

The African American Historical Romance: An Interview with Beverly Jenkins

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The African American historical romance developed in nineteenth-century America but did not gain popularity as a genre until the twentieth century. Set in a specific historic time—usually during slavery, Reconstruction, or post-Reconstruction—the African American historical romance emphasizes tensions between two opposing forces, as it employs romantic elements of adventure and love. Because slavery and racism denied Blacks full political and social inclusion in American society, conflict in African American historical romances is often presented as opposition between Blacks who strive for sociopolitical freedom and the national majority who denies them full participation rights. The romance element centers in courtship and marriage that usually develop from the couple's mutual involvement in racial uplift missions to advance the status of the colored community.

The first wave of African American women's historical romances began with Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892) and continued with Pauline Hopkins' *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrated of Negro Life North and South* (1900) and Zara Wright's *Black and White Tangled Threads* (1920) and *Kenneth* (1920).^[1] These novels contain colored protagonists^[2] and have varied plots, settings, characters and romantic combinations, including interracial entanglements; each aims to disprove myths about Blacks' moral degeneracy and their ill-suitability for assimilation into American society. For this purpose, their protagonists possess attributes that middle and upper-class Caucasians deemed worthy. Well-educated, temperate, frugal, and virtuous, they contribute to community uplift and marry respectably. As professionals, they represent the rising middle class, a rank above the Black masses. Properly armed, they possess the necessary weapons to battle the war against racism in order to assimilate into American society.

Of the novels in the first wave, Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* dramatizes the black woman's initiative in the freedom struggle and establishes a paradigm that other first-wave novels alternately adhere to and modify. Iola Leroy, Harper's titular character, comes from a stable family, is educated, marries well, and works for the racial

uplift of her people. A respectable family background, education, marriage, and community service were hallmarks to aspire to in attempting to dismantle racial injustice. For this reason, romance in the man-woman relationship in first-wave African American women's historical romances is subordinate to sociopolitical struggles. Nevertheless, the romance paradigm is present—man and woman meet, fall in love, marry, and live the rest of their lives together. First-wave historical romance writers, as I have written elsewhere, “found the historical romance a useful and timely genre in which to encase unresolved sociopolitical issues regarding African American rights and status in nineteenth-century American society” (*Black Women's Activism* 3).

Beverly Jenkins is the twentieth century's (and, so far, the twenty-first century's) best-selling African American historical romance writer.[3] She launched the mass-market second wave of African American historical romances with her first novel *Night Song*, published by Avon Books in 1994. Similar to first-wave novels, Jenkins's historical romances evolve from particular moments in nineteenth-century American history and are shaped by confining conditions of race, gender, and class. With a strong revolutionary impetus, Jenkins's novels reveal African Americans in the freedom struggle to secure their civil rights and assert their gender and class privileges in American society. Despite some similarities to the works of her foremothers, however, Jenkins's eighteen published historical romances[4] extend the paradigm found in first-wave African American women's historical romances in several ways.

First, Jenkins manifests a fuller view of history. Approximately a century removed from the historical periods of slavery, Reconstruction, and post-Reconstruction that she writes about, Jenkins carefully dramatizes that history and documents it, appending a bibliography to each of her novels. In *Vivid*, for instance, Jenkins revisits the post-Reconstruction era and details the difficulties that confronted Black female physicians, as illuminated in the life of Dr. Viveca Lancaster, the novel's heroine. Dr. Lancaster enters the medical profession at a time when the racist theory of “negritude,” proposed by physician Benjamin Rush (1754-1813), was still prevalent. Rush's theory, which Jenkins mentions in *Vivid*, hypothesizes that the color of black skin is a form of leprosy. As a result, Black physicians were limited to medical practice in the Black community. Another difficulty facing young Black physicians was the shift in the medical profession from bleeding patients in order to rid them of diseases to using antiseptics in order to prevent disease. This medical change is represented in the violent confrontation between Dr. Wadsworth Hayes, the elder white county physician who applies Benjamin Rush's bleeding technique to a young Black child, and Dr. Lancaster, who applies the more modern cleansing methods of Dr. Joseph Lister (1827-1912) and fights to remove Dr. Hayes from his patient. Other details in the history reveal Dr. Lancaster's engaging in difficult tasks outside her profession. She buries the dead, locates relatives of the ill, and performs household chores of her female patients; for her services, she often receives pay in the form of vegetables and farm animals. Dr. Lancaster is the fictional representative of Caroline Still Wiley Anderson, a black woman who received her medical degree in 1878 from the prestigious Woman's Medical College in Philadelphia, but, because of her race, was restricted to a limited practice in the Black community.[5]

Second, Jenkins' historical romances consistently celebrate nineteenth-century Black women who engage in racial uplift efforts in the public sphere. Jenkins depicts Black women in cohesive plots rather than in the digressive and episodic intrigues of her literary

foremothers, offering a more comprehensive and sustained view of the Black woman engaged in racial uplift efforts. Sequential plotting aids the depiction of heroines in their tireless efforts; in their urgent and constant endeavors, Jenkins's Black heroines seem to take their cue from Maria Stewart, a Black feminist who goaded Black women to action. In her 1832 "An Address Delivered before the Afri-American Female Intelligence Society of America," Stewart urged Black women to "possess the spirit of men, bold and enterprising, fearless and undaunted" (53). Stewart's message was heeded throughout the nineteenth century as African American women assumed public positions as abolitionists (Harriett Tubman), preachers (Jarena Lee), and teachers (Anna Julia Cooper). Black women in Jenkins's second-wave historical romances engage in constructive activism as they assume responsible public positions as abolitionist (Hester Wyatt in *Indigo*), teacher (Cara in *Night Song*), and physician (Viveca Lancaster in *Vivid*).

Third, Jenkins revises the image of the mulatta heroine found in first-wave novels and depicts the darker-hued heroine who triumphs in public spaces. The darker-hued beauty in second-wave novels possesses masculine vigor and often dons pants. She is the antithesis of Frances Harper's mulatta Iola Leroy who, despite her public service as nurse and teacher, relies on her husband to make decisions. Jenkins's heroines also differ from the weakened heroines which African American male historical romance writers create. Clotel in William Wells Brown's *Clotel, or The President's Daughter* (1853) commits suicide by jumping into the Potomac River, and Desiree Hippolyte, the quadroon mistress in Frank Yerby's *The Foxes of Harrow* (1946), depends on the handouts of Stephen Fox, her white lover who abandons her during her pregnancy.

Fourth, unlike first-wave novels, second-wave novels present Black women fighting for self-determination in romantic liaisons with Black men. These men were often unwilling to concede public space to black women. As I have noted elsewhere, "Black men who [were] equally oppressed by race claim[ed] domination of women as their right" ("The Race, Gender, Romance Connection," 185-186). The woman-man conflict is evident in *Night Song*, wherein Chase Jefferson, Cara Henson's paramour, consistently intrudes upon her public space until she loses her teaching position.

Fifth, unlike first-wave novels that avoid sex in romantic relationships, Jenkins incorporates the more explicit treatment of sexuality found in the works of white European and American women writers. In part, she does this to indulge her ardent readers; in part, to satisfy her publisher's demands. Avon Books, Jenkins's publisher, broke new ground in the 1970s by publishing such erotically explicit historical romances as Kathleen Woodiwiss's *The Flame and the Flower* (1972) and Rosemary Rogers's more violently sexual *Sweet, Savage Love* (1974). The passionate sex scenes in Jenkins's novels, however, always take place between consenting black men and black women; there are no rapist heroes or "forced seductions" in her work.

As I sum up the genre in *Black Women's Activism: Reading African American Historical Romances*, second-wave historical romances "offer a fuller view of specific historic moments, an expanded look at Black womanhood, a more complex and emphatic involvement of Black women in historic settings, and heated romance" (4). In addition to Jenkins, other Black woman historical romance writers in the second wave include Francine Craft (*The Black Pearl*, 1996), Roberta Gayle (*Moonrise*, 1996), Gay G. Gunn (*Nowhere to Run*, 1997), and Shirley Hailstock (*Clara's Promise*, 1995).

My interview with Beverly Jenkins came in stages over the past eighteen months. I first sent a written copy of my questions to her in August 2008. She responded weeks later with a telephone call; we continued the interview by telephone and email in December and January of 2008-9. In preparation for this interview's inclusion in the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, I emailed Jenkins a final set of questions in late January 2010, which she answered and returned a few days later.

RBD *Why did you choose to begin your writing career with the historical rather than the contemporary romance?*

BJ It wasn't my choice really; it was the publisher's choice. The first manuscript I sent out was a contemporary that was rejected, but the historical *Night Song* sold. Ironically, that rejected contemporary was published many years later as *Edge of Night*.

RBD *How difficult was it for you to publish Night Song?*

BJ It took me fifteen years to publish my first novel, which has since gone through six printings. The start was rough. My editor, Ellen Edwards, then Executive Editor of Avon, sent me a fourteen-page revision letter. She said she didn't know if I could do the revisions. I did the revisions. The draft went from the editor to a freelancer. Scenes were changed. The scene where Cara's grandfather appears, "nigger, nigger" replaced his name. Characters were depicted as "black as coal." I was devastated when I received the galley. I called Vivian Stephens, my agent, and told her that she should return the advance on the book. I did not want the book published like that. The editor called. She cried and apologized. For four and a half hours, the editor and I were on the telephone going over the revisions. There should be trust between editor and author.

RBD *There are so many more contemporary romances published than there are historical romances. Why is that?*

BJ Money drives the publishing business just like every other business. Back in the seventies and eighties, historical romances held the biggest share of the market, so publishers pushed that genre. But over time, the tastes of the readers changed, the times changed, and contemporaries began to be embraced. Now contemporaries rule. Romance can be very cyclical, though, so, who knows where the genre will be ten years from now.

RBD *You are more than a century removed from the nineteenth century that you write about. How do your historical romance novels bring this era alive for your twenty-first-century readers?*

BJ I bring the nineteenth century alive—I think—by placing my historical characters in the context of their everyday lives. Our bittersweet history in America is just that, but it didn't stop us from building colleges or raising families or continuing to get up every day and put one foot in front of the other so life could be better. All the bullshit America threw at the Ancestors, we as a race survived, and by showing how we bent but didn't break, how

individuals coped in spite of [oppression], gives my readers a truer look at how we got over. Telling history through the lives and actions of a story's characters as opposed to beating folks over the head with dates and boring lectures makes the history more accessible. It personalizes. Whether I'm dealing with the Exodus of 1879, the Seminole scouts, the Black Civil War vets, or the Black and Brown lawmen of Indian Territory, breaking the history down into stories seems to work well with the readers.

RBD *How do your historical romances link to those of your nineteenth-century literary foremothers, Francis Harper and Pauline Hopkins?*

BJ I do know that what these illustrious foremothers stood for—justice, equality, education, a commitment to community and the desire to push the envelope on race and gender—is something I consciously place in each of my heroines. I “borrowed” the concept from the great historian Dorothy A. Sterling. Her book, *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the 19th Century*, is my bible. In it, she states that nineteenth-century Black women had three gifts: a strong work ethic, a commitment to community, and a penchant to push the envelope on race and gender. Whether it's schoolteacher Cara Lee Henson, journalist Kate Love, or banker Grace Atwood, I try to bestow at least one of Sterling's gifts on them. Nineteenth-century Black women changed the world not only for themselves and the race but for women of other races as well. Women like Black abolitionist Maria Stewart, who in 1832 became the first woman in America of any race to lecture to a mixed audience; Rebecca Lee and other pioneering Black doctors of the late 1860s were often not only the first Black doctors, but many were the first doctors of any race in their communities. Their experiences helped shape crusading Dr. Viveca Lancaster, the heroine in my second novel, *Vivid*.

RBD *The neo-slave narrative, another African American historical genre, has gained prominence. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Sherley Anne Williams's *Dessa Rose* come to mind. What is your opinion about this kind of historical novel? What are your thoughts about the relationship of your historical romances to this body of work set in the same period as your novels and deal with similar issues of race, gender, and sexuality?*

BJ I have read both of the titles referenced. Our novels are similar in the sense that all touch the African American experience. Mine differs in the model upon which it is based. Genre romance novels are based on the gothic tradition set forth by authors Daphne du Maurier[6] and Georgette Heyer,[7] and American authors Kathleen E. Woodiwiss[8] and LaVyrle Spencer[9]; but I have taken that model, given it a new spin that makes my work FUBU—for us, by us. I also include a bibliography at the end of each novel to help readers further their knowledge of the historical event/s featured in each novel, be it the Great Exodus of 1879, the Brown and Black outlaws and deputy marshals of Indian Territory, or the gens d'couleur of antebellum Louisiana, etc.

RBD *By gothic model are you referring to the romance template in which an inexperienced young woman meets and falls in love with a mysterious older man, marries him, and then encounters awesome circumstances that potentially jeopardize their union?*

BJ Yes. Your description was closely followed during the early days of romance, but now the model has advanced. Man-woman conflicts are the main elements. The man can now be younger than the female, and the woman no longer has to be a virgin. The genre has morphed with the times.

RBD *What do you think of other African American authors' use of genre fiction in pursuit of, perhaps, comparable goals (i.e., to revisit the past and accumulate cultural memory)? Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*, for example, is a time-travel science fiction narrative that takes the heroine, Dana, an African American, back in time to nineteenth-century Maryland, a slave state.*

BJ Genres. It has been interesting watching African American writers flip the switch, so to speak, on the traditional genres from romance to horror and begin to be accepted and successful in areas where we were not allowed to be fifteen years ago. L. A. Banks[10] is a prime example. Her Minion series has a vampire theme that is FUBU. Anytime small, evangelical/fundamentalist African American churches in the south embrace a vampire series, and they have, as said to me, Ms. Banks has hit upon something that in its own way speaks to the race and is viewed with value.

RBD *While your novels contribute to the historical romance tradition in African American literature, they also break new ground. Would you comment on this point?*

BJ I only see it as breaking new ground in the sense that you can now buy my books, and books by Brenda Jackson[11] and L. A. Banks and others, all over the world. FUBU books have been around since before the American Revolution, but being accessible to the market is the thing. Not sure if this is what you mean, but this is my first thought on the question.

RBD *Global mass marketing certainly plays a big role in a book's accessibility to the public, and I agree that in this sense your books have broken new ground. Moreover, some nineteenth-century Black women's historical romances were serialized in small magazines such as *The Christian Recorder*, that had a small readership. But, I was also thinking about how you have expanded the concept of desire in your novels to embrace not only the agape longing to participate in racial uplift but also the erotic craving for one's mate. The public and private manifestations of desire give your audience a fuller appreciation of Black women's lives in the nineteenth century. Could you say more about erotica?*

BJ Erotica is what romance fiction is all about. Romance started with erotic gothic and Kathleen E. Woodiwiss's *The Flame and the Flower*. Erotica is required to have romance fiction published. I read some of the romances by writers in the white canon, and I flipped the paradigm man-woman sex conflict to include relevant Black history. Our history puts meat into the novels. People outside the genre have no idea how important all books by African American authors are to their readers. Finally a whole slew of books about us—in every genre.

RBD *Who buys and reads your novels?*

BJ Black women. They love erotica. Before my books were published, they read white women's erotica.

RBD *Do Black men read your novels?*

BJ Not many. A brother once told me that he didn't read romances. He didn't believe in romance. I told him, "You're here! There must have been romance. Something must have been going on." (Chuckle)

RBD *What do you think are your major contributions to the historical romance genre?*

BJ My contribution/s. It seems that I have been given the charge of telling our history in a way that is new and different, but also fills our racial soul.

RBD *Thanks to you and your contemporaries Francine Craft,[\[12\]](#) Gay G. Gunn,[\[13\]](#) and Shirley Hailstock,[\[14\]](#) the African American historical romance has made considerable progress since the nineteenth century. Why do you think literary critics have not given more attention to your work?*

BJ It's that old double edged sword—and in our case, the sword has three edges: one, we write romance—which critics sometimes don't look at as a "serious" genre; two, we're female writers of romance, and the big one—we're Black female writers of romance. Makes for a lot of crap to wade through sometimes.

RBD *Most of your historical romances have strong public-service-oriented Black women characters: Cora Lee Henson, teacher, in *Night Song*; Dr. Viveca Lancaster, physician, in *Vivid*; Sable Fontaine, contraband camp worker, in *Through the Storm*; and Zahra Lafayette, Civil War spy, in *Winds of the Storm*. These women find themselves in conflict with outside forces, but they manage to resolve their problems with their self-esteem intact. What message do these novels send to your reading audience?*

BJ The message is: Don't tell a Black woman there's something she can't do. Goes back to Sterling's gifts—particularly pushing the envelope on gender and race. Never tell us there's something we can't do.

RBD *Your male-female characters express love for each other in your novels, but they also long for and celebrate freedom. Could you comment on the intersection between love and freedom?*

BJ To be able to love is freedom. Poet and essayist bell hooks, who I'm looking forward to meeting one day, is a big romance fan and has written the best take on the intersection of freedom and love. I'll have to run it down and get back to you on this one.

RBD *Since our last correspondence, have you had an opportunity to read bell hooks' essay "Love as the Practice of Freedom"? If so, do you have a possible interest in or reaction to bell hooks' ideas about love as a "practice of freedom"?*

BJ Rita, I apologize, but I still have not had time to read Ms. hooks' work. The example I always go back to about love being the "practice of freedom" is a reference in the book *Bull Whip Days* [15] to "a man named Wyatt who was free and sold himself into slavery for the love of a woman." It was a reference that took my breath away. The power and commitment of Wyatt speaks to a love that is both astounding in its depth and heart-breaking in its ramifications. He freely chose to make this decision and to me it is the ultimate example of love as the practice of freedom. I'm not sure if this is what Ms. hooks meant, but this is what it says to me.

RBD *Does your position as an Episcopal lay minister have any bearing on the values and responsibilities evident in the characters you depict in your novels?*

BJ Other than that the church [African Methodist Episcopal] is at the center of the community in many of my books, no.

RBD *You have written more than a dozen historical romances from 1995 until the present time. Explain the evolution of your writing in terms of character development and relationships.*

BJ Golly. Not sure how to answer this. The character development and relationships. There is no real evolution in the sense that the two factors have changed over the years. Both have [been] and continue to be strong—I hope. Sounds like a question for the readers.

RBD *If there is one lesson that you wish the present generation to obtain about male-female relationships in reading your novels, what would that lesson be?*

BJ Cherish each other—tomorrow is not promised.

RBD *What do you consider to be the three most important themes in your historical romances?*

BJ Love. Legacy. Endurance.

RBD *What do you expect your legacy as an African American historical romance author will be for those historical romance writers who succeed you?*

BJ Hopefully that I supplied my readers with edutainment. Education and entertainment.

[1] I discuss first-wave African American women's historical romances in greater detail in *Black Women's Activism: Reading African American Women's Historical Romances* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 2-4.

[2] Prior to Frances Harper's publication of *Iola Leroy*, African American women novelists published romances with white protagonists. These writers and their novels are Emma Dunham Kelly's *Megda* (Boston: John H. Earle, 1891) and Amelia E. Johnson's *Clarence and Corinne; or God's Way* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1890).

[3] In addition to her historical romances, Beverly Jenkins has published contemporary romances, romantic suspense novels, romance novelettes, and juvenile fiction. She has won prestigious awards, including the distinguished Golden Pen Award (1999) from Black Writer's Guild; the 2008 Emma Award for Romantic Suspense, Favorite Hero, Book Cover, and Book of the Year for *Deadly Sexy*; and Author of the Year Award at 2008 Romance Slam Jam for *Deadly Sexy*. She is also the recipient of six Best Seller Awards from the Waldens/Borders Group and two Career Achievement Awards from *Romantic Times Magazine*. Jenkins has her own website at www.beverlyjenkins.net.

[4] Producing one novel, sometimes two, each year, Beverly Jenkins's historical romances include *Night Song* (New York: Avon Books, 1994), *Vivid* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), *Indigo* (New York: Avon Books, 1996), *Topaz* (New York: Avon Books, 1997), *Through the Storm* (New York: Avon Books, 1998), *The Taming of Jessi Rose* (New York: Avon Books, 1999), *Always and Forever* (New York: Avon Books, 2000), *Before the Dawn* (New York: Avon, 2001), *A Chance at Love* (New York: Avon Books, 2002), *Something Called Love* (New York: Avon Books, 2005), *Winds of the Storm* (New York: Avon Books, 2006), *Wild Sweet Love* (New York: Avon Books, 2007), *Jewel* (New York: Avon Books, 2008), *Belle* (New York: Kimani TRU, 2009), and *Captured* (New York: Avon Books 2009). Her historical romances for juveniles are *Belle and the Beau* (New York: Harper Teen, 2002), *Josephine and the Soldier* (New York: Avon Books, 2003), and *Josephine* (New York: Kimani TRU, 2009).

[5] For a discussion of Dr. Caroline Still Wiley Anderson, see Darlene Clark Hine, ed. *Black Women in America*. Vol. 1 (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1993): 28-29.

[6] Daphne du Maurier is a British writer who wrote about adventure and romance in Cornwall, England. Her historical romance *Frenchman's Creek*, first published in 1942 and reprinted with Virago in 2003, was made into a film with the same title in 1944. A television version of the novel was made in 1998, in which Tara Fitzgerald starred as Dona, the novel's protagonist. See Richard Kelly, "Daphne du Maurier: Overview." *Twentieth-Century Romance and Historical Writers*. Ed. Aruna Vasudevan. 3rd ed. New York: St. James P, 1994. Twentieth-Century Writers Series. Literature Resource Center. Web. 10 Feb. 2010.

[7] Georgette Heyer (1902-74), a British romance writer, authored thirty-eight historical romances, most of which were set in the years of the Regency (1811-1820), the reign of the Prince of Wales who became George IV.

[8] Kathleen E. Woodiwiss authored *The Flame and the Flower* (New York: Avon Books, 1972), a novel whose content and marketing transformed the romance publishing industry. "Launched in 1972 as an Avon Spectacular, with all the promotion and advertising support usually given to bestseller reprints," Carol Thurston explains, this novel "not only proved the commercial viability of paperback originals but also opened the door to a new American publishing enterprise": specifically, "the erotic historical romance as a mass entertainment phenomenon." See Carol Thurston, *The Romance Revolution: Erotic Novels*

for *Women and the Quest for a New Sexual Identity* (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1987): 48.

[9] LaVyrle Spencer is an American novelist whose historical romances and other romances have made the New York Times best seller list a dozen times. Her writing career began with the publication of *The Fulfillment* (New York: Avon, 1979), a historical romance which her inspiration Kathleen E. Woodiwiss read and sent to her own editor at Avon. Spencer's other well-known historical romances include, but are not limited to, *Hummingbird* (New York: Jove, 1983), *Twice Loved* (New York: Jove, 1984), and *The Gamble* (New York: Jove, 1987). Emphasizing family situations rather than male-female relations, Spencer has published twenty-four books and is a five-time winner of the RITA Award, the highest award Romance Writers of America gives to romance writers. Spencer's 1988 induction into the Romance Writers of America Hall of Fame distinguished her at that time as one of twelve women to have received that award. See Carol Thurston, "LaVyrle Spencer: Overview." *Twentieth-Century Romance and Historical Writers*. Ed. Aruna Vasudevan. 3rd ed. New York: St. James P, 1994. Twentieth-Century Writers Series. Literature Resource Center. Web. 10 Feb. 2010.

[10] L. A. Banks is one of several pseudonyms for African American author Leslie Ann Banks. Banks has written more than three dozen novels in various genres including contemporary romance, suspense thrillers, and paranormal. *Minion* (New York: Griffin, 2003) is the first of twelve novels in the Vampire Huntress Legend Series. (Rita B. Dandridge, email interview with L.A. Banks. 7 February 2010).

[11] Brenda Jackson began her writing career with the publication of *Tonight and Forever* (New York: Kensington Arabesque, 1995), and to date has published more than sixty novels. Best known as a multicultural writer, she is the first African American author to publish under the Harlequin/Silhouette Desire imprint. A full-time writer, Jackson "is the first African-American writer to make the New York Times best-seller list with a romance." See Patrick Huguenin, "African American Romance Writers Come into Their Own." *New York Daily News*, 23 May 2009. <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/arts/2009/05/24/2009-05-24-africanamerican-romance-writers-come-into-their-own.html>

[12] Francine Craft has published only one historical romance, *The Black Pearl* (New York: Kensington, 1996). In an email interview with Dandridge dated February 7, 2010, Miss Craft indicated that "*The Black Pearl* was sold to BET and then to Harlequin. Kensington quickly sold the historical romance because not one of five or so historicals they published sold. *Pearl* sold about seven or eight thousand fewer copies than other books I wrote."

[13] Gay G. Gunn has published only one historical romance to date and that is *Nowhere to Run* (Columbus, MS: Genesis, 1997).

[14] Shirley Hailstock has written only one historical novel to date, *Clara's Promise* (New York: Pinnacle Books, 1995), about Blacks' settlement in the Old West. For this novel, Hailstock was given the Utah Romance Writers Heart of the West Award. Hailstock's idea for a second historical romance about cosmetology for Black women in the 1890s has not yet materialized. At the time she wanted to write the historical romance, Arabesque decided to accept only contemporary romances, the genre that Hailstock has been publishing since 1995. See Gwendolyn Osborne's interview "Meet Author Shirley Hailstock." *The Romance Reader.com*. 1 Dec. 2000. <http://www.theromancereader.com/hailstock.html>

[15] This reference is to *Bullwhip Days the Slaves Remember: An Oral History*, ed. James Mellon (New York: Quill, 1990), 445.

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