IT TAKES A VILLAGE: TWENTIETH CENTURY BLACK WOMEN’S FICTION 
AND THE SPIRITUAL APPRENTICESHIP NARRATIVE 

Constance Bailey 

Dr. Anand Prahlad, Dissertation Supervisor 

ABSTRACT 

Through an examination of the mentor/student relationship in late twentieth century works by black women, this dissertation argues that blacks in the new world have developed a distinctive communal ethos in which individuals do not appropriately mature, heal, or become self-actualized on their own. Rather, they require a spiritual mentor or guide to aid them in this process of development. Because Western epistemology often uses binaries such as sacred and secular or spirit and flesh, I employ spirituality in keeping with West African religious philosophy to suggest that the mentor’s abilities, while not exactly supernatural, cannot be entirely understood by Western logic. The writers considered here including Toni Morrison, Gayl Jones, Octavia Butler, and Nalo Hopkinson, emphasize the self as constructed by complex social, political, communal, and spiritual forces.