REINVENTING THE BLACK HERO IN
THE FICTION OF WALTER MOSLEY

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Master of Arts in English
in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Indiana University

September 2011
Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in English.

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September 2011
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Dedication

In memory of Professor Eileen Bender, Ph.D. whose love of literature fundamentally inspired this project.

In addition, I would like to thank Marcy Holland, MA. who supplied her exceptional grammar and proofreading skills.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude and love for my mother Constance Akins who provided a wonderful example of how to overcome life's extreme obstacles with grace and excellence.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the members of my committee, Lee Kahan, Ph.D., Jake Mattox, Ph.D., and Elaine Roth, Ph.D. whose assistance with this project was greatly appreciated.

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African-Americans have historically struggled with maintaining an authentic Black African identity that has not been suppressed or whitewashed to meet the demands of a dominant white society. This struggle has overlapped into the African-American literary tradition, where authenticity is always a matter of debate. The question of what authenticity means in the context of African-American literature is a term describing the paradox by W.E.B. Du Bois in The Souls of Black Folk. In a famous passage from the opening chapter, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” Du Bois represents a world that seeks to reconcile itself.

Du Bois was the first black intellectual to voice the internal struggle of a black man to be true to his own inner humanity while being forced to meet the false stereotypical expectations of a segregated post-reconstruction culture. Du Bois argues that it is the negative reflection the black man sees of himself in the eyes of white America that causes him to divide himself into separate personas that are constantly at odds with one another. In order to be accepted or to avoid oppression, he must conceal his assertive and more forceful nature, while only sharing the mild and apparently meeker traits that he perceives the white community will accept.

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African-Americans have historically struggled with maintaining an authentic Black African identity that has not been suppressed or white washed to meet the demands of a dominant white society. This struggle has overlapped into the African-American literary tradition, where authenticity is always a matter of debate. The question authenticity most notably arises concerning genre mimicry or ethnic expansion of white literary traditions. Double Consciousness is a term describing the paradox of American racial identity articulated by W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*. In a famous passage from the opening chapter, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” Du Bois represents African-Americans as a people who are ever seeing themselves 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 two-ness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. (Du Bois 45)

Du Bois was the first black intellectual to voice the internal struggle of a black man to be true to his own inner humanity while being forced to meet the false stereotypic expectations of a segregated post-reconstruction culture. Du Bois argues that it is the negative reflection the black man sees of himself in the eyes of white America that causes him to divide himself into separate personas that are constantly at odds with one another. In order to be accepted or to avoid oppression, he must conceal his assertive and more forceful nature, while only sharing the mild and apparently meeker traits that he perceives the white community will accept.

Several decades after Du Bois, the African-American literary tradition takes double consciousness a step further by severing what is perceived as the black man’s
intellectual and violent self into two separate personas. Although the original DuBoisian theory relates to the autonomous black identity and the identity adapted to appease a dominant white culture, it is not too far a leap to see how the continuous shift from an assertive black identity within the African-American community and the skillfully calculated identity to navigate the white community creates an evolution of DuBois' theory, in which the aggressive and intellectual black identities completely sever and are portrayed by two distinct personas. The black male protagonist is no longer one individual who must suppress intellectual or violent aspects of his temperament based on his environment; he becomes two distinct individuals. The severing of these personas is seen in the works of renowned African-American authors Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright, who each create a central African-American character that embodies only one facet of the dual identity within the black male in American literature. In *Invisible Man*, Ellison creates an intellectual black male character who is ever questioning his identity and his role as a subjugated member of American society. He is a thinking man who primarily believes that he can elevate his social status in America by using education and intellect as a means of self-promotion. However, he quickly discovers that mainstream white America may feign acceptance of the intellectual, but usury is typically afoot and there is no place in black America for a black male who is entirely intellectual. After suffering rejection on every front, Invisible Man sheds his intellectual identity to take on the Rinehart persona, in response to his failed attempt to assimilate into dominant white culture (Ellison 498). He eventually runs beneath the city to social obscurity, unwilling to return to society, until he first comes to terms with his fully integrated selves. From his underground vault, he declares that the rest of society is “up there somewhere, making
a mess of the world. Well, let them. I was through and, in spite of the dream, I was whole” (Ellison 571). Ellison’s text signifies the longing for the African-American male to be accepted for his full identity, without sacrificing segments of his personality to assimilate into either the black or white culture.

Contrary to Ellison’s intellectual Invisible Man, in Native Son, Richard Wright creates a violent black male character who has little self-reflection or ability to imagine a non-violent means of moving beyond the social suppression created by the bigotry of mainstream white America. The poverty and pervasive racial discrimination of urban America have not given Bigger Thomas the physical or intellectual resources necessary to escape his socioeconomic cul-de-sac; he is therefore compelled to express his anger and frustration with violence. Like Invisible Man, Bigger quickly learns that there is no place in white or black America for a black male who is ruled solely by intellect or by violent aggression. He is also rejected, and from the social isolation of prison, he begins to develop the introspection necessary to integrate his intellectual and aggressive selves (Wright 425). Wright and Ellison wonderfully show the distinguishable characteristics of the violent and the intellectual black male identities depicted in American literature, which are each at odds with segments of their society because of the one-dimensional nature of their personalities. Each finds himself removed from the black community and dominant culture and using self-reflection to help integrate his violent and intellectual selves in an effort to find personal peace and social acceptance.

I would like to explore how this split has evolved in the more recent fiction of Walter Mosley’s work, as he provides a wonderful opportunity to explore new ground in the old territory of double consciousness. His writing, which features African-American
male protagonists, expands upon Du Bois’ conception of double consciousness within the African-American male identity by distinguishing the intellectual self and the violent self as two discernible components within the black male identity. This division of the black male identity in literature may be attributed to the strong hostilities African-Americans have historically faced from a racially oppressive country, which causes a necessary schism within his masculine identity. White America resists his wholeness, which incorporates his intellectualism and his militancy; he is therefore encouraged to suppress the more aggressive areas of his persona that he believes are the most reviled and discriminated against in white America. Consistent with Wright’s violent male character, Bigger Thomas and Ellison’s intellectual, Invisible Man, Mosley has split the black male identity of his protagonists in the Easy Rawlins and the Fearless Jones detective series. Wright and Ellison created one protagonist that embodied either the badman or the intellectual persona, who drove the story alone. In their model, the African-American male is doomed to social isolation because he lacks the personality traits to be successful in both the black and the white world. Unlike Wright and Ellison, Mosley responds to this problem by linking the intellectual protagonist and violent sidekick together to work in tandem to resolve the plot.

An overlap in this struggle of double consciousness is playing out among the black male protagonists of Mosley’s work. He adapts his writing to meet the demands of an established white literary tradition of detective novels and simultaneously attempts to carve out new territory for African-American writers to create their unique contribution to this genre. Mosley uses the Socrates Fortlow novel series to go outside of the detective genre and broaden the black hero character in ways that he did not in his
detective novels. He takes more liberty in the way he develops his protagonist within his contemporary novel series, allowing his hero to embody characteristics of both the intellectual and the violent black male. This evolution of protagonist is consistent with the chronological order of his detective and novel series. The detective series take place in the mid-twentieth century and the Fortlow novel series has a contemporary 1990’s setting. The timing of each novel’s settings and the way the characters respond to their social environments are consistent with our own national response to the racially charged atmosphere of the mid-twentieth century and post civil rights era.

Questions of genre are rampant in the discourse concerning author Walter Mosley’s contributions to the literary tradition of white crime and detective novels. Although he is relatively new to the scene, introducing his first Easy Rawlins detective novel, Devil in a Blue Dress in 1990, there has been a great deal written about whether or not he is mimicking the white crime story genre or whether he has carved out a new African-American ethnic tradition in detective fiction. In “'The Black Dick': Race, Sexuality, and Discourse in the L.A. Novels of Walter Mosley,” Roger Berger questions whether Mosley’s use of black subject, character and environment are truly transformative in the detective story formula or "are the novels merely exotic versions of the American detective story, as opposed to subversive texts?" (281) Ultimately, he cautions Mosley of the dangers of using the genre as an entryway into publication at the risk of having difficulty reentering the "community of black discourse" without suffering some loss (Berger 292). In relationship to this ethical quandary both writer and detective hero face, author John Gruesser suggests in A Companion to Crime Fiction that "No
matter how brilliant or brave they are, black sleuths in the pay of white clients or the 
white power structure risk coming off as lackeys. In short, African-American mystery 
writers must strike a difficult balance between genre conformity and genre 
subversion" (531). Aside from the black characters and environment, Gruesser argues 
that Mosley remains remarkably close to traditional hardboiled detective literary 
conventions. However, he does use this medium to show how Easy’s decision to become 
a detective “complicates his relationship with his friends and the black community” 
(Gruesser 532). I argue that the use of both intellectual and violent black males within 
the detective novel is Mosley’s response to this difficult balance between conformity and 
subversion. Mosley does not mimic author Raymond Chandler’s renowned protagonist, 
Philip Marlowe, but develops a partnership between two distinct characters to function in 
the lead detective role. This duel protagonist responds to the expectations of the crime 
novel reader and the racially charged social environments within Mosley’s texts. The 
intellectual black hero addresses the desires of both mainstream detective novel readers 
and the white power structure within each novel’s setting, as the intellectual is a non-
threatening, well-assimilated black hero. Likewise, the violent black male prototype 
responds to the widely accepted and respected black hero among black readers and within 
the black community of each novel. Mosley’s use of these two figures speaks directly to 
the social conditions within a pre-civil-rights-era America that consistently suppressed 
the assertive black identity and demanded a seemingly passive black population, who 
quickly perceived the needs of the white community and changed their actions and 
demeanor to pacify the ruling class. It was only within the confines of the black 
community that blacks could freely display their more volatile and aggressive
characteristics. Over time, violent qualities became more highly respected than intellectualism within the black community, and the intellectual was almost synonymous with the kowtowel or yes-man (West 60-61).

While some have suggested that there are ways in which the Easy Rawlins character can be evaluated in terms of Du Bois’ theory of Double Consciousness, there has been no review of how or why Mosley uses the characters of Easy Rawlins and Mouse Alexander to act in unison, to pursue the goals of a single protagonist. Just as Ellison and Wright’s protagonists were moving toward social reconciliation of their one-dimensional intellectual and violent black male characters, Mosley’s use of these prototypes within his detective series is satisfying the need of the character and the reader to have a multidimensional protagonist. While Easy and Mouse are clearly two separate individuals, Mosley has inextricably linked these two characters together to function as a combined black hero that possesses the traits of both the violent badman and the intellectual hero. The available criticism does not evaluate this aspect of dualism in the

In his article “Walter Mosley and the Violent Men of Watts,” author Jerry Bryant connects the idea of dualism in Mosley’s work and the African-American male psyche, when he describes the conflict between the man of violence and his desire for a more peaceable existence. He writes that “Mosley brings out the latent aspects of the African American man of violence, a longing for calm, order, and stability, a sense that this man contains not only badness but a potential for less socially disruptive behavior as well” (Bryant 153).

Critics have addressed the question of character, in terms of race and genre conventions, but have had a limited review of Mosley’s work beyond the Easy Rawlin’s detective series. Within this series, there has been an extensive review of the relationship between the Easy Rawlins and Mouse Alexander characters, and suggestions that they serve as archetypes of the traditional African folk heroes, the badman and the trickster. Both John Grusser, in the anthology A companion to Crime Fiction, and Mary Young, author of “Walter Mosley Detective Fiction and Black Culture”, have compared Easy Rawlins to the trickster figure, because of his use of double talk and deception (Grusser 532, Young 142, 146-147). Because trickery and malarkey are intellectual processes that this archetype figure must use in his deceptions, I have chosen to associate the trickster figure with the intellectual protagonists of Ellison and Mosley’s black heroes. As stated, Mosley uses the badman archetype as an essential counterpart to his intellectual hero, and as in folklore, this violent badman is a heroic figure within the African-American community. Mosley’s intellectual black hero, Easy Rawlins, departs from the inherent violent nature of the badman archetype so that he can adapt to the more mainstream traits of the contemporary detective hero.
dynamic between Easy and Mouse in the Rawlins series or do a comprehensive, cross-series analysis that broadens the scope of available criticism beyond the detective genre to identify recurrent themes of dualism in both the Easy Rawlins and the Fearless Jones detective series. By ignoring this persistent theme, they do not acknowledge the impact of social oppression and racism on black literature, as the pre-civil rights era black hero is not portrayed as a multidimensional character, able to resolve the plot for both author and reader. Initially, Mosley satisfies this conflict by consistently adding a badman sidekick who fulfills the functions that the intellectual protagonist cannot complete alone.

Another aspect of Mosley’s writing that critics have failed to evaluate is his progression from the two central figures within the detective series to his first evolved black male hero character, Socrates Fortlow, found in his first novel series. Fortlow embodies both the badman and the intellectual archetypes in one person. Mosley’s evolution of the black hero is consistent with the progression of the American Civil Rights movement. Because of the pre-civil rights setting, his characters’ restricted identities coincide with the restricted social standing of blacks during this same time in American history. As Mosley transitions to his novel series, he also shifts chronologically into the post civil rights era. He begins to integrate a multi-faceted black hero who acts with more autonomy in his environment.

My underlying argument suggests that the dual character formula that Mosley uses provides an avenue for the black hero and his sidekick to access resources within the white and black communities that neither can access alone in a racially oppressive pre-civil rights era. However, the black hero can never achieve real political and community power as long as the badman and intellectual archetypes are divided into two separate
characters, as the intellectual has difficulty finding respect within the black community, while the badman is abhorred and feared within the mainstream dominant culture. Over time, Mosley sets the stage for a single black male protagonist, in the body of Socrates Fortlow, to take on the characteristics of the intellectual and the badman. The newly integrated black hero finds a place of acceptance and support within his own community. His community rallies behind him, which ultimately translates into his having political influence that his predecessors did not have. He progresses to the degree that he successfully uses social activism against those institutions that continue their legacy of racial discrimination and oppression.

There is no argument that Mosley has found success in a genre that is heavily saturated with white prototypes but severely lacking in a strong African-American tradition. With his success have come questions of whether Mosley has created something new to add to the white crime novel convention or if he has merely taken a multi-colored pen to place African-American characters into ethnic locations. Mosley’s detective characters are compared most frequently with white counterpart Raymond Chandler’s. In her article, “Power and Knowledge in Walter Mosley’s Devil in a Blue Dress,” Marilyn C. Wesley contends that classic and hardboiled detective fiction are at their root searching for knowledge about the violence that threatens “civic order” (103). She suggests that white detectives like Philip Marlowe, although critical of the system, are ultimately “[servants] of the dominant system of law and order,” while Mosley’s black detectives find themselves in an ethical dilemma, because the dominant system of law has been historically unjust toward the African-American male. Through violence, the black hero must adapt his loyalties to dominant society to fit his own “needs for
Black masculinity is not a static concept, but evolves with the same sluggish fluidity of our gradually changing American socio-political environment. The characterization of the black male hero is ever consistent with the environments in which both the authors and the characters live. Chris Ruiz-Velasco indirectly associates the presentation of violence in the central male character of the Easy Rawlins series as a necessary role in the larger framework of black masculinity in his article "Lost in these Damn White Halls: Power and Masculinity in Walter Mosley’s Fiction." He writes that masculinity “does not arise in isolation but as a result of social, cultural, and political forces” (Ruiz-Velasco 136). Consistent with Ruiz-Velasco, in her article, “Being Black There: Racial Subjectivity and Temporality in Walter Mosley’s Detective Novels," Dalaynne English argues that the classic hero and the black hero may operate within the same time and location, but the social framework that each detective must operate within has a distinctive influence on both how they are treated within and how they respond to their world (362). Ruiz-Velasco and English concur that it is the environment in which black male detectives must live that influences the way that his character evolves, causing violence and masculinity to be indelibly tied together. The white detective has more

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3 For the African-American detective, attributes of respect and freedom cannot be tied to the inherent freedom that is given to individuals based on their race; he must quantify respect and freedom, based on tangibles, such as home ownership and physical freedom. While the white detective role is seemingly more altruistic, as he works to wipe out corruption while maintaining the overall social status quo of a system where he has been a primary benefactor, Mosley’s black detective uses his role in a personal pursuit of middle class respect and freedom, which is primarily shown through home ownership.

4 English writes, “In both content and form, Mosley’s novels support my argument in that they represent black people who live according to a distinct timeline; they also help demonstrate the commonplace that black literature traces a distinct timeline. Yet Mosley and his writings are also very much of and in their
freedom in the sense that he can mirror the classic image of masculinity within the genre convention and never be threatened with accusations of betraying his community by upholding the rules of a corrupt civil authority. Ruiz-Velasco and English are responding to the reasons the Rawlins character may have less allegiance to civil authority and may need to use violence to operate outside of mainstream law enforcement. However, it is not Easy, but the character of Mouse Alexander who typically responds to opposition in a violent manner. Easy is more likely to use doublespeak and trickery to avoid a confrontation. Easy’s reliance on violence is strictly a condition of his association with his badman sidekick, who is essential in ensuring that Rawlins is rescued from danger in time to continue his pursuit of justice. The fact that Mosley’s intellectual and violent black male characters are severely segmented throughout his first detective series speaks directly to Ruiz-Velasco and English’s premise that the black hero is a product of his time and environment.

The same delineation can be made concerning the separation of passive and militant social action in the history of African-American civil protest. Both had an integral place in African-American Civil Rights history. As I evaluate the progression of the intellectual and sidekick characters toward one fully integrated black hero character, this progression is consistent with the increased integration of the African American within mainstream American culture since the 1950’s. The African American culture has been on a similar trajectory of using both intellect and violent protest to secure a more
equitable social role, as neither alone was capable of creating sustained social change for blacks in America.

The search for acceptance into middle class America is arguably a chief motivation for the African-American detective, because he sees this as a source of respect and freedom. Equally important to the African-American male is his sense of masculinity, which ironically is closely tied to whether he is respected by others and has sufficient liberty within his society. Mosley’s black detective has few tangible social or financial options to bolster his sense of manhood and this is further complicated by the fact that he is placed in a time when he suffers abuses of racism and discrimination, which frequently leads to false arrests and beatings from the subjects of his investigation and the police. These events are a continual scolding of the black male, which reduce him from the status of an adult male to the belittled child of a dominant white legal system. Having a violent image becomes a primary indicator of masculinity for the African-American male because of political powerlessness and lack of social influence outside of the black community. In “Walter Mosley and the Violent Men of Watts,” author Jerry Bryant argues that because Easy responds to his hostile environment with reason and intellectualism, “Mosley carries the probe of the violent man by an African American novelist to its furthest point to date” (150). The strength of Byrant’s argument lies in the fact that Mosley does not require his black hero to rely solely on a raw, violent nature but allows his protagonist to show emotional conflict and a desire to uphold a standard of ethics in an unethical environment. This ultimately requires his protagonist to shed some vestiges of the badman persona and adopt characteristics of the classic hero
who exhibits middle class values like home ownership and entrepreneurial endeavors or at the very least, mimic behaviors that allow him to achieve his middle class aspirations.\footnote{In "An Un-Easy Relationship: Walter Mosley's Signifyin(g) Detective and the Black Community," John Gruesser describes how the classic detective, like Marlowe, typically identifies both his name and profession, but Easy must assess his environment and adjust his persona to match or clash with the perceptions of those around him (240-241). Gruesser explains that "This ability links him to the great trickster, the Signifying Monkey, a figure that 'seems to dwell at the space between two linguistic domains' -- the European American and the African American" (241). For Easy, language becomes the object of disguise and manipulation, as he deceives people by either meeting or failing to meet their expectations of a black man in 1950's urban America.}

Easy’s desire to take part in the American Dream is what differentiates him from the classic detective; while his primary goal is to fledge out a literal and figurative home within the American social fabric, the classic detective is driven to uphold the existing social order. Bryant also indicates that another distinguishing characteristic is that there is less romanticism in Mosley’s use of his detective Easy Rawlins than in other traditional detectives like Chandler’s representation of Philip Marlowe (150). Rather than approaching the case as a consummate detective in search of greater truths, Easy is far more ambivalent about his role as a detective and only undertakes his career out of desperation to meet his mortgage payment. For him, upholding civic order is a much lower priority than maintaining his home and finding some form of justice for subjugated members of the African-American community where he lives; Easy ultimately feels a responsibility to his community, because their interests are neither acknowledged nor upheld by mainstream society.\footnote{In “Intellectuals and the Persisting Significance of Race”, William M. Banks conducts a survey of contemporary black intellectuals, which suggests, “the powerful universalistic imperative of intellectual training centers does not subvert the racial and ethnic attachments of Black intellectuals. Not only did the respondents in this study acknowledge the relevance of racial/ethnic group identity influences to their thinking, all but a few (less than 10%) accepted a responsibility to reflect or address the interests of Blacks in their work” (Banks 82).}

Mosley pulls his detective and sidekick characters directly from African folklore, which separates his black detective from the classic detective model and allows the
author to incorporate folklore from African-American culture that has not previously been present in this highly restrictive genre. Author Mary Young elaborates more on the traditional application of the Badman and the Trickster characters from African folklore in Mosley’s work. She argues that “Mosley has taken the two heroic characters, the trickster and the bad Black man, and updated them while retaining many of their historic attributes of deception, misdirection and violence” (Young 147). Young maintains that Mosley is reshaping the classic detective genre, which is adapting to cover African-American themes and is also broadening the African-American literary tradition. Most integral to her argument is the assessment of the primary detective protagonist in the classic and African-American crime novel. While the white detective is derivative of a historical model that can be traced back to classic British crime novels, “Mosley’s recurring characters […] are drawn directly from African-American folklore and are not black-faced copies of the hard boiled tradition” (Young 141). Mosley follows the structure of the classic detective novel, in the sense that his protagonist is the lone hero in search of truth, in spite of an unjust social structure that threatens to destroy him.

However, Mosley incorporates archetypal characters that are unique to black African and Latin culture and places these figures in a time and place that is highly significant to the African-American culture. Because these characters are situated in LA during the mid-nineteenth century and written from the perspective of a subjugated black hero, Mosley is doing something unique in comparison to previous authors in this classic detective genre.

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7 Marilyn Wesley compares Walter Mosley’s Easy Rawlins and Philip Marlowe to their predecessor from the classic British detective, Sherlock Holmes. While she suggests that Marlowe and Holmes use and seek knowledge to protect the dominant class from violence, Easy must pursue “black knowledge,” because the system of power that the white detective upholds has been established and thrived on the oppression of African Americans (103). Upholding that system, in its current state, is a betrayal of the black detective’s ethnic identity and his loyalty to his community.
His plots mainstream the intimate details of the African-American civil rights struggle in a way that puts unjust social and legal institutions on display, establishes a moral main character that has previously been denied the black male in American history, and introduces a new black hero that has been forged through violence and oppression and found a way to come through the fire polished and prepared to defend the black community.

Furthermore, there is an inherent duality in the nature of the badman character because he is ruthless and violent yet holds a quasi-hero status in African folklore and in Mosley’s more contemporary application of this figure. His use of violence and intimidation has been so perfected that the fear and respect he receives within his own community becomes an admirable quality. Both Jerry Bryant and Roger Berger describe Mouse as Easy’s antithesis, because he is the quintessential Badman (Bryant 150, Berger 291). He does not take on the cloak and character of the badman to solve a crime or when his back is against the wall; instead, Mouse is a bad man. Mosley’s use of the Mouse Alexander character as instrumental to the safety and well-being of his lead detective Easy Rawlins shows a departure from the traditional African folklore badman hero. This badman character is, in modern terms, a remorseless sociopath that leaves the remnants of violence and murder wherever he goes. There is an inconsistency, as Easy and Mouse frequently share the label of badman, but Easy’s middle-class aspirations pull Berger goes even further with this analysis, as he relates it to the duality that Mosley is faced with, by assimilating the traditions of the white crime detective genre, while trying to maintain an authentic ethnicity in his novel series (292). He suggests that Mosley is in danger of figuratively “passing”, by mimicking the conventions of the white crime novel and not going far enough in carving out new territory within the ever-broadening black detective genre.
him from the badman classification into a "detective other." 9 He does not fit firmly into
the role of the classic white detective or into the classic badman role. While Mouse's
character clearly and firmly aligns with the traits of the badman; Easy is never successful
when he attempts to imitate Mouse's aggression; it is not authentic to his character's
inherent nature, and he ultimately falls back into the mode of the intellectual trickster,
who relies on misdirection and double speak to manipulate those in his path.

Mosley reworks the image of the classic hero in each of his series. This is
necessary, because the classic hero possesses a high-minded superiority that only an
individual who has not experienced racial subjugation can have. Although his black
heroes take on attributes of the classic hero, there is a constant need for the badman
characters to maintain their veracity, because they are consistently exposed to hostile
environments. This exposure insures that the badman is ever-present and prevents
Mosley's black hero from ever aligning with the classic hero model completely. In his
essay, "The Black Man: Hero," Mosley writes that for the black hero "Survival is a dirty
business and heroes are not saints" (234). He indicates that heroism is not limited to a
specific race or gender, or even humanity, but in its truest sense, heroism is an act of
"simple survival... [or] really only the attempt to survive" (Mosley 235). Because there
has been such adversity toward the black community, Mosley suggests that this

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9 As an intellectual, Easy primarily acts with forethought and cunning, causing a number of
authors to directly associated the character of Easy Rawlins with the traditional African folklore trickster
character (Gruesser 532, Young 142, 146-147). Young writes,"The trickster could improve his situation
through careful deception, but at no time was he really in complete control; the rewards he could win were
limited by the realities of the system within which he existed, and the dangers he faced were great"(400).
Similarly, Easy Rawlins is consistently faced with the challenge of operating in a society that is unwilling
to accept his racial wholeness. Although he is adept at manipulation, he is confined by the reality of the
world around him. Like the Trickster, Easy must alter his authentic self to operate in both the black and
white community (Gruesser AUR 241). Easy exists in a world that is full of racism and inequality and
even the most skilled deceiver cannot escape that reality.
permeates into the life of the fictional hero. The need to endure and somehow persevere in the African-American community has even influenced its ability to believe that the black fictional hero could do so and come out on the other side unstained by the ordeal. Mosley’s description of the black hero further suggests that the constant battle to overcome oppression has made it acceptable to adopt a different moral logic for the black community and the black hero. This is primarily because subjugation has often come from those mainstream institutions that were deemed to have a higher moral compass, such as the Anglo-religious community and the white criminal justice system. While the classic hero is recognized by his valor and morality, Mosley’s black heroes are not bound to this mythology. They are able to establish their role as the black hero by their sheer ability to survive an adverse system and come out on the other side alive and a little wiser for their journey.

By his own standard of Hero, Mosley’s detective and sidekick characters are, at minimum, survivors, yet he continues the pairing of the intellectual and the badman to circumvent the status quo of racial subjugation, which furthers the idea that one is not enough to handle the role of a classic Dick. However, the fact that he continues this dynamic may be more of a testament to the fact that even his black hero must observe the status quo of his time. Neither the author nor his protagonist are ready to enter new territory, where a single black protagonist can be successful in his setting, nor can a black author find success in his first novel series with a single, multi-dimensional black hero. We see the use of dual characters evolving in Mosley’s first Easy Rawlins detective series when he creates the central Ezekiel “Easy” Rawlins character that embodies the attributes of the intellectual black man. In Devil in a Blue Dress, Mosley establishes that
Easy is unlike many of the other black male characters in his community who have survived their environment with brawn and violence. Even though the black community has a history of valuing education for its members, they have suffered the contradictory image of a community that does not fully trust those who conduct themselves as accomplished black intellectual. At many levels, the devalued black intellectual can be attributed to the social conditions of pre-civil rights America. Members of the black community were frequently belittled and debased and rarely given an opportunity to access higher education, much less use it for his or her betterment in mainstream white America. Although Mosley is not the first author to insert an intellectual black hero into his narrative, he does offset the perceived skepticism that the African-American community has for intellectualism by strategically creating his badman counterpart, which serves to restore credibility to his black hero. In many settings, the members of Easy's community do not trust him, but they respond to him because he is associated with Mouse Alexander. Whether this response is prompted by fear or respect, having Mouse as a sidekick has a marketable value. This association with Mouse allows Mosley's black intellectual to access the black community without the same restrictions and misgivings that they have against mainstream white America and law enforcement, who are unable to gain direct access, regardless of their personal associations.

Social conflict surrounds this ideological image of the violent black man in both mainstream American and literary society. Although the intellectual black male may have reduced credibility in his own community, he is more tolerable in mainstream American culture and therefore he is more readily received in mainstream literary circles, specifically one as restrictive as the hard-boiled detective series. It is not surprising that
Mosley introduces his more conventional, intellectual black hero first. Mouse may have more marketability in the African-American community, but Easy is the ticket seller for a wider and more diversified community and literary market. Mosley’s black hero, although completely reliant on the violent black male for his safety and preservation, is conflicted by Mouse’s actions and ultimately by his enduring relationship with this figure. Easy’s discomfort with the actions of his friend Mouse is consistent with that of the black man in America, because there has been such a derogatory impression of the stereotypical violent or angry black male image that he has come to revile and even fear allowing this aspect of his personality to surface. In many ways, as will be evident through the actions of Mouse and Socrates, Mosley suggests that the stereotypical image of angry black men has caused African-American males to look for acceptance and find that many of their conflicts arise because they rarely encounter this from their friendships or the world around them.

The plot of Devil in a Blue Dress revolves around Easy finding a missing woman named Daphne Monet for a rich white businessman in the community. Many other people in the white community are looking for her for a variety of reasons, without success, because they are not able to infiltrate the black community. Mosley’s intellectual black hero, Easy Rawlins, is a ready choice, because he is automatically connected to the black community by race, and it will take more than physical strength and aggression to locate the missing girl. His intellect would help him navigate the white world of the LAPD or interact with businessmen like Todd Carter and Matthew Teran, who are also involved in the plot to find Daphne Monet. Initially, an acquaintance named
Joppy introduces Easy to a shady white gangster, Dewitt Albright, and immediately boasts on Easy’s behalf, saying, “Easy always tryin’ t’be better. He just got his high school papers from night school and he been threatenin’ on some college” (Mosley 12). Although Albright is unimpressed, for Joppy and other members of the 1948 African-American community, someone from their neighborhood completing high school and considering post-secondary education was unusual. These credentials elevate Easy from just an average person in the community into an intellectual. The contradiction lies in the fact that his community does not completely trust him, but as an educated member of their community, he is still someone whose accomplishments made them proud.

Mosley capitalizes on the idea that the 1950’s black community had very little experience with successful black intellectuals but was far more acquainted with the notion that the toughest man on the block usually made the rules. He depicts black intellectualism as rare, unfamiliar, and not holding much power in the black community, which reduced both the credibility and value of the intellectual. Yet, there was and continues to be an underlying assumption that education is the route to equality and social power. Anyone having an education is considered someone who is one step closer to entering mainstream, middle class America and is someone the community could look to with pride and for inspiration. One would think that one perceived as a violent black male would be more mistrusted and reviled by the community, but this is not the case, as Mosley presents violence as the main trading card used by those within and without the community to manipulate its citizens.

Because violence is never far from the black detective or the black community, Mosley quickly acquaints the reader with Easy’s essential badman counterpart. Although
Raymond “Mouse” Alexander is not introduced until mid-way through the first novel as Easy’s primary sidekick character, he remains so for the remaining books in the series. However, Mosley incorporates several surrogate badman personas to fill the gap before introducing his most notable badman figure. We see Mosley’s first pairing of the intellectual and the badman personas when he pairs Easy with Joppy. He describes Joppy as “a tough ex-heavyweight who was comfortable brawling in the ring or in the street” (Mosley 10). Although he now owns a bar, Joppy still has a large, muscular build and a notable reputation and respect within his Watts community, because he is excessively violent in the boxing ring and equally ready to defend himself in the streets of L.A.

Although this introduction and partnership of sorts is fleeting, Mosley still uses Joppy as the essential gateway into Easy’s first detective job with Dewitt Albright. As the plot continues in this first novel, Easy searches establishments for an unnamed gangster acquaintance of Daphne Monet, where “bad men” were known to hang out (Mosley 129). He nervously reflects that he could be killed in places like this, because he was only safe when he was with a “tough man like Joppy Shag” (Mosley 129). Easy is proud that he cleverly coerced Frank Green’s name from the owner of Ricardo’s pool hall, but he is also aware that intellectualism is not a highly respected commodity within his community. In mainstream circles, subtlety and omission are a black man’s best resources and black men who display violence and aggression are rejected, incarcerated and often killed. However, in Easy’s own community, the ability to violently defend oneself was a far better resource. For the intellectual, it was equally important to maintain friendships with tough men who were willing to back him up whenever trouble appeared, as quick thinking could help avoid some altercations, but in the world that
Mosley creates, danger is never far from the protagonist and some violence is simply unavoidable. In those instances, the intellectual is incomplete without his badman alter egos, which are represented in Mosley’s sidekick characters. This comfort and familiarity with violence extends beyond Mosley’s narrative and can go a long way in explaining why there is such a disproportionate level of gun and other violence taking place in black, urban communities all over America. There is still very little affinity or trust in mainstream law enforcement, there is still an underutilized black intellectual community, and there is still more media and community emphasis placed on individuals who live and die by violence as a means of controlling their environment. While the intellectual is a less frightening literary figure, familiarity with the violent black male character allows him more access within the black community, which is consistent with the adage, “you’re more likely to trust what and who you know.”

Although Joppy serves as a short-lived example of Mosley’s pairing of the intellectual with the violent black male persona, Mosley’s most enduring badman character is Easy’s longtime friend, Raymond “Mouse” Alexander. After his introduction, there is a continuing theme that these two characters can only find success and a sense of wholeness when they operate in unison toward a common goal. Long before Mouse arrives in Los Angeles to assist Easy with his investigation, Easy’s narration establishes Mouse as a violent sociopath. Easy remembers how he “ran away from Mouse and Texas,” because Mouse had made him complicit in the murder of his stepfather (Mosley 54). As Easy drove him away from the crime, Mouse gave him $300; he later told Easy that he gave him the money to prove that “he had done right” (Mosley 54). Easy took the money because he was aware that had he refused the money his “best
friend” would have killed him for having a “lack of faith” (Mosley 54). Easy states that
“Mouse didn’t ever feel bad about anything he’d done. He was just that kind of man” (Mosley 54). Although they are long-time friends, it is only in Easy’s complicity and
total acceptance of Mouse’s behaviors that he can continue their friendship and avoid
becoming another victim in Mouse’s path. In spite of their friendship or business
relationship, Easy knew that if he stepped in the way of Mouse’s financial business, he
“might come to no good” (Mosley 17). Easy understands Mouse’s potential for violence,
which provides him reason to be cautious, but he also has conflicting feelings, because he
knows that there were times when Mouse had stepped into the middle of arguments “to
save my bacon”; however, “Just thinking of Mouse set my teeth on edge” (Mosley 34, 12). Easy simultaneously found himself repelled by Mouse’s violence and frequently
needing him as an ally because he was a violent man. This can serve as a metaphor for
successful societal functioning, as societies are only successful when each member is
able to operate in wholeness and no one member suffers the ill effects of double
conscious living, which requires viable attributes to be severed from his repertoire in
hopes of pleasing a dominant culture. Much like Mosley’s black hero and sidekick
characters, when severed identities come together in a united front to fight for a just
cause, they find greater success. As seen in our own American Civil Rights movement,
when non-violent intellectualism and violent militant fractions operated within our
culture, neither was successful alone, but the cumulative actions of both fractions were an
essential component to creating social change.
While the intellectual and violent male characters in the Rawlins’ series hold strictly to their roles, the central characters in the Fearless Jones series are less rigid. This cycle of Fearless Jones books is set in 1950’s Watts, which is also situated in the Easy Rawlins series timeline. Although there is some overlap in the series’ timelines, with the occasional character cameo, such as Paris appearing in Rawlins’ *Little Scarlet* and Jackson Blue being mentioned in *Fear Itself*, Mosley is clearly attempting to do something very different with the central characters of Fearless Jones and Paris Minton. In fact, Mosley depicts the intellectual and first person narrator, Paris Minton, as being both cowardly and greedy, which allows the badman, title character Fearless Jones to arise as the true black hero of this series. Although we hear the story through Paris’ narrative, this self-denigrating narrative quickly identifies that he is not our hero. However, his honesty concerning his personality flaws makes him an extremely reliable narrator. We never find ourselves disbelieving his account of the story or his confidence in Fearless’ noble and ethical nature, and we begin to see this badman as having far more in common with the classical hero than his violent predecessor has. Mosley is careful not to disenfranchise his intellectual character completely from the black community, as he must ultimately be sympathetic to the reader. Notwithstanding, his preference for the violent black male persona over the intellectual suggests that, through his characters, he is weighing in on an almost century-long debate of Intellectualism verses Naturalism, where he seems to be siding with those who viewed the New Negro model with a great deal of cynicism and mistrust. Mosley’s slow progression of integrating the traits of the intellectual and badman have caused critics, like Berger, to argue that Mosley is mainstreaming or causing his black hero character to “pass,” so that he more comfortably
sits within the classic hero and detective genre and thereby becomes more marketable (292). However, this is the author’s way of reintegrating the disenfranchised black male identity into a place of legitimacy within mainstream literature and society. Fearless is the first of Mosley’s characters who appears to be moving from a segmented and oppressed identity into a black hero that more visibly embodies all attributes of his aggressive and intellectual self. Even with his move toward a more integrated, singular black hero, in general, Mosley continues to respond to the socioeconomic climate during the 1950's by continuing to segment and model Fearless Jones and Paris Minton after the African folkloric characters of badman and trickster.

The Fearless Jones novels are narrated through the voice of the non-title character, Paris Minton, who operates as both the intellectual and a reluctant co-detective within the series. In Fear Itself, Paris states that as a child he could not stop asking questions until he had learned to read. He recalls how “Literature came to my aid even when I had to face the hard reality of racism” (Mosley 103). His love of literature helps him achieve a higher level of scholarship outside of the formal education system. In one scene, Paris suffers insomnia because the police are looking for Fearless. While Fearless lay sleeping comfortably upstairs, Paris begins to look up random words in the dictionary, stating “Definitions were neutral: facts, not fury” (Mosley 17). In this passage, Mosley is able to both contrast the personality differences of Paris and Fearless and show how Paris’ use of literature and self-education allows him to distance himself from the racism and violence of his environment. He is not able to sleep comfortably when he feels threatened, but knowledge and books soothe his fragile nerves. In Fear Itself, Paris describes his enduring attachment to books and is a discriminating reader, as
he does not enjoy reading women’s literature, because it is not geared towards male “sensibilities” and he does not read “popular men’s books [because they] were too violent” (Mosley 4). Paris’ aversion to violent literature seems to critique the role of the violent black male, because his intellectual sensibilities do not want to face the notion of violence in literature or in his everyday life. He reads classical literature, like “Don Quixote, Their Eyes Were Watching God” and authors such as “Conrad, Cooper, and Clemons” (Mosley 4, 103). These classical works and canon authors represent a literary tradition that excludes work from African-American authors, as he prefers works by white authors about racial themes. This suggests that as a black intellectual, Paris ignores the violence within his own community, escaping his reality, like Don Quixote, by preferring to engulf himself in pseudo ideas about racial themes that are disseminated by white “authorities” that have no ties to the ethnic traditions they describe in their novels.

Paris has no difficulty confessing the timidity of his personaility. He is not ashamed of his fearful nature, as he is clearly comfortable with intellectualism as his one true strength. Unlike Easy Rawlins, who takes on the role of an unlicensed detective to assist the underserved citizens of his Watts community, Paris is usually motivated by physical threat, greed, or his sense of obligation to Fearless Jones for always being there to bail him out of trouble. Paris recognizes that his inquisitive nature is contradictory to his innate timidity. He states, “I’m afraid of rodents and birds, bald tires, fire, and loud noises. Any building I’ve ever been in I know all of the exits. And I’ve been known to jump up out of a sound sleep when hearing a footstep from the floor below” (Mosley 26). When Paris hears an unexpected knock on his used bookstore door, he is often tempted to ignore it, as he always fears the worst scenario and he is usually correct. When Fearless
knocks on his door in the middle of the night and describes how the police came by his home looking for him, Paris becomes very uneasy at the prospect of being involved in a potentially dangerous situation. Paris observes that this discomfort was “the difference between Fearless and me. He was relaxed in the face of trouble, where I was afraid of a bump in the night” (Mosley 11). Paris is content to use books as a vehicle to answer the questions of his overly inquisitive mind. He does not involve himself in Fearless’ trouble out of friendship or loyalty alone, but he reluctantly enters the investigation because he “needed to know if” his “friend’s problems were going to spill over onto” him (Mosley 26). It is only the desire to ensure his own safety that causes him to consider the needs of Fearless and make an effort to assist him. The narrative suggests that intellectualism is flawed, as it seeks to preserve itself, but does not readily seek to assist or enhance the lives of others.

Mosley’s representation of Paris is largely consistent with the myth of anti-intellectualism in the black community. However, Bank’s survey suggests that contemporary black intellectuals feel both strongly connected to their communities and highly concerned with the socioeconomic conditions in which African-Americans exist (82). Terrance Tucker points out that Paris is an intellectual, “outside of the mold of the ‘New-Negro’ of the Harlem Renaissance, which associates critical analysis exclusively with black elite status... [Instead] Paris’ standing as a working class intellectual questions the class politics of W.E.B. Du Bois’s ‘The Talented Tenth’” (98). Although Paris and Easy both have middle-class aspirations of self-employment and property ownership, Mosley is careful not to categorize either as elitist blacks who are attempting to escape their humble Watts communities. This interpretation of Mosley’s intellectual Paris
Minton demonstrates an inconsistency in Mosley’s presentation. Paris is at first an intellectual who is cowardly, lacks high moral character and is content to ignore the knocks on his door and hide behind the secondhand books in his store. However, as Tucker suggests, Paris does not behave as an elitist black. Similar to Easy Rawlins, Paris is an established member of his community, he is not driven into his detective roles in the pursuit of upper class status, and overall he has very modest aspirations. Although their intellectualism automatically sets them apart, the work that they do ultimately pulls them back toward the needs of their community. Paris does not treat literature or reading as tools to increase his education for socio-economic elevation; these are escapist behaviors that allow him to retreat into a world that does not contain the racism or danger of his community. Similarly, Easy boasts a high school diploma, a preoccupation with reading the daily newspaper, and an ability to interrogate people cleverly, but he is in no way seeking to elevate his social class to the degree that it would separate him from other working-class blacks. Mosley’s intellectual protagonists seek knowledge, but both remain strongly connected to their communities. This inconsistency in Mosley’s presentation of the black intellectual makes them simultaneously sympathetic to the reader and debased for not being as brave, ethical, or capable as his badman counterparts. While the reader is not appalled by Paris’ failings, they are prominent enough to allow Mosley’s evolving badman character to shine through as the true black hero of the series.

The counterpart badman to Mosley’s intellectual in Fear Itself is Tristan “Fearless” Jones. Unlike Paris, Fearless is full of fury. He sleeps soundly, because he is aware that at a moment’s notice he can rise from a sound sleep and successfully fight off any attacker. Paris describes how Fearless lost his baby finger in a gunfight and walks
with a limp, after being stabbed in the leg, while saving Paris’ life (Mosley 4). Paris and Fearless have a “life-and-death... friendship,” yet Paris knows that spending time with him is dangerous, because the night “often ended up as a ride in the back of a police wagon” (Mosley 53, 161). As the story progresses, a white man, using the name of Theodore Timmerman, comes to Paris’ bookstore looking for Fearless. Paris states that he is aware that such a visit would usually make him afraid that the man “would harm me or my stock. But I knew that Fearless was upstairs and Fearless, at least in my mind, was proof against any danger” (Mosley 23). Paris found uncharacteristic bravery when Fearless was present, as he provides the aggression needed to ensure that he is safe, even though he lives and works in a violent community. Because of their badman identity, Fearless and Mouse are characteristically very unpredictable. Easy knows that no one, including himself, can interfere in Mouse’s business and escape unharmed. Similarly, Paris understands that “Fearless was as even-tempered as they come... [yet,] Fearless Jones’s dark side was a terrible thing” (Mosley 82). For Paris and Easy, having strong friendships with bad men like Fearless and Mouse are invaluable assets, but at the same time, there is always something untamed and volatile within the badman persona. It is evident that the use of these folklore heroes and the slow reconciliation of these two figures into one character provides a vehicle for the black hero to rise from his debased state and take pride in this place of prominence and importance within his real and literary society. Mosley is working out some historical injustices against the African-

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10In his essay, “American Negroes Revisited”, author Terrance Tucker describes how Mosley adopts the Paris Minton and Fearless Jones characters to address a time where there is very limited discussion about the black experience in America. He writes, “Mosley’s interrogation of the intellectual and the badman recovers a time and culture, the American Negro of the 1950’s, so that he can redefine heroism and highlight the efforts of African Americans in overcoming racist oppression” (Tucker 98). Tucker suggests that the use of these dual characters is Mosley’s way of providing a hopeful image of the black male in the
American male through his black hero characters. Mosley allows aspects of the black male image that have been deemed violent, which were systematically stripped from his persona through years of subjugation and oppression, to be slowly reintegrated until it is eventually established as a functional part of his black male protagonists’ identity.

Mosley’s title character, Tristan “Fearless” Jones is the first evolving adaptation of the badman persona that the author slowly endows with the ability to incorporate and use his alternate intellectual identity, while still retaining the aggression necessary to garnish respect from within his community. Although he has a history of violence, Fearless also has a higher moral compass that allows him to identify and act on behalf of others. Fearless may retaliate when confronted, but he also demonstrates honesty, compassion, and a perceptiveness that make his character more consistent with the classic hero than any of the other central black male characters in either of Mosley’s detective series. Similar to Easy, Fearless is an honorably discharged war veteran with a sense of responsibility toward members of his Watts community. This connection with a greater social cause, such as WWII, their connection with violence through their shared war experience, and their heroic actions during the war, endow both men with a higher ethical nature than either Mouse or Paris. In Fear Itself, Paris fully intends to defraud the Fine family out of their book of family slave history, which is an heirloom to both their family and the African-American culture. He is undecided about whether he will keep it for himself or attempt to sell it for a large ransom. It is Fearless who identifies that the social value of the book is far greater than any ransom and secretly returns the book to Winifred Fine, but not before he makes “archival quality” photos (Mosley 316). In his final action

pre-Civil Rights era of the mid-twentieth century, redefining heroism for people who were migrating north and looking for a way to not only shed their subjugated past, but overcome it.
of the novel, Fearless displays both a higher moral character and an exceptional intellect. He is aware that it would be inappropriate to break a contract with the Fine family, with whom the book rightfully belongs. Fearless was able to negotiate a large payment for himself and Paris and a promise that the abusive Winifred would allow her sister, niece and great-nephew to live apart from her in peace. He copies the family album before returning it to Winifred, because this ensures that the Fine family members will never be subjected to Winifred’s meddling again. Paris’ desire to have the book is satisfied and there will be a second copy of the material to pass down to future generations of African-Americans. Fearless’ show of intellect and compassion make his role as badman very tenuous at best. The ethical struggle over whether to return the Fine family album is an interesting commentary on the racial politics surrounding the evolution of black intellectualism. Paris, who appears, at least in part, to be designed after the New Negro model, struggles with the decision of whether to keep or sell a symbol of black national heritage, while Fearless, who is modeled after a more traditional African folkloric character, does not have any struggle with this type of ethical question.

The adaptation of the badman role is increasingly apparent by the second novel of the series. In Fear Itself, Mosley is actively merging the intellectual and badman personality traits of Paris Minton and Fearless Jones. Terrance Tucker begins to address this transformation of the badman role in his essay when he writes, “Fearless is a prescient interrogator of the amoral badman represented in Mosley’s Easy Rawlins novels through Mouse. Although Fearless is a badman… [he] ‘combines the principles of Easy with the deadliness of Ray “Mouse” Alexander’” (98). Fearless is almost a contradiction when compared with the prototype of the badman character, because he is
both violent, ethical and a quasi-intellectual, seen in his uncanny ability to read people and pursue clandestine outcomes that work toward a moral outcome. Paris narrates, “Fearless wasn’t a smart man,” but he could look into your eyes and judge your character better than a “psychiatrist, detective, or priest” (Mosley 4). This description of Fearless Jones depicts him as having multi-dimensional personality traits; he is intuitive, analytical, and ethical. In the Rawlins series, Mosley appeared to be testing the literary climate to see whether a black detective series that highlighted themes of racial injustice would find a place of acceptance within the crime fiction genre. Mosley takes this test a step further in the Fearless Jones series, when he creates an imperfect black hero who has many attributes of the classic hero. Yet, violence is an ever-present strength of Mosley’s black hero, who carries it as a mark that he has endured through a long tradition of racial discrimination and oppression and is still prepared to fight against injustice. His traits far exceed the one-dimensional aspect of the traditional badman character, which reflects an evolution of the narrowly defined badman character in black literature and in Mosley’s initial presentation of this archetype in the Rawlins series.

This new complex black subject takes on symbolic form as Paris and Fearless begin to act in unison. The two distinct personalities become interdependent, as they consistently defer to one another and proceed in unanimity. They anticipate one another’s’ actions, as seen when they locate Bartholomew Perry, aka BB. Fearless stops at his door and looks to Paris, stating, “Friendly?” Paris responds, “Neutral, I think” (Mosley 171). Fearless consistently supports Paris’ role as intellectual, by asking, “What now, Paris?”, while Paris defers to Fearless before making a contractual agreement with BB, indicating, “I looked to Fearless for direction, knowing that any deal I made without
him was subject to revision anyway" (Mosley 170, 176). The shorthand dialogue between Paris and Fearless suggests that they are simultaneously thinking about the benign or aggressive nature of the man they are prepared to meet. There is a notable back and forth exchange of opinion and sharing of personal judgment between the two characters, which is founded on trust and respect for the other’s opinion. This is unlike the unstable relationship between Easy and Mouse in the Rawlins series, where Easy must trust Mouse with his life as they work to solve mysteries, but also has an ever-conscious awareness of Mouse’s volatility and potential for danger to himself and others. The overlap of identities is most clear by Paris’ closing narration in *Fear Itself*, where he states, “FEARLESS HAS ALWAYS COME THROUGH for me. He’s always been a better man than I am and smarter than I am too” (Mosley 316). Mosley is careful to establish Fearless Jones as both violent and intellectual; by combining these attributes with an honorable character, Mosley begins to align Fearless with attributes that are more commonly associated with the classic hero and makes solid progress toward creating a fully unified black hero, while always retaining the integrity of both the intellectual and the badman characters.

The depiction of Paris Minton as an intellectual with questionable ethical character and unfavorable traits of greed and cowardice could be compared to the cynicism over black intellectualism, which was arguably taking place during the Harlem Renaissance period of 1919 – 1940 and moved immediately into the era of Naturalism and Modernism from 1940-1960, which is the period when Mosley assembles these detective series (Gates and McKay 929, 1319-1320). There has long been skepticism over African-Americans who completely embraced intellectualism, because they were
perceived as moving away from the cultural traditions that were primary foundations for the African-American community. During this period of Naturalism, Richard Wright gave a critique of the so-called intellectualism that was associated with the Harlem Renaissance period when he wrote, “Negro writing in the past has been confined to humble novels, poems, and plays, prim and decorous ambassadors who went a-begging to white America. They entered the court of American public opinion dressed in the knee pants of servility, curtsying to show that the Negro was not inferior” (Gates and McKay 1321). Wright is indicating that those who espoused that true African-American intellectualism began in New York during the Renaissance were merely imitations of their white forerunners. He argues that they were so enamored that they were willing to forfeit their own black heritage to be included in a white intellectual and literary tradition. Mosley appears to take a stance in this debate over intellectualism and Naturalism by choosing to develop the badman character and enhance his traits to embody intellectual characteristics rather than embellishing the characteristics of the intellectual. This suggests that he supports the belief that violence is a passionate emotion that promotes action and has always been a required component of social change.

There is a distinction between the character who relies solely upon intellectualism as his vehicle for survival in white America and the black hero, who, through violent retaliation, has learned to fight an oppressive dominant system with a combination of both aggression and intellect. This has been a long-standing debate among civil rights activists, as seen in the conflict over a violent or non-violent philosophy in early activists, such as Nat Turner, John Brown, William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglas, and continuing in later activists like Marcus Garvey, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King Jr.,
Malcolm X, and many others. Each applied their own interpretation of moral dogma to a separatist, violent or non-violent platform, which has shaped the nature of the debate for most Americans who form an opinion about how to create long lasting social change. Intellect or violence alone lack the ethical quality that would allow each to be a defender of others, while intellect is inherently selfish and self-serving, as Mosley suggests by Paris’ ability to shut out and become oblivious to the needs of those around him while reading in his bookstore. In contrast, Fearless remains fundamentally physically and emotionally tied to his community, as demonstrated through his advocacy to address everyone’s interest in the Fine family case. Mosley is making a commentary on the intellectual versus the violent or emotion-driven man; the latter seemingly has greater potential to look outside of himself, identify with the needs of others and thereby expand his repertoire to benefit his community. Historically, in the American Civil Rights Movement, change was made by combining intellect, demonstrated through non-violent arguments and actions, with the threat or use of violent retaliatory activism; together these elements were able to secure changes in public policy, the Jim Crow Laws, and ultimately long-lasting social change. Both history and Mosley’s writings beyond the Easy Rawlins series assert, where intellect will work, let it work. If it will not, then there is a legitimate place for violence or, at a minimum, the threat of violent retaliation.

As Mosley shifts from the detective genre to contemporary story cycle novels, his hero evolves into the Socrates Fortlow character, where the traits of the intellectual and angry black man are merged into one central figure. His character goes on a philosophical expedition to understand his own violent instincts, find internal and
external redemption, and search for ways to obtain social justice within an unjust society. Throughout this series, Mosley continues to uphold the idea that there is a split between mainstream institutions and the African-American community, which requires intervention from an insider. In the detective series, this function was served by the dual roles of the intellectual and badman characters, but in the Fortlow series, it is the modified badman character, Socrates, who picks up the gauntlet of fighting against institutionalized racism. Through aggression and intellect, he is able to find absolution and a place of acceptance within his community and he ultimately discovers that he has value and can make a positive change through activism, rather than violent retaliation.

In the character of Socrates Fortlow, Mosley integrates the characteristics of the intellectual and the badman to the greatest extent of any of his previous series. The series opens with *Always Outnumbered Always Outgunned* where a fifty-eight year old Socrates Fortlow is waking up in his two-room shack that is sandwiched between two burned-out and abandoned furniture stores in a Los Angeles alley (Mosley 25). It is nine years after his release from an Indiana prison, where he served a 27-year sentence for committing a rape and double murder of two friends during a drunken rage. Mosley establishes Socrates’ violent history and quickly places the character in settings that show he is a man who has been defined and continues to define himself by his physical strength and his violent personality. His massive hands take on their own persona as “rock breakers,” and he has an ability to anticipate and defend himself from the inevitable violence that is ever-present in the Los Angeles streets where he wanders daily collecting returnable bottles to support himself (Mosley 14). Socrates is a violent man who has lived a violent life, but he is introduced during a transitional phase in his life, as he is beginning to make
life choices that redefine him as a street teacher and intellectual. Mosley begins to
address the question of how the flawed black hero regains his sense of belonging in
mainstream society in the opening paragraphs. Socrates awakes just after 6:00 a.m. and
goes into the alley, in search of Billy, the rooster that had been his alarm clock for a
number of years, but instead of finding his old friend, he finds a pre-teenage boy named
Darryl attempting to conceal the dead rooster in a cardboard box (Mosley 1). When
Socrates sees the mutilation of the dead bird, he recognizes the violence surfacing in the
boy as the same rage that has been ever-present in his own life. He lashes out to grab the
youth and forces him into his home in an act that shows both his capacity for brutality
and his compassion for the young boy. When he asks Darryl, "Why you kill my friend,
asshole?" the reader is unsure whether it is the infamous violent black man or the
philosophical educator that will emerge (Mosley 15). Socrates forces Darryl to pluck the
dead rooster and then sets about to cook him on a single burner hot plate within his tiny
kitchen, where they subsequently feast on the carcass. Mosley uses this scene to show
how Socrates is transitioning from the violent badman character and evolving into a
modern day educator. The act of cleaning, cooking and eating the rooster is a lesson to
Darryl and to the reader that something worthwhile can still emanate from a violent act.
This philosophy gives credence to the redemptive power that could be available to
African-American men, like Socrates, who work to overcome their violent image and
disenfranchised past, so they can become productive members of the same society that
has disregarded their worth. Mosley’s back alley lesson has a larger implication
concerning an entire race of African-American males, who are often viewed as one-
dimensional, angry black men with questionable pasts, who are consistently demoralized,
yet still go in search of self-worth and a way to participate in their communities in a
positive manner. This desire to reintegrate into mainstream society is complicated by the
persistent and prevailing image of the black man as one-dimensional, violent, and easily
provoked. It is very difficult for him to overcome the perceptions of others, as seen
through Socrates’ tone and physical aggression with Darryl. It was not immediately
known that Socrates would do anything more than curse and berate the young man for
killing the rooster. Many find it difficult to move beyond that aggressive exterior to
determine that there is more substance to the individual than his badman persona. With a
further look, it becomes clearer that this is someone who has a personal stake in
redeeming his own social standing, while also trying to help future generations avoid his
past mistakes. Generally, the desire for redemption and a place in mainstream America is
consistent with the average felon, regardless of race or gender, but society frequently
overlooks that these qualities exist within the African-American male.

How does the badman character originate from a violent, jaded, impoverished
past and transform into a positive, respected, socially active member of his community?
This evolution of the badman into the black hero begins to materialize in the Fearless
Jones character without explanation, but it is not without some framing on Mosley’s part
to align him with qualities of the classic hero. While Mosley’s Easy Rawlins character
attributes have consistently aligned with those of the classic hero, Fearless’ claim to
morality came through a shared military history, as both men are WWII veterans. This
shared experience within a dominant white institution appears to be the conduit that
Mosley sets in place, which allows Fearless to transcend into an unperfected culmination
of his predecessors Mouse Alexander and Easy Rawlins. However, there is no such
shared military experience, as Mosley introduces his most evolved badman character, Socrates Fortlow. Socrates is depicted as a violent man who is far removed from any notoriety or title of military war hero. His 27 years in prison become a surrogate for the military, because it is also a formalized, white institution that enforces strict rules and requires complete obedience of its members. Barring the discovery of another common link between these characters, their shared experience with formalized, restrictive, white institutions appears to be the only very fragile tie that allows these badman characters to begin evolving and taking on attributes of the intellectual black hero. While the intellectual, as modeled after the New Negro, is too complicit to work with mainstream political systems to ever create real social change, the badman’s relationship to these mainstream social constructs is far too acrimonious for him to be complicit enough to participate with these institutions to the degree required to create social change.

However, by living under subjection to the rules and regulations of white institutions, these characters have shown discipline, restraint, and an ability to submit and survive, even when the system continues to ingrain the role of second-class citizen in its black members, which was common practice for both military and law enforcement institutions during this time. Easy describes his war experiences, where blacks were belittled and placed in non-fighting all-black regiments. He reflects, they were trained to kill, but “white men weren’t anxious to see a gun in my hands. They didn’t want to see me spill white blood” (Mosley 98). These vehicles for institutionalized racism, during the pre-Civil Rights era, could be credited as the catalyst for allowing the transformation of these previously divided characters to emerge into a single unified self. It is logical to question whether Mosley is crediting oppressive, white institutions for the evolution of the
African-American culture as a unified, socially active body. Is he suggesting that some complicity with these institutions is a prerequisite to social empowerment, or making the argument that these institutions can be manipulated to the betterment of the African-American community? A case can be made for each of these arguments. Although African-Americans have not shared in the benefits, their labor and tax dollars have been instrumental in helping to build these power structures. White institutions are the foundation of American society, and while many minorities would like to forge forward, destroy all barriers, and create new boundaries within the American sociopolitical construct, there must first be some navigation within the existing structures. Whether by complicity or manipulation, white criminal, social, and political institutions are the territories that minority Americans must travel to find a way to connect, master, and then use these systems to promote changes within mainstream American society. Although there is a great deal of difficulty and resistance, social change requires social involvement with institutions that have a history of refusing or limiting access.

Throughout the series, there is a great deal of opposition that is a constant threat to Socrates’ ability to reinvent himself. Much of this is from without, but as Mosley presents through Socrates, a good share of what prevents the black hero from rising from his badman persona lies within his own perception of who he is and his internal doubts about his greater potential. For nine years after his release, Socrates lives in a shack, literally and figuratively fighting to survive on the streets of L.A by collecting bottles and warding off attackers who would rob him for whatever meager funds he has. He subsists by exchanging the bottles for the deposit refund, but suffers the sneers and abuse of store clerks who humiliate and debase the poorest members of society who come to the stores
with their collected bottles in hopes of making enough money to eat and survive. In addition to the hostility Socrates faces from the store clerks and those in his own community, he also suffers harassment from the local LAPD on a regular basis, which frequently threatens to arrest and incarcerate him again. As Socrates undertakes his philosophical journey, Mosley seems to challenge his readers to question how much a man must do to redeem himself from past misdeeds and at what point is he allowed to reenter and participate as a meaningful member of society? By refusing or restricting his access, is society ultimately robbing itself of the potential that the ex-offender might contribute toward improving the community? With such a disproportionate number of African-American men incarcerated or with felony histories, as a society, we must resolve this important question. Have men of color, specifically those with criminal histories, been forever marginalized and discarded from ever entering or reentering society as productive members?

Throughout Mosley’s text, both the community and his black heroes are disenfranchised from mainstream criminal justice system. The heroes are flawed, but they are nevertheless seeking to rectify the injustices that mainstream law enforcement is both unwilling and unable to correct. The lesson of Daryl and the rooster gives some insight into the idea of alternative justice in a mainstream justice system where violence is typically answered with penalty and incarceration. There is rarely a larger philosophical lesson being played out for the benefit of the offender. Socrates uses his own brand of wisdom to reinforce ideas of alternative justice that are also prevalent in Mosley’s African-American detective series. Mosley hones in on the message that one violent act does not always give birth to more violence and negativity, as depicted when
Socrates later instructs Darryl after he confesses to killing a mentally challenged youth from his neighborhood. After Socrates asks Darryl, “How you gonna make it right?” Darryl replies that he refuses to go to jail, which Socrates affirms by telling him he would be better off shooting himself than going to jail (Mosley 21). Darryl declares with defiance that he won’t shoot himself and Socrates responds, “We all got to be our own judge, lil’ brother. ‘Cause if you don’t know when you wrong then yo’ life ain’t worf a damn” (Mosley 22). In this passage, Socrates displays a clear understanding that people must somehow atone for their wrongdoing. However, this is not the conventional view of rehabilitation for criminal acts, as there is a clear implication the criminal justice system is not the solution for the offences of black men in America. Conventionally, since the abolition of slavery, many black men in America have found themselves in a revolving cycle that leads them from cradle to prison to grave. In this sense, the bonds of slavery were replaced with the mainstream criminal justice system. Outside of it, the uneducated and disenfranchised African-American male has found himself locked in the same cycle of being born, being literally and figuratively bound by the restrictive rules of society, and then dying without ever having access to the freedoms that are espoused in the mythical idea of the American Dream. Without legitimate methods of accessing the privileges that mainstream Americans have, the subjugated black male must fight in every arena of his life and is essentially fighting for access and success in both mainstream and African-American culture.

With so much opposition, it is logical that Mosley’s black heroes are so closely associated with violence, as it becomes a precursor to their ability to be effective activists within their community. He addresses the lack of effective law enforcement by creating
a hero who can become a defender of his community through combining intellect and violence. He sets the stage for Socrates to emerge as a black hero by showing him as a man of uncommon wisdom in the rooster scene with Daryl. He then shows how intellect and violence are combined and find a place of leadership within a community when a group of men approaches Socrates to discuss a murder that occurred in their LA neighborhood. The young daughter of one of the men witnessed a local drug-addicted man named Petis robbing and killing another neighbor, and the men have sought out Socrates because of his past criminal history. They do not trust the legal system to convict the man and fear he will retaliate against the young girl for reporting his crime. As they are discussing these events, a police helicopter flies overhead, and Socrates’ long-time friend, Right Burke, comments, “C-cops always be flyin’... Shit. If they come down here to earth sometimes maybe Petis wouldn’t be goin’ all over killin’ folks for laundry money” (Mosley 27). They perceive the police as out of touch with the Black community and their presence as ineffectual. As they fly overhead, they are not present in a meaningful way to prevent dangerous criminals from attacking its citizens, but the sound of their helicopter is a constant reminder of their unapproachable presence and their observation of the black neighborhood. This is a major theme within each of Mosley’s novels, as his black heroes seek justice for members of the African-American community, because the LA police department is either unwilling to assist or too incompetent and out of touch to maneuver within the black community to bring a case to resolution or the culprits to justice. These deficits within the police department give way to a new type of black hero to emerge: one who is ever-present in the community and can be a violent defender of its citizens when necessary.
Mosley uses both overt and furtive messages to reflect the dissention between the tradition criminal justice system and the African-American community and to show the ingenuity of a community that comes together to find alternative ways of handling problems from within. As the story and scene concerning Petis progress, the men discuss various plans of action to rid their neighborhood of this criminal menace. The father of the young witness indicates that he doesn’t know what to do, but feels obligated to tell someone (Mosley 27). Markham, another member of the group, who is depicted as self-absorbed and cowardly, suggests that they call the police, which places him at opposition and in direct contrast with those who are presented as more invested in the neighborhood and ready to take action to resolve the problem (Mosley 27). Right Burke, who is a confidant of Socrates’, explains that he has a gun with Petis’ name on it (Mosley 28). Finally, a man named Stony suggests that they tell everyone they can and maybe the problem will just go away, which none of the men agree will work with a dope fiend (Mosley 28). This variety of opinions could be representative of the different points of view found in the African-American community. Mosley portrays the individual who would like to use the mainstream justice system as cowardly and lacking integrity, similar traits to those of Paris Minton. However, the individual who is willing to kill for the safety of others is a WWII veteran and a respected elder within the area, consistent with the traits of Fearless Jones. Once each man assembled before Socrates has given his opinion, they shift their focus on Socrates to make a decision. This reinforces his position as both the intellectual and the badman, because the men are looking to him to weigh all the options, make the best choice and fight or possibly kill on their behalf. Socrates asks additional questions of the men and then makes the decision to confront the
criminal and give him the ultimatum to either leave their neighborhood or be killed. After they confront Petis in his rented room, Petis takes flight to another part of the city, where he becomes weak, destitute and injured in a failed robbery attempt. He is found dead in an alley less than a month after being forced to flee the neighborhood. This unconventional justice is also an evolutionary event new to the Socrates novel series, transcending the violent justice, which is frequently administered through human hands in the Easy Rawlins series. In that series, where the division of the intellectual and badman characters is most apparent, Mouse is typically the instrument of violent justice, as he kills and destroys any obstacle that would hinder or harm Easy. As the Fearless Jones series emerges, there is less division in the character traits of the intellectual and badman, and the badman character is less apt to murder without conscience, although the reader is ever aware that he has the capacity to commit violent acts. In the Socrates Fortlow series, Mosley integrates these roles and goes further to suggest that there is a time when violence must diminish to allow for positive social change. When the black community comes together in support of one another, to make intellectual decisions for and about their community, there is room for justice to occupy less conventional forms that are more appropriate to the situation than violent retaliation or justice rendered by mainstream law enforcement that has been historically very negatively biased against people of color. Mosley leaves no ambiguity about the combative relationship, which supports the continuing argument in his novels that there is no justice for the African-American in the mainstream criminal justice system.

Unlike the Easy Rawlins and Fearless Jones detective series, which require both the protagonist and the sidekick characters to effectively administer justice in and for the
black community, the Socrates novel series has incorporated both of these traits within the main protagonist. The men looking to Socrates to help them remove the threat from their neighborhood also support the position of respect that the badman character has within the black community. While the other men in the group represent respected veterans, businessmen and working class family men, it is Socrates’ past experience with violence that makes him a respected asset in this situation. Unlike Petis, who robs, kills, and menaces his community in drug seeking activities, Socrates has progressed from his alcohol induced murderous past and now responds to the adversity that faces him in the inner city in a more ethical way; he only responds with violence when someone violently attacks him or when he is defending a higher moral principle. The elevated social status of the badman character within the black community is a recurring theme in Mosley’s detective series, and with Socrates having attributes of both character types, the intellectual black man can also find a place of respect within his own community.

Mosley creates a world that is not far removed from actual sentiments that the African-American community has toward the criminal justice system. The novels’ timelines cover the pre-civil rights era through the early 1990’s, yet many of these same concerns continue to be expressed well into twenty-first century race relations. There is continued discontent that police are not responsive to the needs of the black community, they are quick to arrest, prosecute and convict people of color, and far less willing to seek justice on behalf of a missing, injured, or murdered person of color. These concerns have hit mainstream media outlets, where it has been argued that missing or murdered people of color do not have the same level of media coverage as a counterpart white person. Similarly, Mosley argues, in the voice of his male protagonist, that there is no real crime
when blacks are murdered or missing, but this quickly changes when a white man or
woman is the victim. Although it would be extreme to generalize this to every crime and
every area of our nation, it is important to note that the supposition Mosley makes
through his main characters is rooted in real-life American social history.

Not only has the historical mistreatment against blacks in America supported the
reasoning behind dualism in the real and fictional African-American identity, it also sets
the stage for Mosley to show how these identities can become reconciled and begin to
find social power within and without mainstream white America. While the Easy
Rawlins character is most invested in middle class existence through home ownership
and legitimacy in mainstream white America, it is actually the unified badman and
intellectual character, Socrates Fortlow, who has real success in creating social change
within both the black and the white communities. As a precursor to this social power,
Mosley constructs a situation in the first Socrates novel series where Socrates is
confronted with bias and racism when he attempts to apply for a position within a retail
chain of grocery stores (Mosley 63). After arriving at the store, he is quickly assailed by
the assistant manager, Anton Crier, who asks him, “Sir, Can I help you” (Mosley 64).
When Socrates asks for a job application, Anton responds by immediately asking his age.
Socrates responds by telling him that this was illegal to ask, because it was a form of
discrimination. The conversation continues, as Anton denies being discriminatory, and
eventually he gives Socrates an application, but only after Anton consulting the store
manager in an upstairs office. There are further complications when Socrates asks for a
pencil to complete the application there and must report that he does not have his own
vehicle or a home telephone (Mosley 67-69). As a result of his persistence, the store
manager, Ms. Grimes, agrees to accept but then fails to send his application to the main office. Socrates returns to the store on the city bus five days in a row to inquire about his application and is eventually told that his application was denied because he did not qualify for the bagging position. Socrates pursues the matter by calling the main office and verifying that his application has never been processed, at which time he confronts the store managers, telling her she has lied: “I had the right to get me a job” and he would be returning to the store on the following Monday to pursue it, as he “expected some type of fair treatment” (Mosley 72). Socrates is threatened with arrest and conviction, but ultimately, because he perseveres, he is given a job at a Bounty’s Market on a different side of town. The official store representatives send him to work for a store that is operated by a minority, Hispanic manager as an inside joke, expecting that Socrates will cause this manager grief. Socrates is aware of their malicious intent, but he is unaffected by this knowledge because he is attempting to elevate his socioeconomic standing. He has several choices: to give up and resign to his lower class existence, respond violently to protest their maltreatment and be arrested, or find a way of non-violent protest within legal means. By choosing the latter, Mosley allows Socrates to start a definitive transformation from social illegitimacy to a place of legitimacy in working-class America. Mosley does not minimize the degree of patience or effort that fighting against powerful social institutions requires. At every stage of his protest, Socrates is threatened with arrest, physical assault by the police, and incarceration. Socrates moves from a place of invisibility as a disenfranchised black man, who enters a grocery store in search of the lowest level position and exits as a proud black man who has fought the system and found a way to achieve his goals. However trivial the store managers made
his request for employment, for Socrates, this was a milestone moment in his lifetime of living on the fringe of the American Dream. This scene revisits the issue of the difficulty and obstacles individuals like Socrates face when they attempt to navigate in mainstream American culture. The question of how far an underclass black male must go to begin his journey to social legitimacy is in part answered by the hostility Socrates endures from the managers and police when he attempts to apply for a job as a grocery bagger. It is further answered in the additional steps he is required to take, riding across town on the bus every day for an entire week to inquire about his application and then pursuing the matter at the corporate office when he is informed his application has been denied. The answer of how much he must do to find a place is both angering and encouraging, as he may initially face great opposition in dominant culture, but with integrity, perseverance, and effective use of the current legal system, he can traverse the wide gap between second and first class citizenship.

Mosley uses the incident at Bounty Market as Socrates’ first victory gained through non-violent protest and he continues to expand upon his character’s arrival into social legitimacy by creating other opportunities for the character to use non-violent protest to effect social change beyond his own interests. In Mosley’s *Walkin’ the Dog*, Socrates faces his arch nemesis, the criminal justice system. As a black man in racist white America, he has always been at odds with mainstream law enforcement. Again, Socrates chooses non-violent protest over violent retaliation when there is a wrongful death of a young man in his neighborhood perpetrated by a rogue police officer on the LAPD. When he initially discovers that the police officer has murdered the young man and the officer has a long history of criminal activities against the community, he stalks
him with the intent of sneaking up behind him and murdering him, which would be the
typical response of the non-integrated badman character. However, Mosley continues to
fully integrate the badman and intellectual, as Socrates learns the intimate details about
this officer and decides to post his picture and his transgressions on a sandwich board,
which he places over his back and wears in front of the police station where the officer
works (Mosley 245). In doing so, Socrates is fully aware that he may be beaten, arrested,
or killed, but this becomes the ultimate test of his conviction to move forward from his
violent past and find new ways to overcome obstacles within mainstream America.
Predictably, Socrates is beaten and arrested, but the nuance to this interaction with a
corrupt system is that the local community comes to his aid. They see that he is non-
violeently protesting a matter of great importance and they defend him when the police
begin to openly beat this unarmed, non-violent protester. The police would have
inevitably killed him had he not gained both the attention of his community and the local
media. After his arrest, citizens protest and begin to riot, which reintroduces that fragile
balance between intellectualism and violence as instrumental catalyst for social change.
Here, Mosley allows the community to become the violent component in Socrates’ stead.
This allows Socrates to move beyond the segmented badman and intellectual personas
and find another more cohesive black hero, who can act on behalf of his community and
find acceptance and protest in a way that demands social injustices be acknowledged and
remedied.

In many ways, it appears that Mosley has made long use of the archetypical
badman character, but once the intellectual becomes familiar enough with the dominant
system and begins to protest lawfully, the violence of the badman is squelched and he is
only left with the fervor of fighting for a noble cause. If strong letters or marches were the extent of the unified black hero's arsenal, it would appear that Mosley is selling out his original protagonist characters. In reality, it is only in the knowledge that his protagonist has the potential for violent retaliation that the choice to be non-violent becomes politically significant. The black male, like any human being, contains both intellectual and aggressive attributes in his personality, but the black male has been taught by the mainstream dominant culture that he must suppress his aggressive nature, which is perceived as volatile and threatening to a society that has invested several centuries of social pressure to keep his wholeness subjugated and suppressed.

However, the black man in his unified identity or wholeness will not easily submit to or tolerate being regaled to second-class citizenship. His intellect assures him that he is not inherently inferior to his mainstream counterparts and the volatility necessary to fight in defense of his right to equality. The idea that there can be a transition from violence to civil mediation within the black community has a history of success, but this success has always been prefaced with the knowledge that there is a greater potential for violent revolt if non-violent protest ceases to be effective. As with American history, passive protest has always had a respectable place within social activism, but when the dominant power structure refuses to acknowledge non-violent requests for change, there is always the threat of civil unrest and riots waiting around the corner to force the hands of those who continually ignore the disenfranchised masses. Mosley's Socrates has evolved into a model of non-violent activism, through intellectual manipulation of the social justice system, but if these newly integrated attributes should fail, he has a badman lying
somewhere beneath that intellectual persona. Given too much opposition, the badman
may feel inclined to come back out and play.
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ENG-L 502 Contexts for Study of Writing
ENG-L 650 Studies in American Lit 1900
CMLT-C 603 Topics in Comparative Lit
ENG-L 647 Studies in Victorian Literature
ENG-L 681 Genre Studies-Contemporary Novelists & Literary Traditions
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