this woman would not have been able to take care of herself.

Furthermore, Mary Hart told Katherine van Womer about her Grandmother: "Austine bossed Grandmother around. She would tell her what to eat, help her dress, when to take her medicine. She did it gently, but Grandmother was utterly dependent on Austine to organize

[75] Van Wormer, et al, 206.
[76] Tucker, 30.

her life."[77] Once again, this woman needed the help of her domestic worker on a daily basis. Austine's assistance was essential for her because of her advanced age.

White women's dependence on their household workers was also emotional. Some women who felt lonely were not especially looking for a good worker but rather for a companion or a friend. Judith Rollins interviewed Susan Keplin who told her about her domestic. She explained that she cared a lot about her domestic's personality:

> She's very honest. She's very clean. She's *very* loyal. She's intelligent though she hasn't had much schooling. […] She doesn't clean very well, you know, but I would never think of letting her go. I don't know, I really like her. She never comes to work on time but it's all right. We have a great relationship. She knows me so well…[78]

Susan Keplin's testimony demonstrates that she lacked companionship in her life. She needed more a friend than a cleaner and this is why she accepted that her domestic did not do her job very well. Many women, like Susan Keplin, admitted that they hired domestic workers because they did not like loneliness.[79] Indeed, white women generally did not work and could feel really lonely when their husbands were not at home. Thus, domestic workers could feel a void in those women's lives.

Anne Robertson was interviewed by Susan Tucker and she explained that she always thought of the maid as "being the family therapist." She thought that the domestic's working skills were less important than the emotional support she provided to the family. Indeed, she said to Susan Tucker: "The maid gave the love, the support, the continuity. And if they happened to clean and cook a little, that was fine! Psychologically, they were very supportive."[80]

All these women were dependent on their domestic workers, either because they needed them to perform the household tasks or because they were emotionally fragile (sometimes both). Usually, domestic workers knew that their employers needed them and this could make them feel a sense of importance.

On the other hand, some white women thought they needed a domestic worker only because of their cultural background. Indeed, in the South it was customary to hire domestic workers. David Katzman explains that because of this tradition the South did not develop as quickly as the North:

> The spread of commercial laundries reduced the number of washerwomen in all urban centers everywhere except in the South, where laundry firms never appeared in large numbers until after World War II. It is most likely that the Southern preference for hiring servants retarded the

[77] Van Wormer, et al, 223.
[78] Rollins, 121.
[79] Ibid, 96.
[80] Tucker, 135.

> development of commercial laundries. The Southern white pattern was to hire black servants, a custom that was integral part of Southern white urban life and that served to define black-white relations and signify class and status within the white community.[81]

Elise Talmage's testimony illustrates David Katzman's argument: "We were totally dependent on servant because we had not caught up with the times. We had no washing machines and no dryer and sported a drop kitchen behind the house. […] Now food had to be carried up through the butler's pantry, the breakfast room, the hall, and into the dining room."[82] Elise Talmage was born in 1922 in New Orleans, Louisiana. Innovations of the time such as washing machines, had not developed in the South contrary to the North and this is one reasons why Talmage's family were dependent on domestic workers. Moreover, it would not have been appropriate for a white lady to wash clothes or to carry food around the house. These tasks were only performed by domestics as argued by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham: "Southern etiquette demanded protection of white women's "racial honor" and required that they work under conditions described as "suitable for ladies" in contradistinction to the drudgery and dirty working conditions considered acceptable for black women."[83]

Since slavery, white women had been supposed to supervise their slaves or domestics in order to make sure that the house was well maintained.[84] Employing domestic workers was part of Southern culture and white women were growing up knowing that one day they would employ domestics. Indeed, their grandmothers had domestics, their mothers had domestics, and they had grown up with domestic workers taking care of them, hence they employed domestics too; they were expected to do so by segregationist culture.

In the South it was also customary for white children to be raised by black nursemaids.[85] These children developed love and attachment for these women. Many felt very sad when their nurses retired or died because they considered them as "members of the family". The relationship white children had with their black nurses (very similar to the mother-child relationship) involved a strong emotional dependence on these women.[86] Indeed, a large number of women interviewed by Susan Tucker and Katherine van Wormer stated that

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[81] Katzman, 60-62.
[82] Van Wormer, et al, 203.
[83] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race." *Signs*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1992): 260.
[84] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 97.
[85] Ritterhouse, 63.
[86] Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: the Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007) 80-82.

they considered their nurses as their mothers. Mary Patricia Foley explained: "As time went on, she really became a source of strength to me, like a mother."[87]

Unlike Mary Patricia Foley who felt that her nurse was "like a mother", Sarah Kingsley remembered telling people that her nurse was her actual mother which was not appropriate for a white girl. Thus, she explained what her nurse told her: "She used to say 'Sarah don't tell those boys that.' But to me, she was my mother. I felt the need to say, 'I love this woman.'"[88]

Ellen Owens also described to Susan Tucker the special relationship she had with her nurse: "She was like my mother. That's why I called her Mama Lou. My mother and father both were real busy, and when I was ten years old, my mother decided to become a doctor, so Mama Lou was the one who raised us."[89]

Finally, Melvina Scott explained that her mother raised white children who considered her as a mother:

> She practically raised them, she changed their diapers and put them on her shoulders and patted their backs when they would cry. She cared for them when they were sick or when they needed to eat. She practically took care of them from the entire time they were born, so she pretty much was their second mother. That's why they called her Big Mamma.[90]

All these children grew up in the segregated South, and their nurses took over the role of parent because their actual parents were not present to take care of them. The nurses gave them all the love and tenderness a child needs to be happy. This is why they were so close to those black women who represented a parent figure. A large number of southern white children were dependent on their nurses because they truly loved them and considered them as full members of the family. Flora Talmage Landwehr even told Katherine van Wormer: "I will always be indebted to her for all the love and care she gave us."[91]

Domestic workers usually had to leave their own children at home in order to take care of white children. This was a very difficult sacrifice to make. Thus, it could be comforting for them to know that white children really loved them and appreciated what they did for them. Domestic workers for their parts, tried to take some emotional distance and not to become too much attached to white children because they knew that one day they would grow up and become part of the group that oppressed them. However, as Susan Tucker explained in her book, black women "did see themselves as warmer and more balanced in their approach to

[87] Tucker, 53.
[88] Ibid, 59.
[89] Ibid, 141.
[90] Van Wormer, et al, 148.
[91] Ibid, 207.

children. They felt that white women 'didn't know how to love children' […]"[92] Black women compared themselves favorably to white women and took pride in the idea that they had a higher ability to raise children than white women.

White people's dependence on their domestic workers was very important for domestics' psychological resilience. The idea that white people needed domestic workers to take care of them helped African American women to be more resilient. Once again, it made them feel superior physically and emotionally to their employers.

Employers were often very intrusive and asked their domestics personal questions about their private lives. Nevertheless, domestics tried to keep their lives secret and not to tell much about themselves in order not to become even more vulnerable. They knew that is was a good way to protect themselves from the control of their employers. It was important for domestic workers to maintain some distance from their employers.[93] Keeping their lives secret helped domestics to ensure psychological distance between them end their employers. Physical distance was also very important for black domestics' resistance, as explained in the following part.

[92] Tucker, 43.
[93] Ibid, 32.

II. Non-Confrontational Resistance Strategies

In addition to internal coping strategies that helped them to remain psychologically resilient, domestic workers used behavioral resistance strategies. It means that they changed their behavior in order to improve their lives. Non-confrontational resistance strategies were behavioral coping strategies that did not imply a direct confrontation between domestics and their employers. Indeed, when domestic workers preferred live-out, when they migrated to the North, educated themselves or tricked their employers, they did not directly oppose their employers. Domestic workers who used non-confrontational strategies did not actually want to make white people understand their dissatisfaction but rather wanted to improve their living and working conditions by themselves. This kind of resistance emerged in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century with black people's migration to the North and the transition from live-in to live-out. It continued to develop in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement. Indeed, many domestic workers were encouraged by this movement in order to make their lives better.

1. Living Out

According to David Katzman, the time period from 1870 to 1920 was "the key period in the transition of service from live-in to live-out occupation".[1] During this period, the number of live-out domestic workers increased significantly in the United-States. For instance, in the city of Fall River, the percentage of live-out domestics was 15.6 in 1900 and 35.7 in 1920. In Indianapolis they were 30.3% in 1900 and 54.7 in 1920. In Atlanta they were 63.1% in 1900 and 68.5% in 1920 and in New Orleans the percentage was 54.9 in 1900 and 62.3 in 1920.[2] The change from live-in to live-out came with industrialization and urbanization and from 1900 to 1920 the system of day work developed both in the South and in the North. In the 1920s a study revealed that 93 percent of day workers in Baltimore were black women. When Southern black domestic workers moved to the North of the United States in the 1920s, they brought with them their preference for day work and live-out and this is why these practices developed in the North.[3] David M. Katzamn's analysis allows a better

[1] Katzman, vii.
[2] Joseph Hill, *Women in Gainful Occupations 1870 to 1920,* Census Monograph IX (Washington, D.C: Praeger, 1929) 139-140.
[3] Katzman, 91.

understanding of the concept of day work: "The position of day worker was different from that of cook or of general servant wishing to live out; the day worker herself was the forerunner of the modern domestic cleaning woman who divides her work among a number of employers."[4]

Domestic workers who lived in their employers' homes were the most vulnerable because they were constantly under the control of the white family. They were the most likely to believe in white people's idea that black people were inferior because they were isolated and had nobody to talk to. They could not receive any moral support in order to strengthen themselves. Live-in domestic workers were subjected to "invasions of privacy."[5] Judith Rollins argues that "more than one domestic said she had suspected her employer of searching her room on her day off."[6] As they lived inside their employers' homes, live-in domestic workers had no way to protect their intimacy and privacy. Moreover, employers asked their domestic workers about their private lives, which made them very uncomfortable. Nancy Clay, interviewed by Judith Rollins, explained that employers wanted to know everything about their domestics' lives so that they could control them.[7]

Living-out was a solution for domestic workers to protect their privacy and keep a certain control over their lives. Living- out implied both physical and psychological distance between domestics and employers. On the one hand, it implied physical distance because they lived in a completely different neighborhood considering that during segregation black and white people did not live in the same areas. On the other hand, it implied psychological distance because once the work done, they could go back home and try not to think about it until the next day, contrary to live-in domestics who had the feeling that work never ended.

The situation of live-in domestics was very similar to the condition of slaves. Margo Townsend said to Judith Rollins that the live-in domestic worker is not perceived as a human being by her employer but "becomes a possession" that is part of the household.[8] Employers could assert their domination more easily over domestics who lived in their houses. They could control everything in their lives and thus these domestics were more subjected to exploitation. For live-in domestic workers it was like the work never ended. They had to work from the moment they woke up, which was usually early in the morning, until they went to

[4] Katzman, 90.
[5] Rollins, 146.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid, 164.
[8] Ibid, 146.

bed. For instance, Marva Woods, a domestic worker who worked during the 1960s and 1970s in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, testified:

> I just worked until I got the children to bed. Every Thursday and every other Sunday was off. I got up in the morning, fixed breakfast, got the children ready for school, and carried little John to nursery school. I'd get them all off then start doing my housework: the washing, cleaning up. John would come home about twelve. I'd go and get him and give him his lunch and put him to bed. I would iron or something while he was in bed. When he got up. I'd take him for a walk. Then I'd cook dinner and serve it. After I cleaned up the kitchen and got the children to bed, I was finished…[9]

Besides being exploited, live-in domestics were cut off from the rest of the world. Irene Williams remembers that her mother was a live-in domestic and that she could not spend time with her family:

> My mother-they called her a live-in maid because she stayed with the withe folks. She left us with our grandmother so she could go off to work. And I remember her coming home, and I was so glad to see my mother. She stayed with us Saturday and Sunday, and she told me, she said "Baby, Mamma got to leave again." And I would cry. I didn't want my mother to leave but she did. […] I wanted my mother there with me then. But she couldn't take care there, she had to work.[10]

Many domestic workers preferred to live outside their employers' homes because it allowed them to return to their community every night. As already explained, being among their community was very important for domestic workers' psychological resilience. It was not possible for live-in domestic workers to have a social life and to meet people. It was more difficult for them to have friends and to find a husband. Live-out was more compatible with marriage and family life.[11] Domestics who had a family preferred living-out because they could go back home after work and take care of their own children. Indeed, Irene Williams' mother, like many other live-in domestics, certainly blamed herself every time she left her children. Thus, living-out was a means to spend more time with their families.

The labor historian, David M. Katzman, explains the functioning of day work in household labor:

> Unlike day laborers, who worked for some limited time period for an employer and then had to seek other employment, day workers in household labor had a regular schedule of employment. Laundresses, for instance, might work Mondays and Tuesdays for one family, Wednesdays and Thursdays for another, and Fridays and Saturdays for a third.[12]

Women who worked as day workers had even more freedom than live-out workers because they did not work for the same white family all week long. If their employers did not treat them right they could quit more easily because they were not committed to one family contrary to domestics who worked for the same family from generation to generation.

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[9] Rollins, 71.
[10] Van Womer, et al, 177.
[11] Katzman, 90-91.
[12] Ibid, 91.

Moreover, living-in domestic workers were the most likely to be the victims of sexual harassment by their employers' husbands. They were always in the house, they were vulnerable and completely alone, thus they represented an easy target for men who wanted to sexually abuse them.

In the Southern context of segregation, white men were in a position of power and usually they were not punished if they raped a black woman. As Hazel Rankins explained to David W. Jackson, black women thought that no one would believe them if they accused a white man of rape: "If something got out, they not going to believe you, they going to believe the white guy. So you wouldn't say anything to anyone about what he had done or what he tried."[13] In the context of a society controlled by white supremacists, black women were not in a position to make accusations against white men. In the South, public institutions such as the justice system were controlled by white men. Thus, it was very difficult for black women to accuse white men of sexual harassment. Besides, white people tended to claim that black women being raped by white men was not a real problem. For instance, Frances Galvin, a white woman born in the South 1897, said to Susan Tucker:

> And now they cry rape all the time. There's always notice of a colored woman being raped in the paper, by a colored man or a white man-mostly colored. And yet I know a maid of a friend of mine. She has had six children and every one had a different father. And she just told me, "The Lord meant it that way." And one of the children's father got sick, and came back here, and she nursed him and somebody said, "After what you went through with him, are you going to take care of him?" She said "It's my child's father." That's the way she figured it. Isn't it amazing? And she's a preacher-she's a Holiness preacher. But that's the way old-time Negroes were. They didn't worry about this rape business.[14]

Frances Galvin, like many other white people who lived in the South during the segregation era, minimized the seriousness of black women being raped. At the time, black women having sex with white men was a taboo subject and neither white nor black people talked about it. For example, Vinella Byrd, a black woman interviewed by Charletta Sudduth said: "I'm sure some of the black women had babies with white men. But it wasn't a thing that was talked about."[15] This taboo made black women even more vulnerable because they knew that they had to cope with the issue of rape on their own and that it was very difficult for them to defend themselves.

It was even more difficult for domestic workers who were the victims of sexual harassment because they could not risk losing their jobs by accusing employers' husbands of harassing them. Voncille Sherard remembered the time her employer assaulted her:

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[13] Van Wormer, et al, 158.
[14] Tucker, 174.
[15] Van Wormer, et al, 76.

> One day the husband came home alone at about one or two. I was upstairs making the beds, and he came upstairs and tried to force me in the bed. He asked me how much his wife was paying me. I told him thirteen dollar a week, and he started to tell me how much more I could make if I would go to bed with him. I just started hollering. Well, with my screaming, the husband left.[16]

This kind of harassment was common for domestic workers. Sometimes it happened to live-out domestics but live-in domestics were easier targets. They spent the nights in their employers' homes which made it easier for white men to assault them. Consequently, besides allowing domestic workers to establish both physical and psychological distance with their employers, live-out was also a way to limit the risks of sexual harassment and rape.

As argued by David M. Katzman, black women, more than other domestic workers, preferred live-out and day work.[17] Black women working as domestic workers represented a majority in the South. In 1920 they represented 82 percent of all Southern servants whereas they only represented 18 percent of Northern servants. [18] From the mid-nineteenth century to the 1920s, in the North, Irish and German immigrants represented the majority of household workers because they were immigrants and thus they were considered inferior to native white Americans.[19] But as explained by Judith Rollins: "The migration of blacks north during World War I and the drop in immigration of those foreign-born groups more likely to enter domestic service caused black women to become more significant in the occupation outside the South during and after the 1920's."[20] Indeed, during the First World War the Great Migration became massive and black families started to migrate from the South of the United-States to the North. Black domestics "brought with them their preference for live-out service and day work, which was most compatible with marriage, and live-in service began to fade away."[21]

2. Migration to the Cities and the North

At the beginning of the twentieth century, while a great majority of African American still lived in the South, many domestic workers began to move from the countryside to the cities. The cities offered better perspectives than the country because there were many more potential employers in the cities. In the country the main activity was agriculture and black people were usually sharecroppers. They worked in the fields owned by white families. Sometimes the sharecropper's wife was employed by the white family as household worker.

[16] Tucker, 217.
[17] Katzman, 93.
[18] Rollins, 54.
[19] Ibid, 51.
[20] Ibid, 54.
[21] Katzman, viii.

The problem is that in the country, there were usually not enough white families that could employ black women as domestic workers. Thus, African American women moved to the cities to have a better chance of finding an employment.[22] Many domestic workers preferred working in the cities because they did not have to work in the fields anymore (working in the fields was a really exhausting work.) Furthermore, African American women expected to receive better treatment and to get higher wages in the cities. For instance, Sallie Hutton's testimony illustrates this movement of African American sharecroppers moving to the cities to find better working conditions: "It wasn't a bad life, but the crops were failing. I came down to Mobile when I was eighteen. I had married when I was fifteen, and we'd gone to farming, but you couldn't make the money you could in Mobile."[23]

Some white people in the countryside were almost as poor as black people and could not afford to pay their domestics a fair wage. Essie Favrot, for example, remembered that her first employers were very poor people. It was in the late 1920s and she only received fifty cents a day. [24] Later, in the 1960s, it was not better for domestic workers in the rural areas as Annie Pearl Stevenson testified: "If I worked in the country, where we lived, we would work all day for three dollars. 'All day' meaning from early morning, five or six o'clock to dusk/dark. Like twelve-hour days for three dollars or $2.50"[25]

Winnie Hefley told Susan Tucker that when she worked in the countryside, her employer paid her about $3.00 or $3.50 a week, which was a very low salary. Winnie Hefley decided to move to Mobile in order to get a better pay. She worked for "Miz Watts" from 1942 to 1972 and this woman gave her $10.00 a week. Winnie Hefley remembered that she even got a vacation with pay.[26] The difference in the salary between rural areas and the cities was very significant and this is why it played an important role in domestic workers' decision to leave the countryside.

In the South, since the 1880s, the cities offered better opportunities for black people as Jacqueline Jones argues in *Labor of Love Labor of Sorrow:*

> [The cities] afforded rich cultural, educational, and religious opportunities not available to blacks under slavery or to freed people scattered about the southern countryside. The social structure of black urban communities was much more complex than in areas where everyone made a living from the soil, and some tradesmen and professionals in cities achieved a relatively comfortable standard of living.[27]

[22] Tucker, 104.
[23] Ibid, 33.
[24] Ibid, 118.
[25] Van Wormer, et al, 135.
[26] Tucker, 29.
[27] Jones, 75.

Indeed, the cities were more developed than the country. There were better transportation systems, better infrastructures such as schools and churches, and "indoor plumbing for at least some people, and electric lights."[28] Thus, many black women hoped that moving to the cities was an opportunity of improving both their living and working conditions.

During the First World War, African Americans began to migrate massively from the Southern states to the North. In the South, they were completely "stuck in a caste system."[29] Black people were maintained under the control and domination of White Supremacists by the Jim Crow laws. These laws controlled the lives of Southern African Americans for generations: "The Jim Crow regime persisted from the 1880s to the 1960s, some eighty years, the average life span of a fairly healthy man. It afflicted the lives of at least four generation and would not die without bloodshed, as the people who left the South foresaw."[30] Many African Americans saw in the North a promise of a better future. Isabel Wilkerson explains how this migration began:

> It was during the First World War that a silent pilgrimage took its first steps within the borders of this country. The fever rose without warning or notice or much in the way of understanding by those outside its reach. It would not end until the 1970s and would set into motion changes in the North and South that no one, not even the people doing the leaving, could have imagined at the start of it or dreamed would take nearly a lifetime to play out.[31]

Historians have called this movement the Great Migration. From the 1910s to the 1970s, about six million African Americans migrated to the North.[32] Among them were many women who worked as domestic workers in the South who expected a better salary and better treatments from their employers. Migrating to the North was a way to escape the segregated South. Domestic workers hoped to emancipate themselves and to find better working conditions in the North. The Great Migration completely changed the demographic composition of the United States. Indeed, before the Migration almost all the African Americans lived in the South. According to Isabel Wilkerson, "by [the 1970s] nearly half of all black Americans—some forty-seven percent—would be living outside the South, compared to ten percent when the Migration began."[33]

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[28] Tucker, 105.
[29] Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage, 2010) 9.
[30] Wilkerson, 11.
[31] Ibid, 10.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid, 12.

Some women like Annie Victoria Johnson said that the situation was not better in the North than in the South. Unfortunately, she worked for very mean and hateful employers.[34] But generally, domestic workers thought that the North was a better place for them.

Judith Rollins argues that black women preferred the personal relationship they had with their employers' in the South to the more professional system in the North. Indeed, Northern employers "worked domestics harder" because they payed higher wages than Southern employers, thus they expected the domestics to do a very good work. Morevoer, they cared less about their domestics from an emotional point of view. They perceived domestic workers as their employees, not as their friends.[35] Rollins' assertion might have been true for some domestic workers but the majority preferred an employer-employee relationship and making more money in the North. Being treated as an employee rather than a "member of the family", like many white families called them in the South, put some distance between domestics and their employers. Black women preferred to have a strictly professional relationship with their employers because it prevented the latter from becoming too familiar with them and from taking the opportunity to exploit them.

Odessa Roberts for instance, told David W. Jackson that moving to Des Moines, Iowa, improved her life: "I moved here to Des Moines, Iowa, and that when things started really looking good. They were paying five dollars an hour. That was good money! You were treated like you were a person too. Much better."[36] According to many black women who worked as domestic workers in the North, the emphasis on race was not as strong in the North as in the South. The rules of racial etiquette did not exist in the North contrary to the South. Jennifer Ritterhouse's analysis of racial etiquette is helpful in order to better understand this notion:

> Etiquette, meanwhile, although sometimes learned as a set of discrete and specific rules, served in practice as a sort of script, guiding interracial encounters and providing a framework within which blacks and whites alike could understand their experiences, albeit from different perspectives.[37]

In the segregated South, people always defined themselves and other people according to race. The rules of racial etiquette were implicit but everybody, whites and blacks, knew about them. They were part of the Southern cultural norms and reinforced the inequalities between black and white people. Those rules were, as Goffman would call them,

[34] Van Wormer, et al, 100.
[35] Rollins, 68.
[36] Van Wormer, et al, 116.
[37] Jennifer Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) 5.

"asymmetrical" because white people and black people did not receive the same treatment from each other. Black people had to call a white man "sir" whereas a white man could call a black man by his first name. For domestic workers, the rules of racial etiquette were very specific. These were the most common rules: domestics could not enter their employers' houses through the front door, they could not use the white family's bathrooms, they could not eat with the family at the table and they were called by their first names.[38]

The domestics who moved from the South explained that those rules did not exist in the North. Many African American domestic workers thought they were more perceived as real persons instead of being treated as inferior because of their race. Odessa Roberts explained that Northern employers called their domestics by their first names but that domestics could also use the familiar form of address for their employers. This was different from the South where the forms of address were usually asymmetrical and employers called their domestics by their first names whereas domestics had to use the formal form of address. Migrating to the North could be a solution for domestic workers to improve their working conditions and to be treated with respect and dignity.[39]

Some women also found that the North offered better educational opportunities than the South. In the North, education was stressed for white children and for black children, unlike in the South where schools were segregated in order to prevent black children from attending them.[40] African American women wanted their children to get an education because they wanted a better future for them. The theme of education is developed in the following part.

3. Education

Since slavery and during the segregation era, white people in the South had tried to prevent African Americans from getting an education.[41] Indeed, a group that is not educated is easier to oppress and to maintain in a low status. On the contrary, education gives the opportunity to oppressed groups like slaves to emancipate themselves. Heather Andrea Williams argues in *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*:

> Literacy provided the means to write a pass to freedom, to learn of abolitionist activities or to read the Bible. Because it most often happened in secret, the very act of learning to read and write subverted the master-slave relationship and created a private life for those who were owned

[38] Van Wormer, et al, 185.
[39] Ibid, 191.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005) 22.

> by others. Once literate, many used this hard-won skill to disturb the power relations between master and slave, as they fused their desire for literacy with their desire for freedom.[42]

Educated black people would represent a threat to the established order of society. As Williams explains, masters knew that and this is why they tried to prevent slaves from learning how to read and write: "Reading indicated to the world that this so-called property had a mind, and writing foretold the ability to construct an alternative narrative about bondage itself. Literacy among slaves would expose slavery, and masters knew it."[43]

Thus, white people usually preferred when their slaves or domestic workers were ignorant because if a black person was educated it would go against whites' belief that black people are inferior. Indeed, May Lund argues: "If you have too much education, that brings you up closer to their level and they're threatened by you. They're not going to be comfortable with you."[44] White people preferred African Americans to be lower than them. If black people were educated, they were less easy to control and could threaten the higher status of white people. Elizabeth Roy and many others domestic workers even acted as less intelligent than they actually were so that their employers would not feel threatened by them. Elizabeth Roy explains: "You've got to stay down here [making a low gesture with her hand] and act like you're down there. They might say they have nothing against black people but they still want you in your place."[45]

Many domestic workers understood that their lack of education was one of the main reasons why they were maintained at the bottom of society. Domestic work was considered as low-prestige occupation and it was believed that it did not require skills. It explains why women who were uneducated were limited to domestic work. Nelly Kane who began working as a domestic worker in the 1930s was a bit resentful when she explained to Judith Rollins that her lack of education prevented her from getting a better job than domestic work:

> I would've liked to have continued my education. But when I was younger I didn't have the privilege of continuously staying in school. […] There were many other things I would have liked to do. Maybe to teach or maybe go ahead and get a business course. But by lacking the proper education, that's why I went mostly to domestic work. There wasn't anything much you could do but housework in order to survive.[46]

The majority of black women who could not get the education they wanted were very frustrated about it. This is why they pushed their children to go to school and university. They wanted them to have a good situation in the future. Nancy Valley, for example, was born in

[42] Williams, 1-2.
[43] Ibid, 2.
[44] Rollins, 197.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Rollins, 110.

the South in 1888. She was only 8 years old at the time of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court case that declared segregation legal on the basis of the "separate but equal" doctrine. Thus, Nancy Valley was a child when segregation became an institution. It means that she had no chance to get the same education as white children. She told Susan Tucker that she endured domestic work so that her son could go to school. He eventually graduated from Talladega College which was a source of pride for Nancy Valley.[47] In the segregated South, black children could not go to the same schools as white children and they often had to walk for miles in order to attend a "colored" school. Even if segregated schools existed in the North too, many African Americans found that it was easier for black children to go to school in the North.[48] Odessa Roberts, for example, was born in Monroe, Louisiana, in 1937. She had endured segregation from the day she was born. She explained that major events of the 1960s such as President Kennedy's assassination and Martin Luther King's actions led her to join the Great Migration and to move to Des Moines. The context of the 1960s led her to act in order to improve her life. Once in Des Moines, Odessa Roberts encouraged her children to go to school because she did not have a chance to get an education herself. She understood that it would be better for her children to grow up in the North where they could get the education they deserved. Her children were "educated all the way up to professional levels" and one of them became an attorney.[49] Odessa Roberts knew that if she wanted her life to improve, she had to make it better by herself. After encouraging her children to go to school, she told David W. Jackson that she educated herself to become a nurses' assistant:

> I educated myself and did some nurses' assistant training. […] Yeah I went to a nursing home and they gave me classes. It was at Riverview Manor. I had someone that started me up with education. […] I put all the housework down and become a nurse's assistant. They called it a nurses' aide. I was a nurse's assistant for nine years. Then I started to private duty. I did things nurses did then, and look at me now! I came from a little nobody to somebody.[50]

Thanks to education and training, Odessa Roberts had the opportunity to leave domestic service and to do a job that she liked and made her proud of herself. She could emancipate herself from the occupation of domestic service that was considered degrading by many people.

More importantly, domestic workers wanted their daughters to be educated because they did not want them to do domestic work too. They did not want their daughters to endure

[47] Tucker, 77.
[48] Susan Goldman Rubin, *Brown vs. Board of Education: a Fight for Simple Justice* (New York; Holiday House, 2016) 4.
[49] Van Wormer, et al, 116.
[50] Van Wormer, et al, 117.

all the sufferings linked to this occupation. Voncille Sherard told Susan Tucker that she "would never, under any circumstances, let [her] daughters work in a home."[51] It was very painful for black women who worked in white homes to be humiliated and treated as inferior because of their race. They only did this work because they had no choice. This is why they wanted their daughters to have the right to choose their careers and did everything in their power to send them to school. Zelda Greene testified about her daughter getting a higher education:

> A lot of people told me they were scared to let the white people know they were sending their children to college. But I wanted them to know mine was going, because most of the time… I'll tell you the way white people used to be long time ago. They would say 'Well, if your mother used to work for me, you grow up, and then after she got too old, the children will work for me." They would just keep it coming on down from generation to generation. I say, it's going to stop right there! My daughter she won't need to think she need to do that days work for a living.[52]

Zelda Greene wanted to break the pattern of black women becoming domestic workers generation after generation. She did not accept the fact that white people thought they had the right to decide for black women's future. She wanted her daughter to go to college so that she could decide for herself. Like Zelda Greene, domestic workers could achieve emancipation through their children by pushing them to get higher education qualifications.

Like Odessa Roberts, besides pushing their children to go to school, some domestic workers tried to get an education and to get degrees in order to emancipate from domestic service. Odette Harris, for example, enrolled in night school in order to get a high school diploma. She did so because she knew she had the potential to be more than a household worker. She wanted to study because she did not want to be stuck in domestic service for the rest of her life. She went to college and eventually left her employers to create her own homemaking agency.[53] She became her own boss and did not have to rely on white employers in order to earn money anymore.

Indeed, getting an education was also a way for black women to get more gratifying jobs than domestic work, such as clerical work for instance.[54] Jacqueline Jones also argues that higher education could allow some black women to have very prestigious careers: "Female students in prestigious, predominantly white colleges gradually became more and

[51] Tucker, 221.
[52] Ibid, 204.
[53] Rollins, 177.
[54] Jones, 304.

more likely to train for careers in the traditionally male fields of law, medicine, and business."[55]

According to their testimonies, when black women wanted to leave domestic work they tried to get degrees in order to enter various different occupations. Essie Favrot explained to Susan Tucker that it was hard to find a job even though she had a nurse's aide degree, but she persisted. Despite discriminations, she found a job that she loved:

> So I had my little diploma in hand, and I went out to the nursing homes to get a job. And no jobs! They told me they were hiring only experienced nurse's aides, but I applied anyway. I thought it might be discrimination, but I figured I'd keep trying. We were used to discrimination; it didn't stop me. I landed the position of the laundry manager. Now I'm the executive housekeeper at a hospital, and I like it very much—more than I think I would like being a nurse's aide. I have more responsibility. I supervise fifteen people.[56]

Even if she did not become a nurse's assistant, Essie Favrot left domestic work thanks to her perseverance in order to get a degree and to find a job. Being an executive housekeeper was more gratifying than being a domestic worker because of the responsibilities it implied. When she was a domestic worker she was supervised by her white employer, at the hospital she was the one supervised the workers under her responsibility.

Essie Favrot explained that she was inspired by Martin Luther King's actions. She said that she once thought: "I said, now here I am sitting here, and this man is there in Memphis and lost his life trying to upgrade the black people. And I'm sitting here making five dollars a day just as satisfied, and I said, 'Lord, have mercy, Jesus, if it's your will, I'm to get out there and do better.'"[57] This statement demonstrates that the Civil Rights Movement had the power to push black domestic workers to fight for their rights and to finally dare to struggle against racism. Martin Luther King encouraged Essie Favrot to improve her life. Thus, she went back to school and studied nursing and she eventually became an executive housekeeper at a hospital. Inspired by Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement, Essie Favrot, like many other black women, found the strength to fight for a better life and to emancipate from domestic work by doing a job she could be proud of.

Other women left domestic service in order to work in completely different sectors. Dorothy Weather for instance, was a well-educated woman who worked as a maid and housekeeper and then became a caretaker for social events. [58] Juliana Licoln did domestic work because, as a young mother she needed money, but she eventually went to college and

[55] Ibid, 303.
[56] Tucker, 120.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Tucker, 193.

became a speech therapist. [59] Finally, Leila Parkerson explained to Susan Tucker that she preferred being a clerk than a domestic worker:

> When I first came to New York, I was staying with an aunt who was a domestic. She made more as a domestic than I did as a clerk, but do you think I'd give up being a clerk to make more money? No. I wanted a job that was not traditionally associated with blacks, and I didn't want to have to depend on white generosity when times were rough.[60]

Leila Parkerson's testimony proves that money was not the first motivation for domestic workers. Very often, being independent and doing a job that they could be proud of was more important for them. Domestic service was associated with servitude and exploitation, thus black women wanted to avoid it. All the women mentioned previously educated themselves because they did not want to be forced to do domestic work for the rest of their lives. They wanted to have a choice. Education allowed them to emancipate themselves from the system that sought to maintain them under the control of white people.

As already explained, some domestic workers acted as less intelligent than they actually were so that their employers would not feel threatened by them. They tricked their employers by behaving just as the stereotypes and controlling images defined them. The following part develops the different tricks used by domestic workers to fool their employers.

4. Tricking Whites

For white employers, the perfect domestic worker corresponded to the mammy. She had to be respectful, submissive and loyal to her employer. The characteristic of the perfect domestic is that she accepted her subordination.[61] Very often, domestic workers were not really as submissive and as loyal as they seemed to be. They only played the roles of the mammy. Deference could be used to trick white people. Judith Rollins calls this kind of resistance the "Uncle Tome *performance.*"[62] Domestic workers acted exactly as they were expected to by their employers. This "performance" was a means to protect themselves but it also allowed domestic workers to fool their employers. For example, black people were said to be less intelligent than white people. White people wanted uneducated domestic workers because they knew that they were more easily controlled. If the domestic worker acted as less intelligent, the employer would feel superior and would think that she could take advantage of the situation whereas in reality she was the one who was being fooled. Indeed, when their

[59] Ibid, 169.
[60] Ibid, 165.
[61] Collins, 71.
[62] Rollins, 169.

employers asked them to perform a task, some domestic workers obediently consented to do it, but once their employers left they actually did not do it. For example, if the employer asked her domestic to clean the bathroom even if it was not really dirty, the domestic would not clean it and would tell her employer the contrary.

Elizabeth Ryder's employer, for instance, asked her to get on her knees to scrub the floor but she did not want to do it. When her employer left she washed the floor but she did not get on her knees to do so. Her employer also asked her to do the laundry but she thought that she already had too much work to do. She said that she "had to take care of [herself]" Thus, she did not do the laundry correctly. She explained that she "messed up on the laundry." [63] Domestic workers had a lot of work to do, which was already really tiring, thus they did not want to do tasks they considered unnecessary. However, employers usually thought that their domestic workers were obedient and did everything they were asked to but actually, there were many domestics who played the "Uncle Tom *performance*" and tricked their employers.

Many white people also described African Americans as lazy and thus some domestic workers acted as such. For example, Aletha Vaughn explained that she did not work as hard for whites who said such things about black people.[64] Just like Aletha Vaughn, domestic workers could reverse the situation and use the stereotypes about black people against their employers. In order to trick white people who considered themselves as superior, domestics could act as lazy and stupid. In the end, the stereotypes that were initially created to control black women were used against white people. It did not profit employers because the work they expected to be done was not done correctly.

Wearing the mask of the perfect servant was a way to resist white people's oppression without being aggressive. Judith Rollins argues: "This 'unaggressive aggressiveness' yields two kinds of psychological rewards: appeasement of guilt and a sense of superiority." Indeed, some domestic workers felt better when they acted kindly with employers who tried to oppress them. They preferred to use a peaceful way of resistance rather than responding to white people's hostility with hatred.

Nevertheless, some domestic workers who were interviewed by Katherine van Wormer and other scholars admitted that they used very dirty tricks to "punish" the whites who were mean to them. This kind of action reflected the anger some domestics could feel towards their employers. They usually needed to fight back when the white family mistreated

[63] Ibid, 143.
[64] Tucker, 207.

them, in order to feel better. For example, Annie Victoria Johnson explained what her sister did when her employer tried to fool her. Once the white woman told her that she paid her whereas she did not. Annie Victoria Johnson remembers what her sister told her:

> [The employer] left that day and told them she had to go to a cub meeting. And she left a turkey for my sister to put in the stove. She said, "When I cleaned the bathroom, I took the toothbrush and cleaned the toilet and stuck it back in the holder." She said, "I took one of my socks and buttered that turkey!" She said, "When they do dirty, I got some tricks to get it back."[65]

The employer of Annie Victoria Johnson's sister told her that she put the pay in her purse but the domestic realized that she had the same amount of money in her purse as when she arrived in the morning. The employer thought that her domestic could not count the money and that she would not notice if she did not pay her. Johnson's sister did not accept being considered as stupid. Even though the tricks were hidden and the employers did not know about it, Johnson's sister knew that she humiliated them as much as they humiliated her. Thus, tricking her employers was a way to take revenge.

Moreover, the rules of racial etiquettes could be very degrading for domestic workers. Hazel Rankins and her sister for instance, were very resentful regarding those rules. Hazel Rankins said:

> They washed you plate and put it over there where they put their dog plate, and your plate never comes close to where they put their plate. But you clean their bathroom and do their cooking and all that, but you weren't good enough to eat out of their plate or use their spoons. That was separate. And I just couldn't figure out why, you know. I'm cooking your food, but I can't eat off your plates. Well, you already know that you couldn't sit at the table, because if you had to use the back door in order to come in, and you out there hanging their clothes, sweeping their yards, but yet you're using their back door.[66]

She did not understand why white people treated black people as if they were not human beings and her bitterness is perceptible in her testimony. Whitehite employers did not want their domestics to use their bathroom. Hazel Rankins' sister purposely went against her employers' will and used the bathroom when her employers were absent. Hazel Rankins testified:

> My sister—me and my sister was very close, and she would say they didn't want to use their bathroom. They would want you to go out to the outhouse. But as soon as they would get gone, my sister told me, "I would not only clean the bathroom, but I'd take a bath in the bathtub." […] She said "I wanted to see what that bathtub felt like." Because we didn't have one you know. When she'd be telling me about it, I'd just laugh and laugh and laugh. It's just funny stuff. She said that she cleaned the bathroom, why not take a bath in the bathtub? She said, "I'd just take my bath and I'd hurry up and I'd clean it back up, and they never would know what happened."[67]

[65] Van Wormer, et al, 102.
[66] Van Wormer, et al, 158.
[67] Ibid, 159.

Hazel Rankins and her sister made fun of white people by going against the rule that prevented blacks from using white people's bathrooms. They knew that if the employers discovered it they would be furious and this is what incited Rankins' sister to do it. She wanted to rebel against racism. Once again, even if it was hidden, taking a bath in the bathtub of her employers was a rebellious act. She intentionally challenged the rules of racial etiquette.

A large number of domestic workers did not confront their employers, they tried to find peaceful ways to fight against subordination and discrimination. For instance, they usually did not tell their employers if they did not want to perform a task, they simply did not do it. Nevertheless, some domestics were more rebellious and wanted their employers to know when they were dissatisfied. Those women used confrontational resistance strategies in order to improve their condition.

III. Confrontational resistance strategies at an individual level

Very often domestic workers had to use confrontational resistance strategies because non-confrontational coping strategies were not sufficient in order to really improve their condition. For example, domestic workers who preferred live-out to live-in improved their living and working conditions by taking some distance from their employers, but did not directly challenge racism and subordination. As explained in the previous part, some domestic workers were inspired by the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1950s and 1960s. A clear evolution occurred during this period. Domestic workers became more active in the way they resisted oppression. They were encouraged by the Civil Rights Movement and decided to confront their employers and to openly fight against discriminations. Thus, the time period from the 1950s to the late 1960s was the key period in the transition from non-confrontational resistance strategies to confrontational resistance strategies.

For example, Penny Hanks remembered her grandmother calling black people "Nigras" around her domestic workers. One of them could not stand the grandmother's disrespectful behavior. First, she told her to stop calling black people "Nigras". She dared to confront the grandmother and not to let her disrespect black people. Penny Hanks remembered: "My grandmother, as I found out later, lectured her about how happy the slaves had been and that "Nigras" should be grateful for the life they have. The next day, the sitter arrived wearing a sweatshirt with the words BLACK POWER on it! She then quit at the end of the day."[1] According to Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, the goal of the Black Power movement:

> It is a call for black people in [the United-States] to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support those organizations. It is a call to reject the racist institutions and values of this society.[2]

This Black Power movement grew out of the Civil Rights Movement as some people who thought that non-violence and peaceful actions were not efficient to fight against racism. They called for more violent actions. Wearing a shirt with "BLACK POWER" written on it was an act of defiance. The domestic knew that the Penny Hanks' grandmother would recognize the slogan. It was a symbol of her desire to follow the movement. By wearing this shirt, the domestic openly expressed her political engagement. She was influenced by the

[1] Van Wormer, et al, 247.
[2] Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (Aylesbury: Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd, 1969) 58.

Black Power movement and she understood that she could not remain passive anymore. Thus, she dared to confront her employer. Like this woman, a great number of domestic workers explained that the Civil Rights Movement made them feel empowered because they realized that African Americans' situation could change and that they could do something about it.

1. Oral resistance

In general, African American domestic workers had a deferential and submissive behavior towards their white employers because they knew it was the right thing to do in order to keep their jobs. As already explained, Erving Goffman argues: "Rules governing conduct between two individuals may, but need not, be symmetrical in regard to either familiarity or respect."[3] For domestic workers and white people those rules were not symmetrical. On the one hand, white employers could be familiar with their domestics and they had no concern about offending black people or penetrating their privacy. On the other hand, domestic workers were expected to be respectful in any circumstances. They were not supposed to be on terms of familiarity with their employers or any other white person. Willie Mae Fitzegrald told Susan Tucker that she never said anything when her employer refused to raise her salary or when she was mean to her because she was concerned for her children. She did not want to lose her job because she had to take care of them.[4] Hazel Rankins' testimony also illustrates the way domestic workers usually behaved towards white people: "You know you really didn't look them in the face; you never said very much. They always just talked to you like you was a small child."[5] Domestic workers very often knew their place and did not dare to confront white people because they were afraid of punishment. Moreover, as argued in the previous part deference could even be a form of resistance.

However, some household workers understood that they had to show their employers that they were not going to remain passive if they were mistreated. By doing so, they broke the asymmetric rules of conduct. Erving Goffman explains the consequences of breaking the rules:

> In general then, when a rule of conduct is broken we find that two individuals run the risk of becoming discredited: one with an obligation, who should have governed himself by the rule; the other with an expectation, who should have been treated in a particular way because of this governance. Both actor and recipient are threatened.[6]

[3] Goffman, 481.
[4] Tucker, 154.
[5] Van Wormer, et al, 157.
[6] Goffman, 475.

When domestic workers used oral resistance, they broke the rule that required black people to respect white people. Their employers' authority was threatened but they were also threatened because they could lose their jobs. Nevertheless, domestics using oral resistance preferred to resist rather than accepting submission and remaining silent. Eva James for instance, told Susan Tucker: "The job is not hard if you get a good understanding with [white people]. Look them dead in the eye. You definitely got to look them in the eye, because if you drop you head, they felt like, 'Oh, well, I got a good thing here.'"[7] Eva James had realized that if she was too submissive, her employers were going to take advantage of the situation.

Oral resistance implied a direct confrontation between domestic workers and their employers. This form of resistance helped them to prevent their employers from exploiting them. For instance, Millie Safford explained that she did not let her employers tell her what she had to do:

> I told them what I would do and wouldn't do. And if they put anything else on me I just told them it wasn't in the agreement. Most of them would have dogs, little old puppies. […] If I saw that he'd done something on the floor, you think I cleaned it up? I looked at it and walked out. I said, "It ain't my job. I ain't cleaning up after any dog." [8]

From the beginning, Millie Safford warned her employers that she would not do anything that was not agreed. She would only do the work she was paid for, as for example doing the laundry or preparing food. She did not consider herself as a servant and she thought that cleaning up after the dog was degrading. This is why she clearly told her employers that she would not do it. However, it is important to note that Millie Safford worked in the North of the United States, where the rules of racial etiquette were not institutionalized like in the South. Thus, northern domestic workers could more express their dissatisfaction than southern domestics. In the South, domestics were controlled by their employers and by white supremacists. They were not free to express their opinions and very often, they were afraid to challenge the rules of segregation. As another example of northern domestics who dared to express their displeasure, Ella Thomas and Elizabeth Ryder refused to get on their knees to scrub the floor and clearly told their employers that they did not want to do to it. Ella Thomas explained to Susan Tucker:

> Now they used to have hardwood floors, and one place I worked the lady had a big old box of this here paste was sitting on the table and bunch of rags. I came to work that day, and I just run the buffer over the floor. She say, "I see you didn't put the wax down." I say, "How you intended me to put it down?" She said "Well, I put the rags up there." I said, "Well, not for me because I only gets on my knees to pray."[9]

[7] Tucker, 214.
[8] Van Wormer, et al, 194.
[9] Tucker, 89.

For her part, Elizabeth Ryder told her employer who asked her to scrub the floor on her knees: "You sit right down there and wait until I scrub it."[10] Neither Ella Thomas nor Elizabeth Ryder intended to get on their knees. They considered that it was humiliating because it put them in a degrading position. They both expressed their dissatisfaction in order to make their employers understand that they were not submissive servants always willing to please their employers. Moreover, Jimmie Lane told Katherine van Wormer that she also decided not to let her employers exploit her. She told her employer that she wanted her Fridays off. She obtained her Fridays off because she dared to tell what she wanted and made her employers understand that they did not really have a choice.[11]

Marva Woods for her part, told Judith Rollins that sometimes she had to endure her employer screaming at her. She said that when it happened she calmly told her: "Now don't holler at me, please."[12] Even if she remained calm and polite, Marva Woods was determined to show her employer that she did not tolerate being yelled at. She wanted to be treated with respect and asked for it. Marva Woods was so determined and calm in the way she talked to her employer that the latter had no other choice but to stop screaming at her.

The Civil Rights Movement also encouraged domestic workers to express their opinions openly. Dealy Cooksey for example, told her employer that she could not tolerate her criticizing Martin Luther King: "Don't you say nothing about Rev. King… […] I don't mean to be sassy but when you talk bout Rev. King I gets mad. Y'all white folks work us to death and don't pay nothing."[13] Like Dealy Cooksey, many domestic workers felt empowered by the movement and dared to directly confront their employers. They understood that it was time to resist exploitation once and for all. Seeing other black people like Martin Luther King or Rosa Parks for example, struggling for African Americans' rights encouraged domestic workers to support the movement. Jimmie Lane, a domestic interviewed by David W. Jackson, also testified and explained:

> Back in my childhood coming up, I would listen to my folks talk about this stuff, and they'd say, "We're going to support Dr. King because we really did like what he is doing," I pay my taxes; I have a degree, and you're going to tell me I cannot vote. And we deserve the same quality of education.[14]

Thanks to Martin Luther King, Jimmie Lane and her family understood how unfair the system was. Jimmie Lane could not accept not having the right to vote or not having the same

[10] Rollins, 142.
[11] Van Wormer, et al, 139.
[12] Rollins, 136.
[13] Nadasen, 21.
[14] Van Wormer, et al, 140.

quality of education just because she was black. Black people usually were respectable citizens but were not treated as such. Jimmie Lane realized that she deserved the same rights as white people and that it was necessary to fight for that.

Many white people did not treat black people with respect and dignity because they considered them as inferior. Martha Calvert for example, was born in 1953 in the South and explained to Susan Tucker: "The main thing was the sass. I always saw whites having a lot of sass. […] I resented the way white people behaved toward my mother. Because she taught *me* to respect older people and then I saw disrespect for her." Sometimes even children disrespected black people because they were taught that they were superior to them from an early age. Martha Calvert was born one year before the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case, which means that she grew up during the Civil Rights Movement. Thus, even if she was born in the South where black people were taught to be respectful towards whites, she was inspired by the movement and grew up to become a real militant. She did not tolerate the lack of respect from whites towards black people. She considered that if she treated someone with respect, she should be treated with respect in return. One day, she arrived in a white home to work as a domestic and the woman told her that one of the kids was spoiled. Martha Calvert said: "Hey, if your kids talked to your maid any kind of way, let me know now so I will not waste your time and you will not waste my time."[15] For Martha Calvert, oral resistance was a way to prevent white people from disrespecting her. Thus, as soon as she arrived in the house, she warned the parents that she would not tolerate the kids being arrogant and insolent because she thought that such behavior was unacceptable.

Like Martha Calvert, Alice Smith grew up in the South of the United States. She was born in 1930. She hated the way black people were treated by white people in the South. The context of segregation shaped the woman she became and led her to develop a strong desire to fight against racism and objectification. White people called her "Aunt Alice." According to K. Sue Jewell, the controlling image of Aunt Jemima evolved from the stereotype of the mammy. She explains: "The primary distinction between mammy and Aunt Jemima is that Aunt Jemima's tasks of domesticity are usually limited to those of a cook. She is portrayed as extremely jolly."[16] The image of Aunt Jemima was used on boxes of pancake mix and represented a slave happy to serve her masters. Micki McElya argues: "The mammy narrative embodied in the Aunt Jemima trademark dates back at least to the 1830s, when members of

[15] Tucker, 39.
[16] Jewell, 44.

the planter class began using these stories to animate their assertions of slavery as benevolent and slave owning as honorable."[17] It became common for white people to call their domestic workers "Aunt". It was a way to reinforce black women's objectification. By calling them "Aunt" their employers showed domestic workers that they expected them to be just like the stereotype of Aunt Jemima: a submissive and loyal servant. Alice Smith's employers called her "Aunt" and one day she could not stand it anymore. Thus, she told them: "I ain't none of your damn auntie. I ain't no kin to you. My name is Alice Caldwell Smith, and nothing that white is in my family. You see how black I am. I am not your aunt. Don't call me aunt."[18] Alice Caldwell used oral resistance to express her disapproval of the situation. She did not consider herself as being part of the white family because she was not treated as such by them. Consequently she expressed resentment and did not want them to call her "Aunt". She understood that it was a way for white people to appropriate their domestic workers. Indeed, by calling them "Aunt" it was as if white people erased their domestics' real names and considered them as a possession. By telling her employer that she did not want to be called "Aunt", Alice Smith openly rejected objectification.

During the Civil Rights Movement, it was the first time white people really got to hear what black people really felt. Susan Tucker explains the impact of the Civil Rights Movement on the white women she interviewed:

> The white interviewees who thought about and observed black women most intensely seem to have done so in response to the civil rights movement, to personal crisis, or to the interview itself. The civil rights movement frequently brought the first opportunity for white women to hear the views of blacks expressed openly, to read the works of black authors, and to see films about black life. Only then did most of the white interviewees begin to ponder the lives of blacks.[19]

Thanks to the Civil Rights Movement, both blacks and whites' mentalities evolved and some white people started to understand that the way blacks were treated was unfair. Moreover, some white employers started to take their domestics' feelings into consideration.

Before the Civil Rights Movement, black people were less confident and very often, domestic workers were afraid to confront their employers. For example, Anne Ryder worked as a domestic worker in the 1940's. Her employer asked her to perform so many tasks that she was exhausted. One day, she was so tired that she lay down on the floor. Her employer came in and saw her like that. Anne Ryder used oral resistance to defend herself. She told her

[17] McElya, 4.
[18] Tucker, 209-210.
[19] Tucker, 191.

employer: “I’m tired and if you say one word to me I’m going to get up and go home.”[20] Anne Ryder was so tired that she did not care losing her job. She tried to fight against exploitation. Thus, she threatened her employer to quit the job because she knew that she really needed her to maintain the house. Anne Ryder only threatened her employer to quit but as the militant activism of black people increased in the 1960s, more and more domestic workers decided not to remain passive anymore and to actually leave when they were dissatisfied with the treatment they received.

2. Leaving the job

Leaving the job usually was the next step after oral resistance. Domestics told their employers when they were dissatisfied and when they could not stand the situation anymore, they quit.

Edith Lincoln for instance, explained to Judith Rollins that she left her employers after four months because she thought that the amount of work was really excessive. She said:

> I worked from the time I got up ‘till the time I went to bed. I said, “This is not for me!” It was a big house. I had my own apartment on the third floor. When you work for older people, they like everything done just so. You got your floors, you got the walls, the windows… During the day, it’s a lot.[21]

It was in the 1960’s and Edith Lincoln’s employers were old. Thus, the way they treated their domestic worker was rather old-fashioned. They wanted Edith Lincoln to work all day long and to do all the housework which was really exhausting. At that time, black people’s mentalities evolved because of the Civil Rights Movement, and many domestic workers did not accept being exploited by their employers anymore. After several months, Edith Lincoln could not handle the situation anymore and decided to leave the job. She preferred to prioritize her health by quitting and trying to find a new employer that would not exploit her.

Elra Johnson explained that she hated the way black people were treated in the South. To her, the rules of racial etiquette were unfair and she was not ready to accept them. She told David W. Jackson:

> We weren’t supposed to go in the front door. Yes, the black people were supposed to go to the back door. It really bothered me and so I quit. Yeah, I did! I sure did! Let me say one thing. White folks give Negroes hell. I hate to say it like that, but you couldn’t come in their front door; you couldn’t eat out of their plates. And when they had a dog, they put its food on its plate and

[20] Rollins, 65.
[21] Rollins, 70.

> let it eat, and then they'd take that same plate and give it to you to eat. We just walked out. Me and Georgia seen them do it and just walked out. And us didn't go back no more.[22]

Elra Johnson considered that being forced to enter through the backdoor was degrading. It emphasized black people's inferiority because it showed them that they could not do what white people could do. Eating in the same plate as the dog was even harder to accept. Elra Johnson could not bear being treated like an animal. She left in order to make her employers understand that she was ready to fight racism and not to let white people humiliate her and black people in general.

Similarly to Penny Hanks' grandmother, many white women abused of their power over domestic workers. For example, Aletha Vaughn told Susan Tucker that her employer wanted to assert her authority by any means. She wanted to show her domestics that she was superior. Aletha Vaughn explained: "She'd do anything. Misplace things, something of hers, and pretend you're stealing—she did that. And I quit there on account of it."[23] Aletha Vaughn quit because she understood that her employer was ready to do anything to get her into trouble. The employer used the excuse of Ms. Vaughn stealing objects in order not to pay her. She did not care lying as long as she could take advantage of her domestic's vulnerability. Aletha Vaughn decided that she could not remain passive and she left.

If there was something they did not like about the work or when their employers did not treat them right, domestic workers could leave. Esther Jones for example, explained to Judith Rollins that when she was not satisfied with a job, she simply quit it. She did it with three different employers when she worked in Boston in the 1960's. Once again it was at the period of the Civil Rights Movement. Besides, it was in the North where domestic workers could more express their feelings and show their discontent.

The first time, Esther Jones quit because she considered that she had too much work to do. She had to prepare breakfast for the husband and serve it, then she had to do the same for the lady. After that she did the cleaning and in the evening she prepared and served dinner. She could not eat with the family and had to wait after dinner to eat in the kitchen and then she washed all the dishes. One day she told her employer that she could not go on like that because she was exhausted. Thus, she told her that she would leave after dinner and that she would not come back. Then, Ms. Jones left her second employer because the latter did not pay her a fair wage. She simply told Judith Rollins: "I just didn't think she was paying me enough money." Finally, she left her third employers because she thought that they did not respect her

[22] Van Wormer, et al, 65.
[23] Tucker, 209.

intimacy and privacy.[24] Ms. Jones' example demonstrates that there were many reasons why domestic workers could quit their jobs. Sometimes it could be related to the work itself but it could also be related to the relationship they had with their employers. In any case, domestic workers always left when they thought that they were not treated with respect and consideration.

Nevertheless, Ms. Jones was employed in Boston where there were a lot of potential employers. She knew that she could quit her job and easily find new employers after that. This is why she did not hesitate to quit when she was not satisfied with a job. In both the North and the South, leaving their jobs as a form of resistance against oppression was more possible for domestics working in the cities than for those who worked in the country. In Northern and Southern cities, though, day work was a common practice since the early twentieth century and leaving could not really be used by day workers as a form of resistance because they worked for the same employer only for a short period of time. This means of resistance was rather useful for live-in and live-out domestics who were only employed by one employer at a time. In rural areas there were fewer employers than in the cities. Susan Tucker argues: "In the country, there were generally a few white families who owned large portions of land with whom blacks could enter into sharecropping. These same families employed a few permanent domestic workers—often the wives and daughters of sharecroppers."[25] It was therefore more difficult for domestic workers living in rural areas to quit in order to resist exploitation and subordination. Indeed, they needed their jobs in order to provide for their families and to survive. They usually could not quit and risk not to find another employer.

It could also happen that a domestic left her employers because they did not respect her family. Essie Favrot, for example, once brought her son to her employers' house because there was nobody to take care of him. She explained what her employer told her: "I don't think it's going to be such a good idea, him coming down here. That lady next door… Mind you know, it's not us, but that lady next door don't want him playing down here."[26] Her son was not welcome in the white neighborhood because, in the context of racial segregation, many white people did not like having black people around them. Essie Favrot was very resentful because she took care of the white children but she could not bring her own son for a few hours. She thought that it was really unfair and because of that she told her employers

[24] Rollins, 140.
[25] Tucker, 104.
[26] Ibid, 119.

that she would not come back the next day. She could not stand the idea of her son being the victim of racism and prejudice. She decided to resist by leaving her job and showed her employers that she could not accept their disrespect toward her son.

Clelia Daly had a similar problem. Her grandson was in trouble and he risked to go to jail. Her employer, Judge Sayers, often told her that he really cared for her, that she was like a member of the family. Thus, she thought that if she asked Judge Sayers for his help he would be ready to help her. He told her that he could give her money if she needed and said "I don't know, but I think if it was my son, I think it would be best to let him go to jail."[27] Clelia Daly understood that day that her employer did not really consider her as a member of the family. He cared for her but he still thought of her as a black person, as different and inferior. Thus, he was not ready to help her grandson that he probably considered as a criminal. Clelia Daly felt really offended and insulted because she thought that she could count on the support of her employer if she was in trouble. Consequently, she left because she estimated that she did not need to be around people who were not trustworthy. Leaving was a way to show her employer that she was not fooled: even if he told her that she was like a member of the family, he did not treat her as such.

Sometimes, domestic workers did not even tell their employers that they were going to quit their jobs. It was only a way to explicitly show their white employers that they were not ready to accept abuse and mistreatments. Odessa Roberts was interviewed by David W. Jackson and told him that once her employer, Mrs. Ellison, gave her a sofa because it was old and she did not need it anymore. Odessa Roberts said: "In her way of speaking, she was trying to be nice if she could. But she was still prejudiced toward me."[28] Her employer told her that she was good to her because she gave her gifts but Odessa Roberts understood that she still considered her as inferior because of her race. Ms. Roberts did not like being the victim of her employer's racism and thus she left. She did not tell her employer that she wanted to quit. Her goal was to teach the white woman a lesson. Indeed, domestic workers who left their employers knew that the latter needed them. Thus, by leaving they let their employers in a desperate need for help in order to maintain their houses. For domestic workers, leaving was a way to take revenge over white people by leaving them in a difficult position.

[27] Ibid, 200.
[28] Van Wormer, et al, 115.

For white employers, it was a common practice to give gifts to their domestic workers, like Odessa Roberts' employer who gave her an old sofa. The following part studies this custom and how domestic workers used it as a resistance strategy.

3. Giving and receiving

Giving and receiving was part of the tradition between employers and domestic workers, it was very often central to the relationship that connected white and black women. Susan Tucker analyses what giving and receiving implies:

> Giving and receiving were rituals within the domestic worker-employer relationship built upon ancient traditions of interaction between people separated by class. They were also an important part of customary behaviour between whites and blacks in the segregated South. Giving and receiving in all cultures are symbolic acts that carry many levels of meaning. Giving is traditionally considered as an act of concern, care, and even love for another person. However, it is also an assertion of one's own superiority, as well as compensation for another act. Receiving means an acceptance of the giver—whether as a friend or as a superior—and an acceptance of the obligation to reciprocate.[29]

The fact that employers gave gifts to their domestic workers could be seen as a demonstration of affection and kindness. Many white women explained to Susan Tucker that they were taught to be kind to domestics when they were children.[30] Usually, giving made white employers feel generous because they knew that domestics were poor and that they did not have the financial means to buy many clothes and so on. Anne Robertson, a white employer interviewed by Susan Tucker, argued: "I don't recall that the salaries were much, but the nurturing of the persons themselves was there." Like Anne Robertson, Jane Stafford told Susan Tucker: "Everyone was taught to give them things. Not paying much and yet giving much." [31] White people usually thought that domestics did not need a high salary and that taking care of them by giving them food and old clothes was sufficient. Moreover, if employers gave more money to their domestics they would admit that domestic workers have a greater worth than they would like them to have, and this would threaten the ideology that black people are inferior to whites. From an early age, white women were taught that domestics were happy and felt well treated when their employers gave them gifts. Thus, giving reinforced white women's self-esteem because they considered that they were being good to their domestics and that they took good care of them. Susan Tucker explains that the white women she interviewed "defended a ritual of their childhood, a ritual that embodied not only the paternalistic code but also noblesse oblige and charity."[32] Giving was part of the protective obligations masters and

[29] Tucker, 145
[30] Tucker, 91 ; 93 ; 133 ; 138.
[31] Ibid, 135 ; 179.
[32] Ibid, 149.

mistresses had towards their slaves during slavery. It persisted through the years and employers still felt that it was their responsibility to take care of their domestic workers. Judith Rollins argues that gift giving was more a matter of "maternalism" because it took place between white women and their domestics workers. White men usually did not take part in this practice. Judith Rollins explains the difference between paternalism and maternalism:

> Paternalism is one aspect of a political-economic-ideological power base, the aspect that relates to the exchange of patriarchal protections for service and loyalty; maternalism, on the other hand, is a concept related to women's supportive intrafamilial roles of nurturing, loving, and attending to affective needs.[33]

Indeed, for some white women giving gifts was well-intentioned but it could also be a way to assert their superiority considering the fact that they usually gave domestic workers second-hand objects. It showed domestic workers that they were not significant enough to deserve brand new articles. Domestic workers were supposed to understand that only old and devalued goods were appropriate for them because they had a lower status than their employers. By giving them all kinds of gifts, employers showed domestic workers that they saw them as unable to provide for themselves and their families.

According to Judith Rollins, employers did not expect their domestic workers to give them gifts in return. Marcel Mauss analyses the meaning of one person giving a gift to someone who does not reciprocate: "Donner, c'est manifester sa supériorité, être plus, plus haut, magister; accepter sans rendre ou sans rendre plus, c'est se subordonner, devenir client et serviteur, devenir petit, choir plus bas (minister)."[34] Michael G. Whisson and William Weil agree with Marcel Mauss in their book *Domestic servants, a microcosm of "the race problem"*:

> The giving of unreciprocated gifts places the recipient in the position of a child or a beggar, being too poor, too young or too low in status to be able to participate in the system of exchanges which mark the social boundaries of the donor group […] Employers give in order to assert their dominance and their possession of their servant. [35]

Thus, the person who gives something shows his superiority and by accepting the gift, the recipient accepts his subordination. Very often domestic workers accepted the gifts their employers gave them and by doing so, they accepted their subordinate position. Domestics were supposed to accept gifts in order to show their gratitude. As already said, employers knew that black women had harsh living conditions and they perceived them as needy. This is why domestics were supposed to be grateful when white people were generous to them. Some

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[33] Rollins, 179.
[34] Marcel Mauss, « Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques », *L'Année Sociologique*, nouvelle série, I (1923,1924), pp. 30-186. Paris, 98.
[35] Michael G. Whisson and William Weil, *Domestic servants, a microcosm of "the race problem"* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1971) 41-43.

domestics actually appreciated the gifts they received but the majority of them would have preferred getting more money.[36]

Many black women saw those gifts as degrading because they perceived the lack of esteem employers had for them. They did not want to receive old and second-hand objects because they found it humiliating. Thus, many accepted the gifts given by their employers and threw them away afterwards. May Lund for example, told Judith Rollins: "My employer was always offering me bags of stuff. But if it was something I didn't want, I'd thank her, walk out of there, go around that corner and the first trash can I got to, I'd throw it in. But you take it, whatever they give."[37] Leila Parkerson also remembered throwing her employers' gifts away: "Every white person, poor or rich, always thought they could give me something. This family even—they gave me an old blouse with stains under the arms, perspiration stains. I took it and dumped it in the nearest trash can on the way home."[38] Even if objects they received were worthless they accepted them anyway, in order to please their employers. Sometimes they accepted them in case their employers decided to give them something valuable one day. Dumping gifts could be a symbolical way to counter white people's attempts to humiliate them. In so doing, domestic workers convinced themselves that they could fight against whites' domination. But this was rather an internal kind of resistance. It helped domestic workers to feel better after the humiliation of receiving worthless objects. However, some domestics decided to directly confront the practice of gift giving and refused to accept them. Many domestics were resentful because of the low wages and knew that gift giving was only a compensation designed to maintain them inferior. They remained poor because employers refused to give them fair wages. Leila Parkerson testified:

> She'd try to give me food. "Want some watermelon?" she'd say. "Take your mother a slice of watermelon." That made me detest domestic work. And the more I would work for people and see the books they had, the furnishings, everything in their houses—all nice—I just couldn't understand why we couldn't have this, why we couldn't get paid more instead of just being offered a slice of watermelon or whatever.[39]

As evidenced by Leila Parkerson, employers also used to give food to their domestics. When domestic workers took leftover food it was called toting. Susan Tucker explains:

> Toting was, of course, the practice of taking food from the employer's kitchen as a supplement to paid wages or, less frequently, in place of wages. Toting was also referred to as "taking home the service pan." Both black and white women referred to toting as a practice that originated in slavery.

[36] Van Wormer, et al, 145; 151; 159.
[37] Rollins, 190.
[38] Tucker, 161-162.
[39] Tucker, 162.

Many domestic workers, like Leila Parkerson, thought that this practice was unfair. They understood that gifts and food were used by employers to justify and compensate low wages.[40] Thus, some women decided to fight against this tradition and refused to accept gifts and food. According to Marcel Mauss when someone refuses a gift, this person refuses subordination.[41] Three white women interviewed by Susan Tucker told her they remembered that some domestics refused to tote.[42] These women wanted to show their employers that they did not depend on them and that they could cope on their own. Refusing to receive gifts and food proved that domestics were not fooled and that they did not accept economic exploitation. They did not want compensation for low wages, they actually wanted to receive fair wages that would reward the work they performed every day.

Moreover, domestic workers sometimes gave their employers gifts too. They used gift giving to show their employers that, even if white people considered them as inferior, they could afford to offer gifts too. Susan Tucker argues:

> This reverse gift giving seems to have been another way black southern domestics provided a balance in their relationships with their white employers. The fruit basket, a traditional gift in the South at Christmas, for example, was mentioned as a gift given by black domestics to white employers, as well as by white employers to black domestics.[43]

Domestic workers used their right to give gifts as a way to prove to their employers that white people were not the only ones who could give gifts and that black people could reciprocate. Jill Janvier, a white woman interviewed by Susan Tucker, remembered that the domestic worker who worked for her family often gave her gifts. She explained what she thought of this practice:

> It seems to me that the black maids often were generous to the white families, particularly to white children, like Lucille towards me. To me that generosity has something to do with dignity. It's saying "Hey, I'm not beholden to you. I can help myself, and not only can I help myself but I can help you."[44]

Domestic workers who gave gifts to their employers rejected white people's definition of domestics as needy and dependent on their employers' generosity. They proved that they could provide for themselves and that they could afford to be generous too. This practice could be humiliating for white employers and make them experience shame. Indeed, they realized that black women to whom they only offered old items, were not resentful and were

[40] Ibid, 146.
[41] Mauss, 98.
[42] Tucker, 146.
[43] Tucker, 147.
[44] Ibid, 187.

generous enough to offer them presents. For example, a white woman interviewed by Susan Tucker testified:

> I will always remember the canisters that Elvira gave me when I got married. I remember feeling how it was kind of her. I knew she didn't have that much money, and I knew, for example, that the only time we ever gave her or any of her children anything new, all wrapped up in paper, had been at Christmas. Instead, we were just giving her something we'd gotten tired of.[45]

Like this woman, many white people could feel a sense of guilt when their domestic workers gave them gifts. This practice could make white people question the way they treated their domestics and question the fairness of the whole system of segregation. Indeed, even if they were poor and white people always treated them as inferior, some domestics still offered gifts which could make whites understand that black people could be respectable and that they did not deserve the treatment they received.

The confrontational resistance strategies used by domestic workers at an individual level helped them to resist their employers' authority and superiority. These resistance strategies only allowed them to fight their own exploitation but did not help to improve the condition of domestic workers in general. They quickly understood that it was necessary to organize in order to make the occupation of household work evolve. Indeed, as early as the 1880s, right after the Reconstruction Era that followed the end of the Civil War, domestic workers organized to fight against the exploitation of black women. Even if slavery had been abolished since 1865, a large number of African American women still were treated like slaves. It was obvious that the abolition of slavery was not sufficient for black people to emancipate. They needed to find means of resistance that could help the whole community. They realized that unity creates strength and this is why they began to create organizations such as the National Associations for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), for example, that was created in 1909 in order to fight for black people's rights.

[45] Ibid, 147.

IV. Confrontational Resistance Strategies at a Collective Level

This part studies the confrontational resistance strategies used by domestic workers at a collective level, that is to say domestic workers' organizations and activism. A large number of domestic workers were inspired by the Civil Rights Movement This movement led to an evolution in the way domestic workers organized. It helped black women to feel more confident and to participate in the fight against white supremacy.

The occupation of domestic service was very difficult to organize because domestic workers were isolated and the work took place in the private sphere. Their work was "invisible" and they were "marginalized within the labor movement."[1] Nevertheless some women succeeded in organizing and tried to improve household workers' working conditions. Domestic workers were marginalized and isolated in their employers' homes, thus organizing could be an opportunity to speak about their condition with other women who could understand the complexity of this occupation. Vanessa May argues that union members created a "community of shared experience and sufferings."[2] Domestic workers could also speak for themselves through organizations. Indeed, as they were not treated as equal by their employers, domestic workers were not given the opportunity to express their opinions. As union members domestic workers could finally express claims and demands. Organizing could be a way to fight exploitation and subordination.

1. Domestic Workers' Organizations before the Civil Rights Movement

The first time domestic workers organized to protest against exploitation was in 1881 in Atlanta. At that time, Atlanta, like other southern cities, began to develop. Edward L. Ayers argues: "The 1880s saw town and industrial growth in the South but steady economic pressure on farmers."[3] It was about fifteen years after the end of slavery and black people still had very harsh lives. They were the victims of racism and were not treated as equals by white people. In Atlanta, during the 1880s, almost all black women worked as domestic workers, and more

[1] Nadasen, 4.
[2] May, 158.
[3] Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 7.

particularly as laundresses, because this work was still associated with servitude.[4] In Atlanta, in 1880 73.5% of all women wage earners worked in household labor and more than 80% of these household workers were black women.[5]

Laundresses in Atlanta, like every domestic worker in the South, worked very hard and their wages were very low. According to Tera W. Hunter they earned from $4 to $8 a month and the work was tiring because they had to carry water, make their own soap, wash and rinse the clothes and then iron it with heavy irons.[6] During the summer of 1881 in Atlanta, some of the laundresses united to form the Atlanta Washing Society. These women organized a strike in order to demand higher wages and respect. Jacqueline Jones writes: "Organized through and strongly supported by black churches in the community, the Washerwomen's Association of Atlanta struck for a wage of $1 per twelve pounds of wash."[7] This organization was constituted of twenty women at the beginning of the strike, and gained about three thousand members in a month. The laundresses went from door to door across the city in order to raise awareness about their movement and to increase membership. Considering the difficulty of organizing domestic workers, gathering about three thousand women was a considerable exploit.[8] The authorities tried to stop the movement by arresting the strikers who had to pay fines. Jacqueline Jones explains what was also done to put an end to the strike: "The white establishment in Atlanta wasted little time in marshalling the full weight of both the private and public sectors in an effort to destroy the association. Landlords threatened to raise the strikers' rents to exorbitant levels and the city council debated a resolution that would require laundress to pay $25 for a business license."[9]

The washerwomen persisted in their efforts and wrote a letter to the Mayor of Atlanta on the 3rd of August 1811. They wrote:

> We the members of our society, are determined to stand to our pledge and make extra charges for washing, and we have agreed, and are willing to pay $25 or $50 for licenses as a protection, so we can control the washing for the city. We can afford to pay these licenses, and will do it before we will be defeated, and then we will have full control of the city's washing at our own

[4] Jones, 127.
[5] Percentage of Women Wage Earners in Household Labor (Servants and Laundresses), 1880-1920, Selected Cities (10 Yrs. Or Over) *Tenth Census*: *1880*, *Population,* vol. I, passim; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistics of Women at Work* (Washington, D.C., 1907) 44.
[6] Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) 74-97.
[7] Jones, 148.
[8] Ibid, 148.
[9] Jones, 148.

> prices, as the city has control of our husbands' work at their prices. Don't forget this. We hope to hear from your council Tuesday morning. We mean business this week or no washing.[10]

The strikers did not yield to pressure from the white authorities and decided to continue their fight against exploitation. Even if it was not true for most of them, they pretended that they could pay the licenses. This letter was a kind of threat to the white authorities in order to make them understand that they would not stop the strike until they obtained better wages. They inspired other domestic workers such as cooks and maids to protest too. Their perseverance and determination led the authorities to accept an increase in wages.[11] This strike showed white people that laundresses would not accept economic exploitation and being treated like slaves. It proves that when domestic workers organize they can improve their condition.

The 1930's were also a key period in the evolution of domestic workers' organizations. It was the period of the Great Depression that followed the economic collapse in 1929. The unemployment rate was very high in the United States during this period, and it reached its peak in 1933. That year unemployment rose to 25%.[12] The occupation of household work was affected by this situation. Premila Nadasen argues:

> With twenty-five percent of the nation unemployed, work was especially hard to come by and, for those lucky enough to find a job, exploitation was rampant. As family incomes dwindled, employers fired domestic workers, reduced rates of pay, or simply squeezed more work out of their employees.[13]

Domestic workers had always been exploited by most of their employers but during the Great Depression it became even worse as the majority of the population had low incomes. Employers were rare because many people could not afford to hire domestic workers. Black women had to adapt to the situation in order to find work. In 1935, Ella Baker and Marvel Cooke wrote an article about "The Bronx Slave Market" in the magazine *Crisis.* This article was meant to raise awareness about the "slave markets" in New York City which were usually street corners where black women waited for white employers. They hoped to be hired for the day by those employers. This was the only way to find a job for black women

[10] Tera W. Hunter, "African-American Women Workers' Protest in the New South," *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 13, No. 4, The Gilded Age (Summer 1999), pp.52-55 http://www.oah.org/pubs/magazine/gilded/hunter.html.
[11] Hunter, 74-97.
[12] Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to the 1970, Part I* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), Series D 85-86 Unemployment: 1890-1970, 135.
[13] Nadasen, 14.

who did not have an employer for whom they worked on a regular basis. Baker and Cooke wrote in their article:

> Rain or shine, cold or hot, you will find them there—Negro women, old and young—sometimes bedraggled, sometimes neatly dressed—but with the invariable paper bundle, waiting expectantly for Bronx housewives to buy their strength and energy for an hour, two hours, or even for a day at the munificent rate of fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, or, if luck be with them, thirty cents an hour.[14]

Baker and Cooke denounced the fact that domestic workers were treated like slaves by employers. They explained that employers tried to take advantage of the fact that black women were ready to work for almost nothing. They were so desperately in need of money that they accepted to work for whoever offered them a job. Unfortunately, they could be duped by employers. Baker and Cooke explained: "Fortunate, indeed, is she who gets the full hourly rate promised. Often, her day's slavery is rewarded with a single dollar bill or whatever her unscrupulous employer pleases to pay. More often, the clock is set back for an hour or more. Too often she is sent away without any pay at all."[15]

Domestic workers were tired of being exploited and in 1934, a domestic organization called the Domestic Workers Union was established in New York City by Dora Lee Jones. According to Judith Rollins, in the 1920's and over the decades that followed most of domestic workers were black women. She argues: "The migration of blacks north during World War I and the drop in immigration of those foreign-born groups more likely to enter domestic service caused black women to become more significant in the occupation outside the South during and after the 1920s."[16] This is why the members of the Domestic Workers Union were almost only black women. Premila Nadasen explains that the goal of this organization was "to pass state legislation to provide minimum wage and workers' compensation protections for household workers."[17] Again, domestic workers organized in order to fight economic exploitation. The domestics who were part of this organization were very determined to fight for their rights, as demonstrated by Esther Cooper's testimony: "Before I belonged, I quit two jobs 'cause I couldn't stand it, and then spent a month on the 'slave market' working by the day for 25c an hour… I ain't never been sorry that I'm a Union member and I'll fight for the Union all I can."[18] Esther Cooper could not bear being treated like a slave. She wanted to be respected by her employer and to receive a fair pay. Like Esther

[14] Ella Baker and Marvel Cooke. "The Bronx Slave Market." *The Crisis* (1935): 330.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Rollins, 54.
[17] Nadasen, 17.
[18] Esther Victoria Cooper, "The Negro Woman Domestic Worker in Relation to Trade Unionism" (Master's thesis, Fisk University, 1940) 54.

Cooper, many domestics believed that becoming members of an organization was a way to contribute to the improvement of household work. They knew that unity makes strength and that their membership was important if the organizations wanted to succeed in the struggle for better working conditions. Thus, it made them feel useful and valuable. The Domestic Workers Union was created during the New Deal era. The New Deal was a series of programs developed by President Roosevelt from 1933 to the late 1930s in order to restore prosperity in the United States.[19] During this period, industrial workers organized unions in order to improve their working conditions. The Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) was created in 1935 and became the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1938.[20] It was an organization that joined several different unions together. Robert H. Zieger explains in his book, *The CIO, 1935-1955*, the actions of the CIO since its creation:

> They created permanent industrial unions that boldly intruded into political and governmental arenas. They challenged managers and supervisors at work sites and on shop floors throughout the country. They staged mass demonstrations. Through their leaders, they pressed a social democratic public agenda. They often welcomed Communists and other radicals as their leaders and spokesmen. […] It was the classic era of the CIO.[21]

In this context of labor organizing, some domestic workers wanted to create their own unions, like the Domestic Workers Union, in order to fight for the improvement of domestic service. After its creation in 1934, The Domestic Workers Union allied with other organizations in order to be stronger. Alliances with labor groups such as the Women's Trade Union League was a major asset that enabled domestic workers to have more impact when requesting minimum wage.[22] The Domestic Workers Union activists believed that domestic workers had the power to emancipate themselves. As Premila Nadasen argues:

> These activists wrote about the importance of domestic work for African American women, but also articulated the radical potential of this workforce, helping to foster in domestic workers a subjectivity of dignity and resistance. They unequivocally rejected the mammy stereotype and placed domestic work firmly within discussions of class, race, and gender. They suggested that, as the most oppressed labor sector, domestic workers' mobilization offered the possibility of liberating the entire working class.[23]

Nadasen defines those activists as "feminists." They saw domestic workers' organizations as a way to fight against the exploitation of household workers *and* the exploitation of women in general. They wanted household workers to become aware of their rights as workers, as women and as citizens and to fight for them. The Domestic Workers Union represented the early stages of domestic workers' organizations in the twentieth

[19] Basil Rauch, *The History of the New Deal 1933-1938* (1944. New York: Octagon Books, 1980) xii.
[20] Robert H. Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995) 1.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Nadasen, 17.
[23] Ibid, 17-18.

century. Domestic workers' activism and organization then developed significantly during the Civil Rights Movement.

2. Domestic Workers' Activism during the Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement was a movement that occurred in the United States and that aimed at providing equal rights for African Americans by fighting against racial segregation. According to many historians the Civil Rights Movement lasted from the mid-1950s to the late-1960s. Juan William and Julian Bond for instance, situate the Civil Rights Movement from 1954, the year of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case, on school segregation, to 1965 with the signing of the Voting Right Act.[24]

On the other hand, Taylor Branch, argues that the movement lasted from 1954 to 1968. He considers that the end of the Civil Rights Movement coincides with Martin Luther King's assassination in Memphis in 1968.[25] Nevertheless, the Civil Rights Movement cannot be reduced to a delineated period of time because it occurred progressively. Belinda Robnett agrees with the fact that the key period of the Civil Rights Movement was from 1954 to 1965 but she points out the fact that it was a continuous movement of activism that led to it:

> While the years 1954 to 1965 represent heightened civil rights movement activity, they by no means mark the sudden onslaught of activism. The movement was and is continuous. The development of nonviolent ideologies and strategies, as well as the culture of resistance which manifested itself during the heightened period of the "civil rights movement", developed in historical context. Many of those who were active in the 1930s and 1940s played crucial roles in the formation and sustenance of movement activity well into the 1960s.[26]

Here, Belinda Robnett describes what some historians call the "Long Civil Rights Movement."[27] African Americans began to fight for their rights long before 1954 and continued the struggle after the late 1960s because black people were still the victims of discriminations. Moreover domestic workers were still exploited by whites as explained by Annie Victoria Johnson:

> Slavery was just over down there when Martin Luther King started the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Some of them people were still slaves and didn't know it. I've heard a lot of stories

[24] Juan Williams and Julian Bond, *Eyes on the prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* [1987] (New York: Penguin Books, 2013) vi-viii.
[25] Taylor Branch, *The King Years: Historic Moments in the Civil Rights Movement* [1988] (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013) 173.
[26] Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 44.
[27] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past." *The Journal of American History*, vol. 91, no. 4, 2005, pp. 1233–1263.

> from even the 1970s and 1980s, how some of those people were still being treated down in the Delta. They were treated like slaves.[28]

Domestic workers had been exploited since slavery and because of cultural and social conditioning many of them thought that their situation was desperate and that they were destined to work as servants for white people. They were accustomed to the way white people treated African Americans and to be considered as inferior. However, the Civil Rights Movement gave them some hope for a better future. Thus, some domestic workers felt emboldened and decided to actually get involved in the movement and to become activists. It was important for these women to take part in the movement that was trying to liberate them from white people's domination.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott is a great example of domestic workers' participation in the Civil Rights Movement. This boycott aimed to end racial segregation in the public transportation system. Jo Ann Gibson Robinson relates in her memoir:

> The bus boycott originated in the demeaning, wretched, intolerable impositions and conditions that black citizens experienced in a caste system commonly called segregation. The segregated bus system had existed for over half a century. Although from the beginning protests had been registered repeatedly, black people had had no choice. The system confined them, but it could not obliterate their bitterness, humiliation and anger. […] And on December 5, 1955, fifty thousand people—the generally estimated black population— walked off public city buses in defiance of existing conditions which were demeaning, humiliating, and too intolerable to endure.[29]

Jo Ann Gibson Robinson was part of the Women's Political Council, founded in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1946. Robinson had been the victim of bus drivers' racism and realized that many black people in the city already had suffered the same abuse from bus drivers. This is why in the early 1950s, Robinson and the Women's Political Council decided to take action against segregation and racism in bus transportation.[30] The Montgomery Bus Boycott actually began with Rosa Parks, on the 1st of December 1955, when she refused to give up her sit for a white passenger. She was arrested after that. It is no coincidence that Rosa Parks became a symbol for the fight against segregation. Indeed, Joyce A. Hanson explains in *Rosa Parks: A Biography:*

> In an article in *Elbony* magazine, Parks recalled, "I really don't know why I wouldn't move. There was no plan at all. I was just tired from shopping. My feet hurt." While Parks certainly did not plan to challenge segregation laws on that day, she was not a tired little old lady turned accidental hero. Mrs. Parks was only 42 years old and no more tired than usual after a long day at work. More importantly, she was an experienced local activist and had been the secretary of the local Montgomery branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1943. She had worked in other civil rights actions, in voter registration

[28] Van Wormer, et al, 98.
[29] Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987) 8.
[30] Robinson, xiv.

> campaigns, and as an adviser to the NAACP Youth Council. Rosa Parks did not simply wander into history. Her actions followed a rational course and placed her within a significant group of African American women activists who struggled against white supremacy and for racial and social justice in the United States.[31]

Rosa Parks had been involved in civil rights activism for about fifteen years when she refused to give up her seat in December 1955. Moreover, she was not the first one to refuse to give up her seat in a city bus. Many other women already tried to resist segregation in buses and Rosa Parks, as a member of the NAACP, was aware of the actions taken by these women in the city of Montgomery. By not giving up her seat, Rosa Parks decided to follow in the footsteps of other women who fought against racism and segregation.[32] When Jo Ann Robinson and other members of the Women's Political Council heard about Rosa Parks' arrest they decided to call for a boycott. Martin Luther King and his committee, responding to the women's pressure, decided to encourage black people to boycott the transportation system on December the 5th. Almost every black person who used to ride the bus agreed to follow the movement.[33] The fight against bus segregation began thanks to women's determination but as the movement grew, "men were given titled positions and the power to delegate duties, while women's visibility and power declined."[34]

According to Robert Heinrich, there were about ten thousand black women working in Montgomery in 1955 and over half of them worked as domestic workers in white households.[35] These women relied on the bus to go to work every day. As they were the principal users of the bus transportation in Montgomery, their participation in the boycott weakened the transportation system. Thus, the bus boycott was a success because Montgomery domestic workers mobilized and decided to walk to work. Gussie Nesbitt a domestic worker and member of the NAACP testified: "I walked because I wanted everything to be better for us. Before the boycott, we were stuffed in the back of the bus just like cattle. I work hard all day, and I had to stand up all the way home, because I couldn't have a seat on the bus."[36] Gussie Nesbitt, like thousands of other black women, understood that the boycott was an opportunity to change the system and to improve black people's condition.

Household workers fully got involved in the mobilization linked to the boycott. They massively participated in meetings and they tried to rally other people in the community.

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[31] Joyce A. Hanson, *Rosa Parks: A Biography* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Biographies, 2011) xi.
[32] Hanson, xv.
[33] Martin Luther King Jr, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (1957. San Francisco: Harper, 1990) 71.
[34] Robnett, 61.
[35] Robert Heinrich, "Montgomery: The Civil Rights Movement and Its Legacies" (PhD dissertation, Brandeis University, 2008) 28.
[36] Nadasen, 20.

These women did not want to be the victims of racial discrimination anymore and were ready to fight for their rights. Georgia Gilmore, a domestic worker working in Montgomery, mobilized like many other women but also decided to create an organization called the "Club from Nowhere". This club was used as a means to raise money to fund the boycott. Black women used their skills to help the movement: they cooked food and sold it. Gilmore explained:

> We collected $14 from amongst ourselves and bought some chickens, bread and lettuce, started cooking and made up a bundle of sandwiches for the big rally. We had a lot of our club members who were hard-pressed and couldn't give more than a quarter of half-dollar, but all knew how to raise money. We started selling sandwiches and went from there to selling full dinners in our neighborhoods and we'd bake pies and cakes for people. [37]

Gilmore and the other domestic workers of the club wanted to help the boycott and realized that the skills they had acquired during their years as domestic workers could be useful. The funds they raised by selling food were really important for the continuation of the movement considering that it was very expensive to run and maintain the boycott. Indeed, Nadasen argues: "Coordination was a massive undertaking and included fundraising, publicity, legal representation, security patrols, as well as the providing of alternative transportation in the form of an organized carpool for protesters."[38] Thus, without the help of domestic workers the Montgomery Bus Boycott would never have lasted for so long and more importantly it would never have succeeded.

Nadasen explains that "domestic workers used the very elements of domestic work-their marginalization, their insider status, their access to the white domestic sphere, their culinary skills-as a basis for subversive activity."[39] Household workers who were involved in this movement understood that they could use their status as domestics as a tool to resist against white supremacy. Their participation in the boycott challenged the "mammy" stereotype because it proved that domestic workers were not just submissive and loyal servants but that they could also be politically active and fight for equal rights. Their skills as domestic workers helped the boycott and the boycott helped them in terms of working conditions. The relationships between domestics and employers evolved as domestics became more confident and dared to confront their employers. Besides, many white people unintentionally contributed to the continuation of the boycott as explained by Nadasen: "Many employers inadvertently aided the boycott by driving their maids to work or giving

[37] Vernon Jarrett, "Raised Funds for Blacks: 'Club From Nowhere' Paid Way of Boycott." *Chicago Tribune,* December 4, 1975: p.1.
[38] Nadaden, 28.
[39] Ibid, 31-32.

them cab fare, because they depended upon domestics to keep their households running. […] Even at the expense of aiding the boycott, employers were not willing to do without their maids."[40] This was a victory for the boycott and for domestic workers who made employers realize that domestics' work was more valuable than white people were willing to admit.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott was a success and segregation in the transportation system came to an end on the 21st December 1956 after the Supreme Court's decision that declared bus segregation unconstitutional.[41]

Another domestic worker who played a major role in the fight for African Americans' rights was Dorothy Bolden who lived in Atlanta. She was inspired by Rosa Parks and the bus boycott and wanted to be part of the movement. She fought for the right of access to education for black children. She also fought for domestic workers' rights because, as she told in an interview, she really loved her work and thought that it should be more valued. Bolden used public transportation for organizing. She knew that domestic workers rode buses to go to work, she understood that it was the best location to speak to the great number of domestic workers. She explained: "I would go around and in the bus and ask maids how they would feel about joining if we could organize, and they would say 'I'm for that'"[42] Thus, Bolden established the National Domestic Workers Union of America based in Atlanta.[43] The aim of this organization was to improve domestic workers' working conditions by educating and training them. The National Domestic Workers Union of America was a success in the sense that it mobilized and helped thousands of women. Nadasen argues that Bolden and her allies reached "thousands of Atlanta women—both employers and employees—whom they educated about the rights and responsibilities of domestic work."[44] Bolden had realized that organizing domestic workers was the better way to fight against poverty and economic exploitation and this is why she decided to take action.

Geraldine Roberts' goal was the same as Dorothy Bolden's when she created the Domestic Workers of America in 1965 in Cleveland. Geraldine Roberts was humiliated by her employers when she worked as a domestic. She explained: "I felt it was an unusual and terrible place to work… Maybe it's good that had the experience because I think out of that very home grew the idea, a very strong idea to do something about workin' conditions for

[40] Ibid, 25.
[41] King, 203.
[42] Nadasen, 42.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid, 43.

household employees."[45] Thus, in September 1965, Roberts organized her first meeting and twenty-one domestics showed up in order to have the opportunity to share their experiences and to testify about their working conditions. Meetings after meetings, more and more domestics showed up and eventually Roberts founded the Domestic Workers of America that "sought reform the unfair working conditions of private household workers."[46] She also joined the NAACP and took part in the Civil Rights Movement by participating in the Meredith March in Jackson, Mississippi. Like Dorothy Bolden, Geraldine Roberts realized that she had to act instead of remaining passive. She understood that action was the only way to improve black people and domestic workers' condition.

Like Geraldine Roberts, many domestics were members of various organizations such as the NAACP which fought for the rights of African American people including black domestic workers. [47] NAACP members were major actors of the Civil Rights Movement. For example, they fought against school segregation through the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case.[48] Elra Johnson for her part, was a member of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. When David Jackson asked her about her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, she answered:

> I was the head. Georgia Clark was right side of me. […] We weren't scared of the devil. I was member of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Me and Georgia Clark decided how they treated our old parents in the front and said now us ain't gonna let them do us like that. […] And do me and her got out and protested.[49]

Elra Johnson did not want to undergo exploitation and humiliation. She was determined to advocate for African Americans' rights and this is why she decided to become a member of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and to protest against segregation.

Lisa Anderson Todd explains what the aim of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was:

> The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) a new, integrated, parallel political party, was challenging the seating of the all-white, segregationist Mississippi Democratic Party delegation because that party barred blacks from participation in party affairs and supported the state in denying blacks the right to vote through literacy testes, poll taxes, intimidation and violence.[50]

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[45] Henry Hampton et al, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s throught the 1980s* (New York: Bantam, 1991) 44.
[46] Nadasen, 52.
[47] Van Wormer, et al, 74.
[48] Susan Goldman Rubin, *Brown v. Board of Education: a Fight for Simple Justice* (New York: Holyday House, 2016) 11.
[49] Van Wormer, et al, 65.
[50] Lisa Anderson Todd, *For a Voice and the Vote: My Journey with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014) 1.

Elra Johnson was not afraid of challenging the rules and for example, she entered through the front door in white people's houses even if she was not allowed to. She also protested by organizing marches in her city. She became a leader in her community. This proves that domestic workers could have a key role in the Civil Rights Movement.

Some white people tried to intimidate black people and to discourage them from participating in the Civil Rights Movement. Jimmie Lane, for instance, remembered: "I don't remember them calling us niggers. […] But the only time I ever remember was when people found out that my grandmother and mother was involved in the civil rights. They burned the cross in my house, and that's when we heard all this talk—nigger this and nigger that."[51] However the women who participated in the movement understood that organizing was the best way for domestic workers and for African Americans to fight against the injustices they were the victims of. They realized that unity creates strength and that they could achieve emancipation through the Civil Rights Movement.

After the Civil Rights Movement, domestic workers still had to fight for better working conditions. Even if the Movement brought improvements in African Americans' lives, the struggle for full equality was not over. The following part studies domestic workers' organizations that were created after the Civil Rights Movement.

3. Domestic Workers' Organizations after the Civil Rights Movement

Annie Victoria Johnson recalled that in the 1970s and 1980s some domestic workers were still treated like slaves by their employers.[52] Thus, they had to pursue their fight for better wages and better working conditions.

In 1971, the first convention of domestic workers took place in Washington DC. Six hundred domestic workers gathered in order to discuss means to obtain improvement in what they called "the three P's: pay, protection and professionalism."[53] This convention allowed domestic workers to meet and to share their experience with others. It was also a way to know more about domestic workers' activism. Edith Sloan made a speech during this gathering and told the assembly: "Unless there are some changes made, 'Madame' is going to have to clean her own house, and cook and serve her own meals, because *everyone* is going to quit."[54] The

[51] Van Wormer, et al, 153.
[52] Ibid, 98.
[53] Nadasen, 78.
[54] Ibid.

goal was to arouse domestic workers' sense of militancy. The organization was called the "Household Technicians of America." The members wanted to create a multiracial organization but Native-American and Latino-American domestics never really became involved in the movement.[55] The goal of the Household Technicians of America was to "give voice" to domestic workers. Indeed, household workers had remained silent for decades. They usually endured domination, exploitation, humiliation and so on without protesting. They never had the opportunity to speak for themselves and to share their stories. Thanks to the meetings organized by the Household Technicians of America hundreds of domestic workers could hear the stories of women enduring the same sufferings as themselves. They understood that they had shared interests with hundreds and perhaps thousands of other women. Storytelling played a key role in the empowerment of domestic workers as argued by Nadasen:

> For household workers, storytelling highlighted their relationship to domestic work, linked past and present, and was a means to achieve dignity and self-empowerment. Storytelling served as a base-building tool, gave legitimacy and authority to those speaking on behalf of domestic workers, and helped craft their identity. They learned about the experiences of other domestic workers and empathized about the common pattern of mistreatment. Moreover, their stories enabled women from vastly different backgrounds to develop a thread of connection that would be the basis of their collective mobilization. By speaking about their lives, their hardship, and love of their work, they hoped to bring dignity and value to household labor.[56]

By the mid-1970s, domestic workers considered that the depreciation of domestic work was responsible for their exploitation. The National Domestic Workers' Union of America tried to develop a sense of pride among domestic workers. Bolden, for instance, argued that domestic workers deserved to be treated as real workers and not as servants. Through their unions domestic workers tackled the problem of lack of respect. During the convention in Washington D.C for instance, they agreed on the fact that they should be called Miss or Mrs. by white people because it was a "sign of respect, and recognition of professionalism and independence."[57] Plus, domestic workers' activists estimated that it was time to use a new designation for their occupation that would be more gratifying. They began to call domestic workers "household technicians" because it was less demeaning than "maid" or "domestic." Carolyn Reed for example, explained: "When I think of *domestic,* I immediately think of a very tame animal—a cat or dog or something. I am not a tame person, I am not a domesticated person. *Servant* to me goes back to the days of slavery."[58]

[55] Ibid, 79.
[56] Ibid, 81.
[57] Nadasen, 94.
[58] Ibid.

The word "technician" conveys the idea that domestic workers are professionals and that this occupation requires skills. Domestic worker activists thought that professionalism was necessary to improve domestic workers' condition. They tried to establish a "Code of Standards" for wages and hours and organized training programs to give women the possibility to improve their status and to professionalize the occupation. Nadasen explains:

> By standardizing the labor process and trying to professionalize their work, private household workers eroded some of the racial and class power that employers wielded and challenged the disciplinary practices that were designed to disempower and create a more compliant and controllable workforce.[59]

The women participating in the training programs created by the National Domestic Workers Union of America received a certificate that aimed to prove their status as professionals.

Mary McClendon founded the Household Workers Organization in Detroit in 1969. McClendon went further in the idea of designating domestic workers by gratifying labels. She distinguished all the areas of specialization with different names: "General Housekeeping Technician, Kitchen Manager, Child Supervisor, Home Geriatric Aide, Party Aide, Party Supervisor, and Household Manager."[60] Through her organization, McClendon wanted to emphasize the need for professionalization. She also created training programs to improve domestic workers' skills.

Geraldine Roberts, for her part, organized training programs in order to help domestic workers to emancipate from domestic work. She wanted to give an opportunity to young black women to get an education and to find other jobs than household work. She explained: "We feel that the domestic worker must look further ahead especially if she's a younger person that house cleaning should not be her goals for her life. That she should seek educational programs, scholarships and ways and means to improve and bring pride and dignity to her life."[61] Rather than following the pattern of previous training programs that aimed to improve the status of domestic workers, Geraldine Roberts decided to create programs that could enable black women to leave household work.

The goal of those activists was to elevate the status of domestic work. Household workers who enrolled in those organizations sought recognition and dignity. They wanted domestic work to be respected.

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[59] Ibid, 96.
[60] Ibid, 100.
[61] Nadasen, 97.

As Vivien Hart explains, in the early 1970s, domestic workers were the only group that were still excluded from laws that guaranteed minimum wage. The Fair Labor Standards Act was passed in 1938 and was the first federal minimum wage law. When it was passed, this act only covered 20 percent of all the workers in America and many occupations were excluded. Over the years, the act expanded to other categories of workers but in the early 1970s domestic workers were still excluded.[62] Thus, various domestic workers, women and civil rights organizations had to unite in order to fight for the establishment of a law that would protect domestic workers and that would guarantee minimum wage. They won in 1974 when the Fair Labor Standards Act was amended in order to extend minimum wage coverage to domestic work.[63] For domestic workers it was a huge victory because it meant that their work was recognized as valuable for the first time. They were put on the same level as other workers. The government recognized that domestic workers deserved to be rewarded for their work. The minimum wage laws finally protected domestic workers from economic exploitation. Moreover, from 1976 on, domestic workers could have access to unemployment insurance which could be very helpful if domestics lost their jobs.[64] Unemployment insurance guaranteed an income for domestic workers while they were looking for a new employer or a new job.

Domestic workers' organizations and activism had existed since the 1880s. Domestics always had the desire to improve their situation and working conditions. During the New Deal era, domestic workers' unions developed at the same time as industrial workers unions. Domestic worker activists tried to make the occupation evolve by requesting better wages. Nadasen explains that storytelling was a key element in the development of domestic workers' collective actions:

> If their personal experiences were the building blocks of the movement, the process of sharing, of storytelling, was the cement that fused those blocks into a larger whole. Stories of the "slave markets", stories of Rosa Parkes, and stories of struggle and empowerment circulated among household workers in the 1970s.[65]

Domestics had to wait until the Civil Rights Movement to see changes in white people's mentalities and until the mid-1970s to see real improvements in the occupation with the adoption of minimum wage laws and the access to unemployment insurance.

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[62] Vivien Hart, *Bound by Our Constitution: Women, Workers, and the Minimum Wage* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994) 151-172.
[63] Nadasen, 125.
[64] Ibid, 142.
[65] Nadasen, 176.

Conclusion

Black domestic workers always were considered as inferior because of their gender, class and race. They were discriminated against because they were black and racism was widespread in the United-States, first during slavery and then during the segregation era. Then, domestic work was considered as the lowest occupation because it was performed by women and it was associated with servitude. Thus, domestic workers always had to fight for recognition, for equality and for their rights. As argued in this thesis, they used various different strategies that could lead them to improve their situation. They used internal coping strategies that helped them remain psychologically resilient. The black community and religious faith were important because they pushed them to maintain hope when they were in a desperate situation. Using self-definition and self-esteem was a way to fight stereotypes that maintained domestic workers at the bottom of society and to be proud of themselves. Moreover, white employers' dependence on their domestic workers and the latter's knowledge of their employers' intimacy also helped domestics to be more resilient because they could realize that it was possible to surpass white people even if they were led to believe the contrary. These resistance strategies were helpful for domestic workers only from a psychological point of view. They were not useful for domestics to really improve their working conditions. Considering the fact that black domestic workers had very hard living conditions, internal coping strategies were a means to make their lives less harsh. In order to really improve their living and working conditions domestic workers had to act instead of remaining passive.

First, they used non-confrontational resistance strategies. They took action but that did not imply a direct confrontation with their employers. For instance, many domestic workers decided to move from live-in to live-out in order to put distance between them and their employers. It was a way to become more independent and to spend more time with their families. Moreover, it was also a means to prevent sexual harassment. Then, in the 1930s a large number of southern workers moved to the North of the United-States because employers paid more and the working conditions were better. It was also an opportunity to leave the segregated South and institutional racism. Domestic workers also understood that their lack of education was the reason why they were maintained at a lower status than white people. Thus, some of them tried to educate themselves but more importantly they pushed their children to go to school and get an education in order to elevate their status. Education offered the

opportunity to get away and emancipate from household service. Domestic work was exhausting and thus some women tricked their employers in order to reduce their workload. They also used tricks to take revenge for the humiliations they underwent from their employers. However, sometimes those non-confrontational strategies were not sufficient to improve domestic workers' lives. They had to confront their employers in order to make the latter realize that they were dissatisfied with the way they were treated. Some domestics used oral resistance and dared to directly tell their employers when they were not happy with the situation. Oral resistance proved to employers that domestics did not always remain silent and submissive. Sometimes it worked and domestic workers obtained what they wanted but when it was not enough they left the job. Leaving was a way to show white employers that domestics were not ready to accept everything in order to keep their jobs. It led employers to change the way they treated their domestics because for the most part they were not ready to maintain their household without the help of a domestic worker. Moreover, some domestics used the southern tradition of giving and receiving to show their employers that they were not dependent on them. They refused to receive gifts or to tote and sometimes they used their own right to give gifts to prove that black people could also afford to buy gifts. Those confrontational resistance strategies were used by domestics who could not stand being treated as inferior by white people. They wanted to be treated with respect and dignity. Nevertheless, those strategies were only helpful for them at an individual level but did not help the entire group of domestic workers. This is why domestic workers' organizations were essential for domestic workers' resistance. They aimed to improve and emancipate the entire occupation of household service. From the 1880s to the 1930s some organizations were created but they did not bring change at a national level. When the Civil Rights Movement occurred, domestic workers were galvanized and encouraged to fight for their rights. Thus, a large number became members of organizations and participated in the movement. Finally, after the Civil Rights Movement, domestic workers still had to struggle for recognition. In 1974, they eventually obtained the extension of the minimum wage laws to domestic service. They were finally recognized as real workers. However, domestic workers' struggle for better working conditions continued after the 1970s and still continues nowadays. According to Premila Nadasen:

> By 1980, the NCHE [National Committee of Household Employment] began to more consciously acknowledge the importance of the history of organizing among household workers and embrace the example of working-class black women's resistance. These household workers

> seemed acutely aware of the historical significance of their organizing and how it fit into a broader trajectory of activism among domestic workers.[66]

In the 1970s, storytelling was important for domestic workers to develop a collective consciousness but it was only by 1980 that union leaders became aware of the importance of sharing history. Domestic worker activists intended to use history as an "organizing tool."[67] The goal was to use their mothers', grandmothers' and their own experiences in order to empower themselves and to create a sense of community.

In 2007 the National Domestic Workers Alliance was created. Several domestic workers' organizations allied to form a national organization. The National Domestic Workers Alliance was created in order to defend the rights of domestic workers in the United States. Leaders of this organization participate in international conventions that aim to enforce standards for domestic service all around the world.[68] The creation of this organization in 2007 demonstrates that domestic workers still are vulnerable nowadays and still need to fight for their rights.

In 2009, the novel *The Help* written by Kathryn Stockett was published and in 2011 the film was released. The story of *The Help* takes place in the 1960s, in Jackson, Mississippi, at the time of the Civil Rights Movement. Thanks to this story, people all around the world became aware of black domestic workers' living and working conditions in the South of the United States. For decades, black women and domestic workers had been treated as inferior by white people and thanks to *The Help,* they were finally put in the limelight. For the first time, black domestic workers were the heroines of a novel and people got to know about the hardships they endured. In this novel, the author exposes the importance of storytelling. Indeed, the heroines are interviewed by a young white woman who wants to write about domestic workers' deplorable working conditions. Even if the domestic workers who testified wanted to remain anonymous for their safety, sharing their experiences and exposing them in a book could be seen as a form of resistance. Thus, contrary to Premila Nadasen who argues that *The Help* "reinforces dominant stereotypes of passive household workers," I would say that this novel presents domestic workers who wished to fight against oppression, discrimination and racism but who feared the consequences of challenging the established order of society. The fact that they decided to testify proves that they did not remain passive. This novel exposes storytelling as a form of resistance. By depicting the lives of black

[66] Nadasen, 176.
[67] Ibid, 180.
[68] Ibid, 175.

domestic workers during the 1960s, *The Help* also tackles the broader topic of black people's lives during the segregation era. The matter of domestic workers' resistance is intrinsically linked to the matter of black women's resistance in general. Indeed, black women were restricted to domestic service, especially in the South, because it was considered as a low prestige occupation and black people were seen as inferior by white supremacists. As argued by Judith Rollins, during the segregation era, almost all working black women worked as domestics.[69] Thus, when domestic workers fought against racism, oppression and subordination they did not only participate in improving the occupation of domestic service but they also contributed in the emancipation of black women in general.

[69] Rollins, 54.

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