Lack of Racial or Privilege Awareness in Dorothy Bryant's *Ella Price's Journal*

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Abstract:

The turbulent decades of the 1960s and 1970s included several movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement, and spawned a number of texts, such as Dorothy Bryant's *Ella Price's Journal* (1972), which discussed the lives and plights of women throughout America. As beneficial and impactful as these works are, some of them, including Bryant's novel, focus on white female protagonists, which, unfortunately, further emphasizes the idea that the Women's Liberation Movement of this time was dominated by white women and their personal causes rather than speaking for all women of different backgrounds, races, and classes. While Bryant wrote the novel during the 1960s, allowing her to reflect on and represent the struggles of all women, her focus remained solely on the troubles of a white, middle-class woman, Ella Price. Her novel offers little inclusion of other races, particularly awareness of ethnic women and their difficulties during this era. Instead, Bryant presents a female character that fails to recognize the role her race and heritage play in her life, as well as the privileges afforded her due to her whiteness.

Keywords: Dorothy Bryant, *Ella Price*, whiteness, racial privilege

During the tumultuous decades of the 1960s and 1970s, several movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement and the LGBT Movement, altered the culture of America. Another significant movement during that time was the Women's Liberation Movement, which brought women's rights and feminism to the forefront of political and social discussions. This era spawned a number of texts, such as Dorothy Bryant's *Ella Price's Journal* (1972), which discussed the lives and plights of women throughout America. As beneficial and impactful as these works are, some of them, including Bryant's novel, focus on white female protagonists, which, unfortunately, further emphasizes the idea that the Women's Liberation Movement of this time was dominated by white women and their personal causes rather than speaking for all women of different backgrounds, races, and classes. While Bryant wrote the novel during the 1960s, allowing her to reflect on and represent the struggles of all women, her focus remained solely on the troubles of a white, middle-class woman, Ella Price. Her novel offers little inclusion of other races, particularly awareness of ethnic women and their difficulties during this era. Instead, Bryant presents

a female character that fails to recognize the role her race and heritage play her in life, as well as the privileges afforded her due to her whiteness.

Bryant's first novel, *Ella Price's Journal*, published in 1972, is a fictional journal of a 1960s suburban house wife who, after stepping outside her home and recognizing the realities of the world around her, begins to understand who she is and what she wants out of life; however, Ella eventually realizes that growth, as freeing as it may be, can be painful and come with harsh consequences. When it was first published, the work came out "to complete silence: no promotion, nothing but a few local reviews, and in a hard-cover edition costing more than the main audience for a 're-entry woman's novel' would pay" ("My Publisher/Myself" 1979, 36). Yet, the novel and others like it during this era introduced different issues, such as "Black Power, the movement against the war in Vietnam, and women's liberation" to women readers (Behrent 2019, 266). According to Megan Behrent, *Ella Price's Journal* "becomes a link to a broader political radicalization that was, at once, unfamiliar and deeply connected to the personal or individual radicalizations" (266) and acts as a foundational text of the Women's Liberation Movement.

Ella Price's Journal is part of women's fiction, literature typically written by women for women and usually focused on a central female character. In the 1800s, numerous women writers wrote about female character formation and individual self-development. Currently, the focus in feminist fiction and poetry remains "firmly fixed on individual self-transformation, on private coming to awareness, emotional experience, personal relations, subjective self-recognition and insight" (Baym 1993, xli). These works are distinctly intended for female readers, making the female protagonist even more crucial. Women readers should feel a connection between themselves and the main female characters as they deal with similar issues in life, such as love, identity, ageing, etc. Rebecca Vnuk and Nanette Donohue stress that "if the main character could easily be swapped out for a male character, then it is general fiction" (2013, viii) and not women's fiction, even if it does offer the same connection to female readers. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young add that female protagonists are often flawed rather than perfect portraits of womanhood, which elicits "readers' compassion and identification" (2013, 4). Women's fiction is also character-driven and the emotions and relationships of the female protagonists are central aspects of the plot. Sarah Sceats claims that both historical and cultural influences impact character and plot development in women's fiction (2000, 3), and Helge Normann Nilsen adds to this idea, stating that female authors are typically influenced by the ideas and values of their times (1990, 26).

Whether the plot addresses the career and goals of a young woman or the journey of self-discovery by an older female protagonist, women's fiction showcases obstacles for women to overcome, allowing them to grow and develop their identities moving forward into their futures. In addition, women's texts "aim to forward the development, in young, female readers, of a specific kind of character" (Baym 1993, xix). The protagonists represent "instances of the character that the authors want their readers to become, while the grippingly affective reading experience is meant to initiate or further the resolve of readers to change themselves" (xix). By the

end of these texts, a female character develops "a strong conviction of her own worth as a result of which she does ask much from herself" (19). She can "meet her own demands and, inevitably, the change in herself has changed the world's attitude toward her, so that much that was formerly denied her now comes to her unsought" (19). The characteristics and actions of these female protagonists often influence women readers. Linda Grasso emphasizes that women's texts, both early and contemporary fiction, open up possibilities, allowing female readers to reimagine new identities and new lives (2002, 158).

Because of its plot structure and focus, *Ella Price's Journal* also classifies as housewife fiction, a sub-genre of women's fiction. Many housewife fictional works share a straightforward plot format. At the beginning of the narrative, the female protagonist is "in a state of domesticity, but unconscious (or only vaguely conscious) of her own oppression within it" (Behrent 2019, 262). At the beginning of the novel, Ella's life focuses on her home and family; she has been living as a traditional wife and mother, taking care of the home and raising her child. The story is structured around "the protagonist's gradual recognition of the oppression as she is introduced (whether forcibly or by choice) to the world of the radical left, or the WLM (Women's Liberation Movement) outside of the home" (262). As the story develops, Ella becomes more conscious of her oppression because she begins attending classes at the local community college where she comes face to face with people and concepts that are different from who and what she has known. The main character's experience in "the radical milieu of 'the movement'" and her "ethnographic introduction to the other" transforms her and her consciousness, "leading to some form of breakdown or fragmentation from which a new self is reconstructed or reborn" (262-3). By the conclusion, Ella, finally seeing the reality of the world and her place in it, leaves her husband and daughter and moves forward with getting an abortion, so she will not be trapped in a life she no longer wants.

Few scholars or critics, in the 1970s or now, discuss *Ella Price's Journal*; however, those who do typically focus on Bryant's decision to frame the text as a journal. Megan Behrent argues that feminist authors, like Bryant, who wrote in the "form of first-person fictional narratives, charted women's progress from what [Betty] Friedan had dubbed, in 1963, the 'feminine mystique' into a new feminist consciousness" (261). When specifically referencing *Ella Price's Journal*, she stresses that the journal format and writing are "central to Ella's radicalization and feminist consciousness" (277). Alexa Mergen adds to this idea, stating that Ella Price "seeks wisdom and solace in books and legitimizes her life through oral and written stories" (1998, 95). Mergen also explains that using the format of a journal allows Bryant to "tie Price's development as a writer to her development as a person" (95). Martin Levin builds on this, stating that the structure allows Bryant to explore "some of the pitfalls of family life," while interposing "sharply-observed nuances of personality and a leavening pinch of irony" (1972, BR14).

In addition to the format of the novel, scholarship tends to address the characterization of Ella. Like many of Bryant's other female protagonists, according to Mergen, Ella Price embodies

"the twin American ideals of education and freedom" (1998, 94). Behrent explains that the novel "sets out to trace the broader radicalization of a generation of women through the personal story of its protagonist, a literary 'everywoman' [. . .] whose story is anything but expectational" (2019, 263). She adds that between Ella Price's "sense that nothing *should* be troubling her and the deep, gnawing feeling that something *is* troubling her, [Ella] provides our first glimpse of Friedan's 'problem with no name'" (265), the unhappiness and unfulfillment of women in the 1950s and 1960s because of conventional gender roles. All Ella is, at the beginning of the novel, is a housewife; she takes care of the home, raises her child, and tends to her husband. She, as well as many women of that era, embodies Anne Sexton's description in her poem, "Housewife," that "some women marry houses" (Sexton 1999, 77). Ella's identity and self-worth do not go beyond the confines of her house and the gender specific role she plays within it.

Beyond these specific aspects, scholars and critics, in the few reviews and articles written, provide favorable reviews of the novel. Levin, overall, finds the work "fresh" and "engaging" (1972, BR14). However, when the novel was published in 1972, Library Journal found the book "quite predictable" (qtd. in Rogers 1997, 99). Behrent argues that *Ella Price's Journal* is "a prime example of the awakening-housewife genre of feminist literature" (2019, 263), and Mergen adds to this idea, explaining that, "through memorable characters and skillful writing, Bryant shows the value of stories, especially of those made marginal by gender, class, ethnicity or circumstance" (1998, 95). Barbara Horn stresses the significance of the novel, claiming it "addresses America's most subtle and overlooked instrument of control: social class" because it sets the novel on a community college campus, giving "the issue of class unusual clarity and visibility" (1997, 241). Dan Harkan, Ella's English professor, emphasizes that the college predominantly caters to working class students, "'asking to learn how to read and write better so that they can get a place in the system'" (*Ella Price's Journal* 1997, 97). These students start at the community college, hoping to move on to four-year universities, but according Harkan, "'it was all decided, a long time ago, who was getting a place and who wasn't'" (97). Most of the students fail to make it very far while at the community college; the dropout rate is "'like eighty percent'" (97). In addition, the community college's predominate clientele stresses the class divide between Ella and her middle-class status, who is able to attend school "'just to learn'" (65), and her classmates, who are "'going to spend the rest of their lives outside—outside the places where money is made and jobs are fairly easy'" (97).

While scholarship addresses the importance of the book for raising the consciousness of women and the structure of the text, no scholars discuss the lack of racial and privilege awareness, which is not surprising due to the invisible nature of whiteness. While race "may be a social constriction without biological validity," Linda Martin Alcoff stresses that it is "real and powerful enough to alter the fundamental shape of all our lives" (1998, 8). Ethnic women, in the real world and within literature, often grapple with hardships due to their race; they struggle with the hybrid nature of their backgrounds and prejudice based on their culture and appearance. At times, these obstacles even cause some ethnic individuals to "aspire to be white" (Planas 2020, 188), believing

it will make their lives easier. Writers from ethnic groups struggle with being judged based on "appearances" (Gillan 1999, xvii) and affixed labels that always focus on their ethnicity; however, whiteness is seen as "generic" and usually "taken for granted" (McKibbin 2018, 97). White individuals have "no racial identity" (McDermott 2005, 245); they are typically viewed as "invisible" and regularly considered the privileged race. According to Monica McDermott and Frank L. Samson, white racial identity is traditionally privileged compared to other ethnicities due to "centuries of oppression of nonwhite groups" (245). The idea of a race being invisible proves detrimental in many ways. One main issue is that many white individuals fail to see "the connection between their opportunities in life and their racial identity" (248) because their race is invisible even to themselves, emphasizing their privilege. To be white is "to be class privileged" (Planas 2020, 186).

In a novel written by an ethnic writer, like Toni Morrison's *Jazz* or Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz*, the author provides her main character a path to understanding her place in the world through her own sense of who she is within a community. Examining or defining her ethnicity can provide the main character with different opportunities, new appreciation, or a fresh perspective, but this is not available to the white woman character who has no sense of where she comes from or, apparently, any interest in seeking such a connection to her "roots." By failing to make her white female character's ancestry or cultural background a crucial part of her identity, Bryant suggests that ethnicity is not essential to her or her work. Bryant was an American novelist, playwright, and feminist writer. Her writing is "experimental in form," "varied in point of view," and "eminently readable" and focuses on controversial issues, such AIDS, homophobia, and ageism (Horn 1997, 233). Her works utilize a variety of settings, both real and fantastical; however, the essential theme of her writing remains the same throughout all her texts: "the struggle of the human spirit to know and become itself" ("Dorothy Bryant: About the Author"). She was born in 1930 in San Francisco to Italian immigrant parents; yet, she was "reluctant to be limited as a writer by labels such as 'Italian American,' 'working-class,' 'Californian,' or 'feminist'" (Horn 1997, 233), an action that emphasizes a level of disregard for her own heritage and how it impacts her life. As seen throughout this essay, there is a continued disregard, intentional or not, for the significance of race and cultural background throughout the novel. How is Ella, or any other female character, expected to understand her own identity, especially as she ages and attempts to break free of gender norms, when she is unable or unwilling to take her own background or race into account?

Not surprisingly, Ella Price fails to recognize the importance that her heritage or her background plays in her life. She was "born in Nebraska" (*Ella Price's Journal* 1997, 12) and spent the first ten years of her life there. However, after moving to California, Ella implies that she never returns to her roots in Nebraska, and she has many relatives there that she has never seen. Since she moved to California at the age of ten, she would have memories from her time in Nebraska, but she shows no interest in understanding where she came from or the family she left behind. In addition, due to her mother's oppressive behavior, after marrying Joe, Ella only sees her parents

from time to time, avoiding them as often as possible. According to Barbara Horn, journal writers "document their personal and social histories" and "keep in touch with 'the self'" (1997, 230); however, Ella fails to recognize or acknowledge the role her heritage and background play in her life.

Throughout the novel, while race and ancestry are often ignored by Ella, social class plays a significant role in her life. Janet Zandy defines class as "an experience of shared economic circumstances and shared social and cultural practices in relation to positions of power" (1996, 8). She further claims that "each of us is born into a family with a particular class identity and class history" (9), a "kind of inheritance we carry with us as individuals" (8). Don Slater adds that "it is partially through the use of goods and services that we formulate social identities and display these identities" (1997, 31). In addition, Annette Kuhn states that "class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being" (1995, 98). Overall, class relations "determine life-chances" (Reay 2005, 924) and are "deeply embedded in everyday interactions, in institutional processes, in struggles over identity, validity, self-worth and integrity even when it is not acknowledged" (Payne 2005, 909).

After moving to California, both Ella and her parents continuously attempt to shed their "Okie" status and rid themselves of any stigma associated with their previous home. Even though she is from Nebraska, people they encounter in California, particularly her in-laws, continuously refer to Ella and her parents as Okies, emphasizing their perceived poor economic station and further smearing their whiteness because, at least to Ella's father, poorness equated with being on the same level as "'the niggers'" (*Ella Price's Journal* 1997, 47). They aim to better their class position by earning enough money to move away from the lower-class neighborhood, which Ella's father calls "'niggertown'" (47), into which they first move after relocating. According to Megan Behrent, for Ella and her parents, "civil rights pose a threat to the meager 'wages of whiteness' that separate them from the bottom rung of American class society in which poverty is associated with blackness" (2019, 266). Eventually, they open their own grocery store, allowing them to move up the class ladder and into an all-white neighborhood. As she grows up, Ella continues to want nothing to do with her "Okie" image and strives to separate herself from her history and her previously poor class status through every choice (marriage, children, home) she makes. However, throughout her life, even after marrying Joe and moving into a middle-class position, Ella struggles to rid her feelings pertaining to "'the big line between the kids who went to the ballet and the ones who didn't'" and the constant feeling that "'someone might come up to [her] at any moment and say,' Oh, no, you'll have to leave, you don't belong here" (*Ella Price's Journal* 1997, 62).

Even though social class appears important to her, Ella continues to disregard her background in several ways, one being her ties, or lack thereof, to any religion. Growing up, Ella's mother was extremely religious; she went to church frequently and regularly talked about sin with Ella. However, Ella willingly disconnects from this aspect of her upbringing at the age of sixteen when she "suddenly stopped believing in God," and she "never went to church again" after she

married Joe (47). Ella's marriage to Joe does nothing to bring her closer to her religious upbringing. Joe's family is Catholic, but Ella chooses to not take up her husband's Catholic beliefs. Ella never appears to feel guilty about the conscious decision to not remain religious like her own mother or in-laws even though it further disconnects her from her background and upbringing. Her disregard for religion is further emphasized when she decides that she wants to have an abortion; no religious ties stop her from making that decision.

Ella's lack of understanding when it comes to the role her whiteness plays in her life is further seen during her time at the community college. Ella feels as if her age makes her invisible on the junior college campus because she is surrounded by so many people younger than she is. However, she fails to realize that she is already invisible because she is white. While she may be older and at a different place in her life compared to her younger peers, there is no question that she is accepted at the college. While ethnic individuals must be very conscious of where they are "allowed" and welcomed, white people, like Ella, can easily slip in and out of spaces without concerns about safety, acceptance, etc. She moves around campus, goes from class to class, and finds a place to sit in the cafeteria without any issues. On the other hand, the African American students spend most of their time sitting separately in the cafeteria, isolating themselves from other students of different races and backgrounds, and they "'don't go to class much'" (63), where they likely feel out of place at times. This invisibility is also seen when Ella goes to the anti-war march where she "was completely anonymous" and did not worry about "being seen by [her] family or neighbors" (125). In addition, Ella must observe and, at times, interact with individuals at the community college that are different than she is. While this experience helps enlighten her, and she may even share a sense of alienation with them, she fails to fully grasp their struggles in life. As she becomes more aware, she still does not fully understand or think about what people of color are going through; instead, she remains focused on herself and her concerns.

Ella's inability to acknowledge the role that her heritage plays in her life aids in her inability to recognize the privileges associated with her whiteness. According to Linda Martin Alcoff, part of white privilege has been "whites' ability to ignore the ways white racial identity has benefitted them" (1998, 8). Ella and her family "settled" (*Ella Price's Journal* 1997, 13) for a "nice home" (18) in a middle-class neighborhood called Hillside Estates. While it may not be the wealthiest area in town, their ability to own property there speaks to their comfortable class status. Ella and Joe, her husband, may see their home as less than ideal; however, many other individuals, particularly ethnic people, have traditionally been kept from purchasing homes in such a nice neighborhood. Joe works for the City Purchasing Department and "makes a good living" (12), allowing them their nice home and a number of luxuries, like trips, nice cars, and color TVs. On occasion, Ella will take on a temporary office job to help pay for these indulgences. However, it is not necessary for her to do it on a regular basis. In reality, if her husband did not have such extravagant tastes or want to show off, Ella's temporary jobs would not be needed at all. In addition, Ella and Joe are financially comfortable to host parties and gatherings, like Lulu's, their daughter's, fifteenth

birthday, where "over fifty young people came" (14). Instead of having to work, like many ethnic women, even married ones, she has free time to socialize, to play bridge, and to enjoy pre-dinner martinis on a regular basis with her husband. Also, later in the novel, when she begins to regress into her old close-minded ways, Ella is able to see a psychiatrist. While he proves to be useless, she is still able to seek help for her mental health. Even when she is in need of an abortion, she can gain access to one. Her class or race does not stop her from getting what she wants.

Ella's lack of privilege awareness is also present in her education. At 35 years old, she is able to return to school at Bay Junior College without real concerns about money. Many people, especially ethnic individuals, would likely not be able to afford college, even community college. Based on a family conversation, it appears that Ella is able to go to school by "wasting the taxpayers' money" (17); whether that is true or whether Joe is paying her tuition, Ella is not kept from returning to her education because of money issues. More so, she is also able to take any classes she wants, such as English, Social Science, and Psychology. Her focus is not to use these classes to get a job or further a career, something that would likely be essential for minorities. At one point, when she is frustrated with her English class and professor, she even stresses that she "didn't *have* to take this class" (21). On the other hand, Professor Harkan attempts to aid his other students, even when they do not want to listen, and make their time in his class beneficial by "'tell[ing] them the truth [. . .] the way it is'" (97) because he knows that "'the only way these kids are going to come alive is to know the truth, to see where they are'" (98).

Besides her aim to shed her poor class status, Ella's other main focus is dealing with ageing. According to Robert Butler, just as sexism and racism are based on gender and ethnicity, ageism is "a form of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people simply because they are old" (*The Longevity Revolution* 2009, 40). Ageism allows younger generations to see older people as "different" from themselves; thus, they "subtly cease to identify with [their] elders as human beings" (40). In addition, Butler adds that the tragedy of old age is "not that each of us must grow old and die, but that the process of doing so has been made unnecessarily and at times excruciatingly painful, humiliating, debilitating, and isolating" (*Why Survive* 1975, 2-3). Paul Kleyman adds that "age continues as one of the last areas of openly uttered bias across the American cultural spectrum" (2017, 42), and Harry Moody explains that ageing is "a threat to our sense of ourselves" (2017, 95).

Ageism is especially challenging for women, who are judged more by their physical appearances; the loss of their attractiveness reinforces their subordinate roles in a patriarchal society. Yi-chin Shih explains that ageing is "socially and culturally constructed, instead of biological in nature," which causes women to suffer more from the conspiracy of ageism (2018, 200). The fear associated with ageing is ever-present and used to keep women subordinate in society (201). Barbara Barnett argues that women learn that "their value lies in their physical appearance (i.e., their attractiveness to men)" (2006, 88), meaning that old age diminishes their worth. In a patriarchal culture, ageing makes women unbeautiful. For older women, the standards of youthful beauty are unrealistic to meet, guaranteeing "insecurity and subordination to patriarchal

authority" (88). Sima Aghazadeh adds that middle or old age for women is "the phase of losing the admiring gaze of others" (2016, 23), which is the main indicator of femininity in Western culture.

While the invisibly associated with her whiteness does not bother her, the invisibility caused by Ella's age and ageing does concern her. Due to her age, she learns that "no one has any 'use' for [her], no one has any plan for [her], no one has taken account of [her] presence because [she is] invisible" (*Ella Price's Journal* 1997, 121). As she gets older, she becomes more concerned with ageing and how that impacts her looks; Ella's "biggest problem" is "finding time to go to the beauty parlor" (26) because, according to her, after reaching thirty, "a woman's got to do something if men are going to notice her at all" (37). More so, Ella has the money to work on combating her age; she gets her hair done and dresses nicely. According to her, she has "always taken pains to make up carefully and keep [her] hair pretty" (23-4) because she takes "pride in [her] appearance" (24).

At first, Ella's return to school seems to be an escape from suburban boredom. Her white and middle-class status allows her to go to school and to gain enlightenment about the status of women in literature and thereby in the world. This is important because Ella becomes more socially aware; however, her social awareness seems limited to the bubble of her own existence as a middle-class housewife. Even though she begins to question her role as a housewife and as Joe's partner in marriage, she continues to focus on herself and how she is impacted. Her awareness does not extend to how her privilege as a white woman affects the lives of others. Rather, she utilizes the changes that others have fought for to benefit herself. For example, the work and struggle of women who fought to make abortion legal allow her to have an abortion when she finds herself pregnant and is not willing to have a second child. Behrent explains that this moment stresses that Ella's journey has "only begun and there is a sense of hope for the emergence of a new woman, a new self, and a new world" (2019, 270), but Ella's journey is still marked by the limitations of what she learns about herself even at a time when she is beginning to gain awareness.

Ella also never appears to feel guilt or remorse for some of her actions and decisions; she never seems worried about potential consequences, which would likely stop other women, especially ethnic women, who have too many responsibilities to risk poor behavior and choices. When she has an affair with her professor, Ella appears to feel no guilt. Even when she brings her lover to her own house, she does not seem concerned with the possibility of getting caught or what that could mean for her safe and comfortable lifestyle. Her only priority is to not get pregnant, so while she does have a regular doctor, to avoid suspension, she decides to go to Planned Parenthood. Other women, particularly ethnic women, often do not have regular doctors; they have to use Planned Parenthood. When Ella visits the clinic for contraceptive information prior to starting her affair, she comes face to face with these other women, poorer and of different races, who do not have the same privileges or options as she does. However, the experience does little to enlighten Ella to her privilege. When Ella does get pregnant with her husband's child, she fails to consider or worry about financial issues or logistics. More so, she does

not consider the realities of her situation or her finances when she leaves her husband and her home; she is able to go stay with her friend who offers to help her. She is able to get an abortion, and she never seems to worry about what will happen next.

As alarming as thoughts or comments about suicide can be, someone like Ella, who has an overall stable home and family life, has less to worry about than others of different races or class status if she made the decision to end her life. At times, Ella mentions suicide, in general and as something that she is considering for herself. While Ella's mental state is concerning based on her comments, the harsh reality is that, if she did kill herself, her family would not be too seriously affected. Yes, they would likely be upset and grieve her, but her family would not be losing a provider. Their lives and family structure would not be affected. This appears true when Ella leaves her husband and daughter near the end of the novel. She feels "'this is the best way. [. . .] For [her] to leave. The house, that life, even [her] daughter—none of that has anything to do with [her]'" (*Ella Price's Journal* 1997, 225). She is not worried about money or what will happen next, and she shows no concern for what will happen to her husband or daughter; she knows that they will be fine without her.

Ella's privilege is best demonstrated by her behavior and attitude toward others, especially those of different races. Prior to her awakening, Ella stresses her lack of understanding of the real world and her privilege when she explains that she is "sick of Negros and Mexicans and this group and that group who are always yelling. They're not the only ones suffering" (32). Ella fails to recognize her hypocrisy. While she is aware that only her professor is likely to read her journal, she has no problem complaining about her life, which seems idealistic compared to others of different races and classes; her "woe is me" attitude further emphasizes her inability to see her own privilege. Ella is able to live a "clean and respectable" life, "what you call middle-class" (20). She claims that "there's nothing immoral about enjoying [luxuries] instead of agonizing about all the people who don't have them" (23). Unfortunately, she does not stop there. Instead, she further emphasizes her privilege, stating "maybe if those people had worked as hard as my husband, instead of collecting the taxpayers' money to support their illegitimate babies, they'd have [luxuries] too" (23). Ella appears blind to the irony of what she is saying. It is okay for her to waste the taxpayers' money by going to community college with no intention of doing anything with that education, but it is not right for ethnic individuals who actually need assistance to utilize it.

Even after she becomes more socially aware, Ella still focuses more on her own issues and problems, negating any progress she makes and further emphasizing her privilege. While she feels that she spent the first half of her life being dictated to by other people, like her parents and Joe, Ella acknowledges that the second half of her life, now that she has become more enlightened, offers her a "form of freedom" (121), allowing her to do with it what she will. In addition, sometimes, Ella feels "awfully bitter about being a woman" (75). Being white, her focus can be on her gender and the limitations associated with it. Yet, ethnic women are held back for being a woman and women of color, something that Ella does not even think about. Also, towards the

end of the novel, Ella realizes that she was "seeing [her]self and [her] problems and [her] needs in terms of men" (208). She recognizes that she needs to make a change and that she is "not defined by [her] relation" (208) to the men, her husband and her professor, in her life. While this feminist step forward for Ella is significant, Ella still feels comfortable to move forward in her life without the support of a man. Even when she attempts to be helpful by volunteering to help her friend's women's group send Christmas cards to prisoners, her motives are selfish; she wants to keep her mind off her upcoming abortion. Overall, at the end of the novel, Ella feels optimism rather than fear with the idea of starting anew. She wants to find "something like that feeling [she] had when [she] was in love, that first week, when [she] was high and the world came alive and belonged to [her], and [she] belonged to it" (226-7). Because of her class and race, she can do this; she can have this opportunity.

Dorothy Bryant is not alone in her disregard, intentional or not, of her female protagonist's heritage or privilege. Many white female writers, even contemporary ones, fail to fully recognize the role that race and privilege play in their construction and characterization of their white women characters. This detachment begs the question: why? Likely, there is no easy or quick answer for this question, and the reasons may differ from author to author. Alcoff stresses that everyone "needs to feel a connection to community, to a history, and to a human project larger than his or her own" (1998, 8). Without this connection, she claims "we are bereft of a concern for the future or an investment in the fate of our community" (8). One possible reason for this issue is that facing the privilege connected with their race and the inequality other races deal with just might be more than some white female characters and the white women writers who created them are ready to acknowledge because it could severely alter how they perceive themselves or because they have no idea how to work towards fixing the issue. While genealogy tests, like AncestryDNA, and television shows, such as *Who Do You Think You Are* and *Finding Your Roots*, appear to be growing more and more popular, many white Americans seem to be reluctant to find out about their past because, in a number of cases, they are forced to face harsh realities about their ancestors; for example, a number of white people have slave holders as past relatives. In addition, some of these white female writers just may not recognize the significance that being white plays in their lives, so it is not surprising that it would not play a role in the lives or their characters; unfortunately, this perpetuates the "invisible" nature of whiteness and further emphasizes the divide between races. When specifically addressing *Ella Price's Journal*, it is important to acknowledge the significant role it played during the Women's Liberation Movement and its consciousness-raising content that likely aided many women in better understanding themselves and their place in society. However, as powerful as this text is, *Ella Price's Journal* neglects to define its main character, Ella, as someone with a history that began long before the novel opens in the early 1970s. Ella is just another white woman with no sense of how her being white influences her life and her ability to make choices.

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