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The Day That Daddy's Baby Girl Is Forced to Grow Up:

The Development of Adolescent Female Subjectivity in Mildred D. Taylor's *The Gold Cadillac*

> I have many good memories of those years, including the year my father brought home a brand-new Cadillac. I also have memories of those years that long troubled me.
>
> —*Mildred D. Taylor*

M'ildred Taylor's 1987 novella *The Gold Cadillac* has received scant attention in studies of her fiction. Yet, the text plays a crucial role in the larger body of her work as a manifestation of her vision of the individual subject's relation to a larger community. More specifically, *The Gold Cadillac* presents a protagonist—'lois—and a series of events modeled in part on Taylor's own life experiences that invite her readers to consider how subjectivity (both hers as well as their own) is influenced by forces such as communal ties and kinship and how both individual subject and community are shaped by pressures and contingencies of time and place that result in potentially problematic constructions of race and gender.

In *The Gold Cadillac*, Taylor examines the emotional and psychological tensions resulting from life in the segregated South of the 1950s by constructing a narrative style that relies on both a single voice—that of 'lois—and that of community of listeners and speakers. Taylor employs a complex mix of private and public speech to reflect and, at times, challenge the ways in which issues of race become embedded in the consciousness of her African American characters. Moreover, she uses private and public speech to tell a story designed to reach multiple audiences: black as well as white, children as well as adolescents and adults.

Before turning to the novella itself, I want to elaborate on my use of the concept of public and private speech and its relation to Taylor's larger project in *The Gold Cadillac*. In her article, "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition," Mae Gwendolyn Henderson argues that African American women writers' works should be examined for their commentaries on the interrelationship between race and gender. She claims that black women's texts speak from a "multiple and complex social, historical and cultural perspective" which, in effect, constitutes black female subjectivity and that analysis of this multivalent subjectivity must take into account both a dialogic of differences and a dialectic of identity (344). Building on the works of Mikhail Bahktin, Barbara Christian, and Hans-George Gadamer, Henderson asserts that the writings of black women are expressive of four key levels of discourse involving the relation of an individual self to a generalized "other" imagined to exist both outside and within the self. These four levels are: the self in competition with the

external other; the self in accord with the external other; the self in competition with an internal other; and the self in accord with an internal other. For Henderson, then, the dialogic of difference would include those moments wherein the self is in conflict with the other—external or internal—in a relation that highlights differences while the dialectic of identity emphasizes those moments wherein the relation of the self and the other—external or internal—is characterized by sharing, unity, and a sense of commonality (345).

The Gold Cadillac's emphasis on storytelling and the usage of various modes of speech—private, interior reflection, and public dialogue—provide the foundation for Taylor's constructions of the individual's relation to family, community, and the broader social world.

Henderson links the notions of dialogics of difference and dialectics of identity to issues of speech: both private individual monologues and more public, multi-voiced discourse. She goes on to contend that minority female authors, especially African Americans, rely on both types of discourse—in her words, they must "speak in tongues"—in order to successfully reflect the complexities of racial and gender stereotyping and to manage the often competing perceptions and expectations of multiple discourse(346-347).[3]

In this essay, I will show how private individual speech, often in the form of interior monologue, combines with public dialogue and storytelling among members of various communities in *The Gold Cadillac* to construct a particular kind of discursive diversity designed to appeal to multiple audiences: blacks, whites, females, males, children, young adults, and mature adults. I argue that examining this diversity—what I refer to as Taylor's own version of "speaking in tongues"—is crucial to understanding both the unique characteristics and goals of her narrative style. In each of her texts, Taylor's characters, especially her protagonists, speak in tongues to various audiences in an attempt to teach a series of lessons about the ways in which the problems of place and time —the South under Jim Crow—shape both individual and communal perceptions of race and gender.

The Gold Cadillac's emphasis on storytelling and the usage of various modes of speech—private, interior reflection, and public dialogue—provide the foundation for Taylor's constructions of the individual's relation to family, community, and the broader social world. In other words, as I will show, Taylor's style is inextricably bound up with her thematic emphasis on social realism; she consistently seeks to connect her fiction to the most pressing cultural and political problems of the time and place in which the stories are set.

To better illustrate the links between Taylor's narrative style and her investment in social realism, I provide below an analysis of some of the historical tensions and events that influenced the lives of Taylor, her family, and other African Americans during the early decades of the twentieth century—tensions and events that are crucial to the plot and context of *The Gold Cadillac*. Wilbert Taylor, like a significant number of southern African American men and women, fled the South in an attempt for a better existence. During the first half of the twentieth century, black Mississippians still lived under the harsh laws of Jim Crow. Although African American men had fought in both World Wars, white men still saw the need to "tighten" the "noose" (McMillen 14). As Neil R. McMillen notes in *Dark Journey*, these laws enforced exclusion, not merely separation (10). Within the "heartland of American apartheid," a significant number of African Americans did not own their homes, lacked an education, and were denied gainful employment and the right to a fair trial.

3 See also Roberta Seelinger Trites' *Disturbing the Universe*. Trites has written extensively about identity politics and subjectivity and how these concepts relate to adolescent literature, especially in novels with black female heroines. Trites makes effective use of Henderson's concepts of dialogics of difference and dialectics of identity to show how access to power is granted (or not) to adolescent characters within a narrative. In a particularly revealing analysis of Mildred D. Taylor's entwicklungsroman *The Road to Memphis*, Trites elucidates the interplay of internal and communal dialogue in the novel to show how the main character, Cassie Logan, defines her selfhood in "terms of the institutions of race, class and gender" (48).

During the years of Jim Crow, there was no hope for Mississippi's "meek" to "inherit the Earth" that they tilled (112). As McMillen states, over 50% of all Mississippi farms were worked by African Americans; however, blacks did not own the land that they plowed (112). These sharecroppers found themselves under a new form of servitude. Forty years after Emancipation, "the southern planter [remained] lord of all" (123). The "new order" still resembled its predecessor (124). Josephine Beard, a former tenant farmer's personal narrative supports this theory. In the following passage, she describes the fear that she had toward her former "riding boss":

> It could have been slavery time . . . the way they act, scared of him . . . You see our parents wuz scared of white folks (125).

Tenant farming required the assistance of the entire family. Plantation "women often worked even harder than their men" (129). As stated by Martha Robb Montgomery, a former sharecropper, women had to "do double duty" (129). Most women, who lived on rural farms, were familiar with plowing tools. It is also important to note that a large number of farms lacked a male presence. By 1940, African American women "operated nearly 10% of all the [B]lack farms in Mississippi" (130).

By World War I, rural black farmers "responded to the lure of [urban Mississippi cities] (155). They abandoned farm life in search of better opportunities in cities such as Jackson and Yazoo City. McMillen states that between the years 1890-1940, the African American urban population (in Mississippi) increased from 34,200—178,000 (155). The only occupations that were available for blacks were domestic and manual labor. The general sentiments were that the decent jobs were reserved for Caucasians (156). Thus, uneducated and unskilled blacks worked as domestics, caregivers, cooks, porters and janitors (156). Wage discrimination did occur within these occupations. The U.S. Census bureau did not configure income statistics (based on race) until 1940; however, it was widely known that white unskilled laborers earned more than their black co-workers (157-158).

Lynching was another problem that black Mississippians were forced to encounter. The fear of "lynching was one of the major fears in the life of any Negro" (227). For, as McMillen states in his analysis of race relations in Mississippi, "the threat of lynching is likely to be in the mind of the Negro child from the earliest days" (120). The years 1889–1945 were commonly known as the Mississippi lynching era (229). According to McMillen, 13% of the U.S.'s lynchings were held in Mississippi. Mississippi "ranked first in most lynching categories." These included: "the most total lynchings, the most multiple lynchings, the most per capita, the most female victims, the most victims taken from police custody, the most lynching without arrest or conviction of mob leaders, the most public support for vigilantism" (229-230). Thus, Mississippi was deemed as a "hopeless state" by poor, southern blacks and educated, southern and northern African Americans (230). Taylor's own father fled the South for a better life in the North. Upon Wilbert's move to Toledo, he became accustomed to a better lifestyle—new car, decent housing, and integrated facilities. There, he was respected as a man.

As Taylor has 'lois describe, it was easy for men like her father to forget the hardships that they once endured. This is illustrated when Wilbert informs his male friends and relatives that he is driving his Cadillac to Mississippi. For, if Wilbert had recently relocated to the North, he would be conscious of the fact that it was dangerous for blacks to own cars, especially luxury vehicles. This act alone could lead to lynching. According to McMillen, these events prompted southern blacks to migrate north in search of a better existence. From 1920–1950, 500,000 blacks fled; 100,000 of them were Mississippi residents (262). The primary force that caused African Americans to flee was the "hunger push" (263). One migrant claimed that the "wages [in Mississippi] [were] so low [that blacks] c[ould] scarcely live (263). The "land of starvation" was not just a physical hunger (263). Most blacks left because of the emotional starvation that they experienced—inadequate schools, legal woes, lynching, and poor housing (263). Although the North did not completely allow migrants to forget the sorrows that are associated with racism, it was "freer of rac[ial] tension than the South" (Sochen 51). Upon arriving in the North, thousands of African Americans became displaced. Blacks' lives became filled with despair (McMillen 53). Cities such as Harlem and Chicago became urban slums.

Despite the hardships that prevented many blacks

from acquiring jobs, most African American migrants were still able to gain a better financial existence in the North than in rural and urban Mississippi. From these migrants emerged the brown middle class. States such as Illinois and Ohio became the locations where blacks were attaining the "American Dream." After arriving to the Midwest, couples like Wilbert and Deletha Taylor attempted to establish a middle class existence for their young children. Parents worked hard in order to purchase homes in decent neighborhoods.

In addition to recognizing the material advances the Taylors made—decent jobs, a large home in a middle-class neighborhood—readers should also pay close attention to the society that the Taylor family attempted to emulate. In *The Negro Family*, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier discusses how the black middle class's views toward careers and wealth stemmed from their admiration of the African American upper class. Frazier states that the black middle class's traditions are characteristic of the African American elite. For instance, one's residence marked his wealth. Homeownership was a "major aspect of middle class standards" (322). These homes were "show places" that were previously owned by wealthy whites (322). The more expensive a person's home, the more successful he was. Regardless of the debts that accrued from material goods that were beyond their financial means, at all times, an "appearance of wealth" had to be maintained (322).

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Taylor's text serves as a commentary about the socio-historical and cultural events that were occurring in America during the first half of the twentieth century. Even in the 1950s, the South remained segregated whereas the North was primarily integrated. In order to both recreate and critique the racism and social inequalities that characterized life for African Americans in this time and place, Taylor uses a mix of public and private discourse; her characters publicly encounter and acknowledge problems of race relations and then reflecting on their implications at a personal level. In scenes that depict 'lois's interactions with her family, the family's striving for middle-class status, and their encounters with racism, Taylor reveals the complex set of tensions within individuals, families, and communities that shape U.S. history. Such tension first becomes apparent when 'lois' father Wilbert purchases a new gold Cadillac. When he arrives home with the car, 'lois runs to share the news with her mother, Dee. Taylor's protagonist soon realizes that her mother is dismayed about the new vehicle; she strongly believes that the purchase is frivolous and that the money should have been used for a down payment on their dream home:

Dee: You didn't buy this car, did you, Wilbert?

Wilbert: Gotta admit I did. Couldn't resist it.

Dee: But. . . but what about our Mercury? It was perfectly good!

Wilbert: Don't you like the Cadillac, Dee?

Dee: That Mercury wasn't even a year old!

Wilbert: And I'm sure whoever buys it is going to get themselves a good car. But we've got ourselves a better one. Now stop frowning, honey, and let's take ourselves a ride in our brand-new Cadillac! (13)

Wilbert's and Dee's conversation is a dialogical moment in which family ties are complicated by gender and racial tension. Wilbert has purchased the Cadillac and he has let her know that his decision is final. His wife, however, refuses to ride in the vehicle, not only because she believes the money would have been better spent on a house, but also because she recognizes the potential problems that can and will result if the family takes the car to the South. Indeed, she tells Wilbert that since he purchased the Cadillac without her consent, he could "just ride in it alone":

I didn't understand either why she did not like that fine

> Cadillac and thought she was being terribly disagreeable with my father. (18)

At this moment, 'lois opts to become the nurturer and cast her mother into the role of disobedient child. Taylor marks the difference and tension between 'lois and her mother:

> **Dee:** Is this your business? She asked.
>
> **'lois:** Well, I just think you ought to be nice to Daddy. I think you ought to ride in that car with him! It'd sure make him happy.
>
> **Dee:** I think you ought to go to sleep [. . .] (18)

Yet Dee eventually does accept her husband's decision because, while she is dismayed by Wilbert's actions, she understands that his sense of self-worth—both in terms of race and manhood—is bound up with the purchase of the car. When Wilbert lived in the South, he was denied the privilege of socio-economic equality—a privilege he enjoys after migrating to the North. Wilbert's actions reflect a key moment in the development of an African American middle class in the North. For the first time, blacks, like their white contemporaries, were able to strive for the "American Dream." 'lois' father already owns his home; now, with the purchase of the gold Cadillac, he appears to have proven to both racial communities that he is capable of maintaining a middle-class existence. Wilbert, like any white man, freely goes out and purchases a luxury car. The southern migrant has "arrived," and to him, the best way to celebrate is by purchasing a Cadillac. Wilbert reinforces the importance of displaying his social status by boldly displaying the vehicle amongst his friends and relatives: "Just off the showroom floor! [. . .] I just couldn't resist it" (12).

That the African American community recognizes Wilbert's status is evidenced when both Wilma and 'lois, as well as their uncles, aunt and Mr. Pondexter, a neighbor, take a ride in the gold Cadillac. Yet this recognition is not complete, and tension manifests itself upon their return when Dee expresses her frustration over their tardiness—frustration driven by the fact that Wilbert has purchased the car without her consent.

At this point, still early in the novella, 'lois' relationship with the black community and extended family remains characterized by a sense of comfort and security For instance, when Wilbert arrives home with the gold Cadillac, Wilma and 'lois run to tell their relatives and acquaintances about the new vehicle:

> And then we took off again, up the back stairs to the second floor of the duplex. Running down the hall, we banged on all the apartment doors. My uncles and their wives stepped to the doors. It was good it was a Saturday morning. Everybody was home. (11)

'lois' community and its inhabitants are important to her emotional equilibrium. Her neighborhood is safe and prosperous. Her family frequents the fish market, grocery store, the Dixie Theater, a drugstore and local restaurant (22). After informing her aunts, uncles, and cousins about the gold Cadillac, 'lois runs to inform Mr. Pondexter "from next door" and Mr. Courtland and Mr. LeRoy "from down the street" (11). 'lois's reference to these men reflects a form of salutation by which children enjoin the elder's title with his/her first name as a sign of both respect and familiarity. It is clear from 'lois's use of this style that she sees herself strongly and comfortably connected to a broad social network. Both 'lois and her parents view their neighbors as extended members of the family rather than merely inhabitants of the community. This is reflected as the men admire Wilbert's car. Through private monologue, 'lois describes the men's reaction to the vehicle: "Mr. Pondexter was still there. Mr. LeRoy and Mr. Courtland from down the street were there too and all were admiring the Cadillac as my father stood proudly by, point out the various features" (12). To Wilbert, the men's admiration is a confirmation that he has achieved what most of his contemporaries only dream about owning.

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'lois' sense of security is further affirmed by the apparent lack of interracial friction in her world. On

her "very busy block," there appears to be a minimal amount of tension between black and white residents (11). While 'lois recounts the fond memories of the times that she spends with her family, there is no mention of her relatives being harassed by whites. Taylor suggests that blacks in the North, circa early 1950s, have many of the same liberties as Caucasians. Wilbert had given his children a far better existence than they would have received in Mississippi. African Americans are welcome to shop in the non-segregated grocery store, cleaners, gas station and the Dixie Theater. African Americans could visit banks and acquire loans for new homes. In addition, blacks are able to travel to other Midwestern cities without being harassed by white policemen. For instance, 'lois's family would take trips to Chicago, Peoria, Detroit and Cleveland, where they would visit relatives. A sense of equality also allowed 'lois's family to feel comfortable driving their vehicles to the park and beach, where their children could "run and play," their wives could "spread a picnic" and the men could polish their cars.

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'lois's harmonious relationship with family, race, place, and time is disrupted when her uncles and male neighbors warn Wilbert about traveling to the South in a brand-new Cadillac. In *The Gold Cadillac*, this is the first moment that Taylor directly discusses racism and its significance to black–white relations, circa early 1950s. Within this text, Taylor illustrates that racism (both physical and emotional) and socioeconomic factors that plague the Logans in Mississippi, circa 1920s, continue to affect blacks living in the South during the 1950s. Most importantly, Taylor examines how some northern black children are naïve about matters concerning racial turmoil; for many, their northern upbringing has resulted in a sheltered existence. Taylor explores this in her depiction of 'lois's reaction to the warnings of her uncle and neighbors. Here, for the first time, she learns that her father, her uncles, and other black men, who fought in World War II and saved the lives of white American soldiers, felt betrayed upon their return to the American South, where they encountered not only segregation but also outright violence in the form of lynchings:

> "Not much those folks hate more'n to see a northern Negro coming down there in a fine car," said Mr. Pondexter. "They see those Ohio license plates, they'll figure you coming down uppity, trying to lord your fine car over them!" "Listen to Pondexter, Wilbert!" cried another uncle. "We might've fought a war to free people overseas, but we're not free here! Man, those white folks down south'll lynch you soon's look at you. You know that!" (24)

While the men are shown engaging in public discourse about segregation and murders, 'lois's response is presented to us through private, inner thoughts about her neighborhood: "the smell of charcoal and of barbeque drifting up the block," the "sound of laughter and music and talk" that occurs amongst friends. The conversation shifts when Wilbert mentions taking the car to Mississippi. Taylor relies on DuBois's view of double-consciousness to illustrate how the men are aware of their dual existence. It is at this point in the novella that 'lois begins to experience the full magnitude of racial double-consciousness that W.E.B. DuBois discusses in *The Souls of Black Folk*. DuBois' book is primarily concerned with social history and psychological experiences of African Americans, from slavery to the turn of the twentieth century. As stated earlier, DuBois argues that African Americans, who are denied their right to ever possess a "true self-consciousness," can only perceive themselves as whites view them:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (5)

When the men attempt to convince Wilbert not to take his car to Mississippi, lois's discourse becomes closed and private.

> I listened, but I didn't understand. I didn't understand why they didn't want my father to drive that car south. It was his. (24)

This scene highlights the fact that, as a child, she is still relatively sheltered from the social tension of her time and place and how, for her, growing up is directly linked to gaining knowledge about race relations. She has heard wonderful tales about her heritage, but not about the "dark" side of black southern life.

After hearing these horror stories regarding "strange fruit" that hung on trees in southern rural towns, 'lois learns for the first time about the differences between the ways white people perceive blacks and the way blacks see themselves. 'lois is now aware of racism, segregation and poverty. For the first time, 'lois begins to become more aware of double-consciousness. She realizes her duality—two souls within the same body. For Taylor, this problem of double-consciousness is a key element of her overall mode of social realism. In other words, Taylor, in each of her novels, attempts not only to connect her stories to particular historical events and tensions but also to show how those tensions influence the psyches of African Americans.

The lesson 'lois receives is meant to serve as one for Taylor's readers as well. For children and young adults, the public speech of the men provides a powerful illustration and commentary on the status of race relations in post-war U.S. culture. For many white readers and for young and older black readers who, like 'lois, have grown up in the North, the scene reveals potentially new information not only about life in the segregated South but also about an older generation's emotional response to the hypocrisy of a nation that would ask them to fight abroad for democracy but continue to deny them civic equality at home.

The fear that threatens 'lois's sense of tranquility subsides when her aunts and mother prepare for the family's journey to Mississippi. Taylor's protagonist's concerns are replaced with elation as reflected in her narration of the preparations for their journey:

> All the next day my aunts and my mother cooked and the house was filled with delicious smells. They fried chicken and baked hams and cakes and sweet potato pies and mixed potato salad. They filled jugs with water and punch and coffee. Then they packed everything in huge picnic baskets along with bread and boiled eggs, oranges, and apples, plates and napkins, spoons and forks and cups. They placed all that food on the back seats of the cars. It was like a grand, grand picnic we were going on, and Wilma and I were mighty excited. We could hardly wait to start. (27)

'lois is at ease not only because of the preparations but also because she believes that, as long as Wilbert is present to serve as the family's protector, she need not concern herself with the issues raised by the public speech of the men.

Yet 'lois's positive relation to family, community, and the broader social world of 1950s Toledo slowly deteriorates as the family leaves their home and crosses the Ohio River into Kentucky. At this point in the story, Taylor begins to contrast the pastoral Midwestern countryside with the harsh realities that 'lois and her family will encounter as they travel into the Deep South. 'lois's sense of inner emotional comfort begins to deteriorates once the family reaches the other side of the Ohio River—the boundary that separates Ohio from Kentucky. Upon their arrival, he lectures his children on the need to change their attitudes and behaviors in response to the social demands of the new place. In particular, he requires them to remain silent when the family encounters whites:

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> Now from here on, whenever we stop and there're white people around, I don't want either one of you to say a word. *Not one word!* Your mother and I'll do all the talking. That understood? (29)

Wilbert's command marks the moment in which 'lois realizes fully the importance of her uncles' and neighbors' concerns. His speech conveys a distinct friction—both with regard to the relations among family members and the relation of the family to the segregated South. At this moment, 'lois begins to learn that, in the South, she must deal with the effects of racial double-consciousness: the awareness that whites see her differently than she sees herself. At this moment, as the family moves from one region and racial context to another, the very act of speaking takes on a new risk. The realities of segregation compel Wilbert to warn his children not to continue thinking and speaking as though they exist in har-

mony or unity with the world around them. This is something new to the girls. Through silence, they become aware of the reality of the South's social system and the double-consciousness it produces.

'lois's emotional stability—her sense of unity with the external world— gives way to a sense of fragmentation as she sees signs that read: "WHITE ONLY, COLORED NOT ALLOWED." In the North, she is permitted to use public facilities, whereas in segregated states such as Tennessee, blacks are barred from hotels, restaurants, and the restrooms in filling stations. As her feelings shift, 'lois begins to question the rationale for segregation. The "Whites Only" signs prompt her to engage in dialogue with her father. Wilbert relies on his rich storytelling abilities to explain to his daughters the difference between living in Toledo and the rural South, circa early 1950s:

> I asked my father what the signs meant. He said they meant we couldn't drink from the water fountains. He said they meant we couldn't stop to sleep in the motels. He said they meant we couldn't stop to eat in the restaurants. (30)

'lois is informed that she cannot use facilities designated for whites. The question-and-answer session that takes place between 'lois and Wilbert serves at one level to explain segregation in the South in the 1950s both to 'lois and to younger readers who might be unaware of the realities of that particular place and time. For a mature audience, their discourse also serves as a marker of the consolidation of 'lois's and her father's shared identity—both in terms of family and as members of an oppressed racial group. Their dialogue consolidates their identity as father-daughter and as blacks who are living in the segregated South. It also helps them understand that they are both in the same situation.

These harsh realities force 'lois to view their vacation not as a "grand picnic," but as a traumatic experience—one characterized by far more pain than joy. When the family reaches Memphis, traffic separates them from their relatives. Thus, they are forced to travel to Mississippi alone. It is when they reach the Mississippi state line that 'lois is reminded of Wilbert's speech regarding the differences between northern and southern relations. Shortly after crossing the state border, 'lois witnesses racism first-hand. Two white policemen stop Wilbert and interrogate him regarding the ownership of the gold Cadillac:

> **White Policemen:** "Whose car is this boy?" They asked.
>
> **Wilbert:** "It's mine," he said.
>
> **White Policemen:** "You're a liar," said one of the policemen. "You stole this car. Turn around, put your hands on top of that car and spread eagle," said the other white policeman. My father did as he was told. (30)

The scene once again underscores the significance of place: in Toledo, Wilbert might not have been stopped and interrogated for driving a brand-new Cadillac. In fact, one can assume that a white sales associate may have sold Wilbert his car in the first place. But in the South, he is an immediate suspect and target.

Wilbert illustrates to his children the behavior that he expects them to follow when dealing with southern whites. He does exactly what the white officers demand of him, regardless of the fact that their treatment is unjustified. This scene also teaches 'lois how white males, regardless of their socioeconomic background, are viewed as men where as black males are merely "boys." Wilbert's arrest teaches 'lois about the social realities of Mississippi; it is not a place where black men can proudly wax their vehicles at local parks, nor is it a state that permits African American families to picnic in its parks. Instead, Mississippi is a place where the white man's word is law, and blacks must adhere to it.

After Wilbert is released from jail, he drives his family to a secluded area so that they can rest. In this scene, Taylor demonstrates 'lois's growing apprehension, which results from the lessons that she has learned about the realities of race relations in this place and time. The ''lois of Toledo—a young girl who enjoys going to the local movie theater—becomes 'lois, the nigger child, whose innocence is shattered by racism. Dee tells 'lois—her "baby"—to go to sleep; however, her daughter is no longer the baby of the family (35). Instead, she is an African American young woman now fully cognizant of all the tensions to which she was previously unaware. At this point in the novella, Taylor provides a dramatic example of racial double-consciousness—one constructed specifically to resonate with younger readers. In sum, she is building on and further illustrating DuBois's concept

by showing how it is experienced by children as well as adults. 'lois's realization that whites see her and her family differently than they see themselves has terrified her and transformed her from an emotionally stable young girl to a tense and potentially violent attacker:

> Ready to strike, I sat there in the back of the car, eyes wide, searching the blackness outside the Cadillac. Wilma, for a while, searched the night too, then she fell asleep. (35)

Like 'lois's earlier conversation with her father about segregation, this scene also holds the potential to speak to multiple audiences. The feelings of fear and powerlessness are again meant to illustrate for younger readers the realities of a segregated society of which they may know very little. For older readers, 'lois's private speech shows how her relation to the external world has been reshaped by Wilbert's experience with the white policemen. 'lois is no longer excited in a positive way about the family's trip; instead, she has become terrified.

The family returns to Memphis where they exchange cars with Cousin Halton. They proceed to Mississippi; it is there that the family is reunited with their other relatives. While at the family homestead, Wilbert relies on his storytelling skills in order to explain blacks' inferior status in a manner which 'lois can understand; he emphasizes that he shares her feelings, and he urges his daughter to channel her animosity toward whites into something positive:

> My father looked at me and said it all was a difficult thing to understand and he didn't really understand it himself. He said it all had to do with the fact that black people had once been forced to be slaves. He said it had to do with our skins being colored. He said it had to do with stupidity and ignorance. He said it had to do with the law that said we could be treated like this here in the South. And for that matter, he added, any other place in these United Sates where folks thought the same as many folks did here in the South. (37)

Wilbert speaks in such a way as to provide 'lois—and Taylor's audience with a feeling of hope and optimism. His focus is less on difference and tension and more on commonality and unity, and he eschews the fragmenting theme and tone he employed in his lecture to the girls as they entered the segregated South:

> I'm hoping one day though we can drive that long road down here and there won't be any signs. I'm hoping one day the police won't stop us just because of the color of our skins and we're riding in a gold Cadillac with northern plates. (37)

He encourages 'lois to believe that her relationship to the racist elements of 1950s society will improve and that she should concentrate her thoughts and speech on the potential for unity and harmony with the world around her—despite the fact that the world, as she now realizes, treats her as a second-class citizen. Upon returning to Toledo, Wilbert affirms his message to 'lois by selling the gold Cadillac. By getting rid of the car, the family reminds itself of what is important—solidarity—for ownership of the Cadillac had threatened to break their circle. After learning that her father has sold the car, 'lois reflects privately upon the importance of family and being African American:

> As fine as the Cadillac had been, [. . .], it had pulled us apart for awhile. Now, as ragged and noisy as that old Ford was, we all rode in it together and we were a family again. (43)

Yet Taylor is careful to point out that selling the car is not the right thing in an ideal sense, but rather a pragmatic response to an inherently unfair social situation. The fact that Wilbert must get rid of the car to protect his family underscores the depth of inequality they face and the loss of subjectivity that accompanies it. Although family unity is reaffirmed in the face of segregation, the act of selling the Cadillac serves as a telling marker of the difficulty—perhaps impossibility—of broader racial unity. It is a marker of a sacrifice that 'lois—and Taylor's readers—are meant never to forget:

Taylor is careful to point out that selling the car is not the right thing in an ideal sense, but rather a pragmatic response to an inherently unfair social situation.

> We had the Cadillac only a little more than a month, but I wouldn't soon forget its splendor or how I'd felt riding around inside it. I wouldn't soon forget either the ride we had taken south in it. I wouldn't soon forget the signs, the policemen, or my fear. I would remember that ride and the gold Cadillac all my life. (43)

Through 'lois, Taylor suggests that the American Dream can be obtained, but at a cost. She implies that

Wilbert realizes that he no longer needs to prove himself through material goods. For it is family, not luxury items, that is important. Most importantly, this text exemplifies the significance of Taylor's use of different modes of speech—private and public—to "speak in tongues" to multiple audiences about the social realities of race relations and to offer models for how to respond (pragmatic and ideal).

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