"I'm a Gangster Woman from Louisiana, and I'll…I'll Drink Your Blood With My Chitlins!": Dominique Morisseau's Paradise Blue

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There are multiple lenses through which to look at Dominique Morisseau's Paradise Blue (2015). The first lens is to note that this play is the first part of a trilogy, The Detroit Project, which looks at the city from 1949-2008, and also includes Detroit '67 (2013) and Skeleton Crew (2016). In covering one city over such a long expanse of time, the project is reminiscent of August Wilson's Twentieth Century Cycle, nine of whose ten plays take place in Pittsburgh. There are also multiple themes that the two projects have in common. There is the theme of jazz musicians trying to make it in not the most welcoming atmosphere (Ma Rainey's Black Bottom); the theme of a place that serves as a potential refuge for Black people (Gem of the Ocean, Joe Turner's Come and Gone); the theme of "urban renewal" and gentrification (Jitney, Two Trains Running, Radio Golf); the theme of a musician who dies at the beginning of the play, whose task is to explain his death (Seven Guitars); the theme of a family legacy versus the lure of capitalism (The Piano Lesson); and the theme of a father's legacy on his son (Fences, King Hedley II). To point out this similarity is not in any way to suggest any lesser value to Morisseau's work. The point is that all of these themes are, to some degree or another, in much of African American literature in the wake of the legacy of slavery, Reconstruction, and the Great Migration. One can call them archetypes of the Black community.

A second lens through which to look at the play is the place, Detroit. At the time the play takes place, 1947, Detroit is one of the major destinations for those who were part of the Great

Migration, when millions of African Americans left the South and moved both north and west to escape natural disasters that devastated the agricultural economy, as well as the threats to life and limb from the Ku Klux Klan. When these migrants left the South, they not only took their bodies, but also their culture, most specifically jazz. Louis Armstrong had left New Orleans in 1922 to join King Oliver's band in Chicago, and later made the definitive recordings that can be seen as the foundation of modern jazz, the Hot Five and Hot Seven sessions that were recorded between 1925 and 1928. This time period, not coincidently, was also the height of the Harlem Renaissance, the artistic movement that produced, among many others, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, Nella Larsen, and Countee Cullen, not to mention Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. The Harlem Renaissance ended in 1939; and soon thereafter, there was a recording ban because of a musicians' strike from 1942-1944, and then another beginning in 1948 and going into 1949. This time period was when bebop was being developed, the primary architects being Charles "Yardbird" Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Thelonious Monk. Bebop had been developed out of a feeling that swing music, as developed by Black artists such as Ellington and Basie, had been copied and corrupted by white musicians such as the Dorsey brothers, Glenn Miller, and Benny Goodman, the so-called "King of Swing." Bebop wanted to create music that couldn't be easily copied and watered down. Parker and Gillespie revolutionized the music by playing so fast that most white musicians couldn't keep up. As Ralph Ellison notes in "The Golden Age, Time Past":

> "Nevertheless, the inside-dopers will tell you that the 'changes' or chord progressions… worked out by the creators of bop sprang partially from their desire to create a jazz which could not be so easily imitated and exploited by white musicians to whom the

market was more open simply because of their whiteness" (Shadow and Act 212). Monk's contribution was to play music that sounded dissonant and off key, and that was filled with silence and hesitation. Monk was also famous for his hat and beard (listen to Eric Dolphy's composition of the same name), and for pausing in the middle of a tune to dance in circles before going back to the piano, what Ralph Ellison, in the same essay, refers to as his "hide-and-seek melodic methods of modern jazz" (Shadow and Act 202). The point of all this is that because of the strike and then the ban, bebop could only be heard live in small clubs. The most famous of these was Minton's in Harlem, where Monk was the house piano player, and where many of the foundations of bebop were established. It has even been called "the birthplace of bop." (Check out William Gottlieb's famous 1947 photo outside Minton's of Monk, Howard McGhee, Roy Eldridge, and Teddy Hill.) Ellison's essay "The Golden Age, Time Past" is a celebration of this place, this time, and the music that was created there. He even says that the musicians "thought of Minton's as a sanctuary" (Shadow and Act 201). Wherever Black people existed in numbers, there were jazz clubs where bop was played. Morisseau's play takes place in 1949, and centers on one such spot, the Paradise Club, owned by the bebop trumpet player Blue.

The club is similarly named as the downtown strip known as Paradise Valley, where there are multiple jazz clubs. The play's prologue begins with Blue, alone, playing "a long note. It is the most beautiful note we've ever heard" (9). This note can either be reminiscent of Roy Eldridge, Dizzy Gillespie, or more likely Miles Davis, who in 1945 replaces Gillespie in Parker's band. If you listen to the young Miles's playing with Bird, you can hear that he really isn't the fast player that Bird is, so it's no surprise that in 1949-50, Miles would go on to record the album that would

spawn a completely new form of jazz, aptly entitled Birth of the Cool.

As the play opens with Blue's playing followed by the sound of a gunshot, we are immediately thrown into a mystery. Was it a shot in the air; was someone shot; if so who was it? If so, who did it and why? Why does Morisseau choose to structure the play this way? Another topic we begin with is the word" Paradise." The club is called the Paradise Club. The downtown strip on which it is located is called Paradise Valley. Is the word accurate? Is it, in fact, a paradise for the Black people who live and work here, or is the word used either in hope or ironically, and neither the club nor the strip where it is located is an actual "paradise"? We thus begin with many questions we need answers to. It is true that there was an actual Paradise Valley in Detroit where there were several notable jazz clubs, including the 606 Horseshoe Lounge, Club Three Sixes, Club Plantation, the Brown Bomber Chicken Shack (obviously named for Joe Louis), as well as an actual Club Paradise. These venues were a hub for both the new music and the old. Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Louis, Sammy, Ella, Dizzy, the Count, Dinah, and Mr. B. all performed in the city. In December 1947, Miles, Bird, and Max Roach recorded in Detroit; and so at the time the play takes place, Detroit is a very important space in the evolution of bebop. From this perspective, it makes a lot of sense to see the primary lens through which to view the play as being jazz, and Blue's relationship both to his club and to his fellow bandmates, Corn and P-Sam. But things are not going as smoothly as they might. For one, we learn right at the beginning that Blue has fired his bassist, Joe, and put up a sign in the window of the club saying "Bassist Wanted" (10). Now, of course, a band leader has every right to fire a band member. As a classic example, Miles notoriously fired Trane because of his heroin addiction, which actually

ended up being to Trane's benefit, because it made him go cold turkey, kick his habit, and then go on to his greatest musical accomplishments. But here, something else seems to be going on. As percussionist P-Sam notes, "Ain't nothin' little when it come to Blue… Soon as he get that bit of anger in him, somethin' little always turn into somethin' jumbo size" (12). And we learn that this anger issue has more than one source. On the one hand, Joe has been fired because he wants more opportunities for solos during gigs, and he wanted to get paid off the top before the gig starts. On the surface, neither of these seems like an unreasonable desire. We also learn that Blue has inherited the club from his daddy five years ago, and that how he operates is what has been passed down to him. And while P-Sam defends Joe for standing up for himself, and notes not only that there are other jazz clubs in town, but some of them are doing better business-wise; Corn, who has been with Blue much longer, consistently defends Blue; and that creates some degree of tension between them, so much so that P-Sam refuses to eat breakfast because the food might have "Some kinda Blue-don't-do-no-wrong magic dope or somethin'" (14). This conversation takes place because Blue has called a rehearsal but hasn't yet shown up because he "Just ran downtown for a sec" (15). This sounds insignificant, but it will prove to be much more than that.

When Blue shows up, he commands the room, and asserts his position regarding Joe, "Everybody know this is Blue's Black Bottom Quartet. My club. My band. Ain't nobody getting' solo time but me. Don't no bassist nowhere get solo time" (17). This raises some questions. For starters, Blue is wrong about bassists not getting solo time. One need only look at Jimmie Blanton's work with Duke Ellington. Blanton, who played at Minton's, and can therefore be seen as the developer of the bebop bass style, played with the Duke from 1939 until his death at 23

in 1942. As a bebop musician, Blue would definitely have known about Blanton's work; and so his defense of Joe's "leaving" because he asked for something "unusual" is untrue. This suggests that the real issue here is about power. It's interesting in this context to think about Ellison's notions about jazz in "The Charlie Christian Story." There, Ellison argues that jazz is one of the best metaphors for American democracy. He notes: "For true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment… springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest; each solo flight, or improvisation, represents… a definition of his identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition. (Shadow and Act 234). The jazz artist, like the American, is both individual and part of the group. That tension is the essence of what being an American means. This goes against Blue's assertion. He is clearly saying that the band is "all about me" rather than "all about us." So from this perspective, Blue should immediately be seen as problematic in the play. Blue also makes an argument about "Money ain't quality" (17). What exactly does he mean here? He seems to be suggesting that the music played at the Paradise is more "pure" than the jazz played at other venues. But this raises an interesting topic. Other jazz clubs are attracting more customers, and therefore making more money. What exactly is going on here on the topic of jazz and capitalism? Is the quality of the music better somewhere else? Or is it simply, as another character will point out, that other jazz clubs have a lower admission price? What exactly is the argument Morisseau is making about Blue's attitude/stance toward both the music and the business of the music?

Immediately after this, we start to learn why Blue was downtown. The new mayor, as part of

his campaign promises, has decided to "be cleanin' up the slums" and "Getting' rid of the blight in the city." Apparently, to the mayor, this means getting rid of Black spaces. Surprisingly, Blue seems to go along with this idea, saying, "Some of these places are a real eyesore. Make all our spots look run-down," and he is hoping that "the rest of us can finally move on up." This is a problematic position to take. Blue is talking from what he views as a class position rather than a racial one. Blue clearly views himself to be opposed to other Blacks who are financially less well-off. Let us remember that this is 1947, seven years before Brown, and therefore, a time when Black racial solidarity is particularly important given red-lining, racial covenants, and other attempts to limit any form of racial progress. Blue seems to think that because he owns an establishment that he is "better" than other Blacks who are less well-off. His thinking is clearly individualist, capitalist, and short-sighted. Interestingly, Corn, who has just more-or-less agreed with Blue's firing of Joe, immediately steps up to confront Blue on the state of the less well-off community members, "Them folks ain't doin' nothin' but living where they can afford. That's all." Pumpkin, Blue's girlfriend, supports Corn's position, saying, "I like it here in Black Bottom. Always got somewhere I can count on folks. Know Buffalo James gonna always offer me some of his cornmeal if I run out here…These folks over here like family. Always got time to pull favors for family" (19). Once again, we are presented with an argument for racial solidarity that goes against Blue's seemingly individualist, capitalist, selfish ideology. We clearly have a major conflict here. Blue is listening to offers that will negatively affect the community, while the other characters have problems with his decisions, both to fire Joe and to begin conversations that could end up with the sale of the Paradise. The band and the place are intimately connected. The sale of the club would both destroy the music and the community.

The Paradise, which has served as a community center and refuge, is possibly on the road to becoming hell.

Another aspect of the jazz lens takes place when P-Sam and Corn talk outside the presence of Blue. In particular, they discuss the realities of being a jazz musician. P-Sam notes that "Ain't no place for a colored man outside Black Bottom… I been on that stint, playin' the whiteman's club in Detroit… entering through the back door… standin' on them stages and smilin' like I'm happy to be entertainin' these no-count crackers that think of me as less than the spilled whiskey on they shoe" (32). One of the things bebop attempted to do was to move the music from the realm of entertainment to that of art, and to be able to perform in venues where the musicians' work would be sufficiently appreciated. And so while the Paradise does provide a safe space for musicians, they are not able to perform before larger audiences, and therefore often have to pick up extra gigs to make ends meet.

Another problem is that Blue has decided that until a new bass player is hired, Pumpkin will start singing with the band, although she has no experience. Not only that, her skill set is limited at best. As Corn notes, "But she workin' and workin' and sound like she getting' worser and worser" (33). This, again, is causing conflict in the band, and is another example of how this supposed model of democracy in motion is not functioning the way it should.

When Blue is alone playing his trumpet, "He plays a beautiful and painful melody – long, sorrowful notes," and he becomes "too wrapped up in his pain." And while Pumpkin thinks, "that sounded real good," Blue's response is, "I lost my rhythm. Let it take me over. Ain't never s'pose to let it take over" (43). The cause of this pain turns out to be the relationship between

Blue and his daddy. He tells Pumpkin, "I'm chokin here…Baby, I'm not right," and the source of this is "Them spirits… Spirit of my daddy. Lurkin' round this club…Nigger won't leave me be… They my daddy's demons comin' after me. I got to run from 'em 'fore they kill me" (44). This is why he tells Pumpkin that he has decided to sell the club for ten thousand dollars and move to Chicago. Pumpkin has no desire to leave and go to "Where I ain't got no people." Blue's response is, "This dead here. Don't you hear me, baby? I need you to take care of me. I'm dying here" (45). This is a set-up to the final, and most important, lens through which to critically look at the play, the lens of sexism. That this is the most important lens is clear from the play's dedication page. It reads, "For Pearl Cleage, because of her inspiration to me as a writer… And because of her essay, "Mad at Miles" – which gave me the ammunition and bravery to deal with community accountability in and out of my art" (3).

Mad at Miles: A Blackwoman's Guide to Truth (1990) is a sixty-five page book-length essay in which Cleage argues that sexism is to women what racism is to Black people, and that Black men in particular need to learn this lesson. She begins the text with quotes from Shahrazad Ali's The Blackman's Guide to Understanding the Black Woman; Ike Turner's quote about his breaking Tina's jaw; and finally, a quote from Miles's autobiography, in which he says of his wife at the time, Cecily Tyson, "and I just slapped the shit out of her." Cleage wonders when Black men are going to fight as hard against sexism as the do against racism, realizing "the point where racism and sexism meet" (4). She further notes that she is "writing because five women a day are murdered by the men who say they love them" (5). In making this argument, it's interesting that she places much of the emphasis on Miles, as he is a jazz icon for his music,

and therefore, a leading Black cultural figure. More than once, Cleage repeats the passage, “he is guilty of self-confessed violent crimes against women such that we should break his albums, burn his tapes and scratch up his CD’s until he acknowledges and apologizes and rethinks his position on The Woman Question” (13). How do Cleage’s words and Morisseau’s dedication make us think about what the main action of the play actually is? And before we even get to that, there is the overall general question of what distinctions, if any, we should make between the artist and the art. Should we not listen to Miles anymore because of the way he treated the women in his life? Should we no longer look at Picasso’s paintings for the same reason, or no longer read the poetry of Pound because of his support of Mussolini? These questions not withstanding, the dedication to Cleage’s work makes us stop and go back to asking the question as to what Morisseau’s argument is. Earlier in the play, we note that Pumpkin “winces from a pain in her wrist” (29); and that later, she “lifts” her arm “and a pain stabs her wrist. She flinches” (41). It is clear that she is the victim of physical abuse from Blue, and that she doesn’t want to talk about it. We already have had difficulties with Blue’s vision and actions. Cleage articulates the options very succinctly, “Either we think it’s a crime to hit us or we don’t. Either we think our brothers have to take responsibility for stopping the war against us, or we don’t (18). Or, as she puts it slightly later, “And the question is: How can they hit us and still be our leaders? Our husbands? Our lovers? Our geniuses? Our friends? And the answer is… they can’t. Can they? (21). We have already had issues with Blue, but this behavior clearly places him over the line. This behavior causes us to look more closely at Pumpkin. At the beginning of the play, she is obsessed with the work of Georgia Douglas Johnson, and in particular, her poem “The Heart of a Woman,” which is the title poem of her first book, published in 1918. This date is

important because her publication precedes the first book publications of Jean Toomer (1923), Langston Hughes (1926) and Zora Neale Hurston (1934) as major Harlem Renaissance writers. In "The Heart of a Woman," Johnson presents a or the dilemma of the modern woman. At dawn, her heart goes forth and roams freely; but at night, it must fall back and return to an "alien cage" where it "tries to forget it has dreamed of the stars." This poem is reminiscent of Paul Laurence Dunbar's 1899 poem "Sympathy," with its famous line, "I know why the caged bird sings," later adopted by Maya Angelou. Pumpkin is caged by Blue, and has no opportunity to fly free. She spends all her time cooking and cleaning. Her interpretation of the poem is "that a woman is just goin' off on her own lonesome…waitin' for somebody to love her"(16). This is a limited interpretation based on Pumpkin's limited experiences. The other poem she likes to recite is Johnson's "My Little Dreams," which begins, "I'm folding up my little dreams/Within my heart tonight, /And praying I may soon forget/The torture of their sight." Like "The Heart of a Woman," this poem is a clear representation of the sexist ways in which men treat women by limiting their opportunities and thus controlling their lives. P-Sam correctly interprets the poem's meaning as "Bury something deep inside so you can forget the hurt of not havin' it" (30). When P-Sam suggests, flirtingly, that she just call him "Sam," she refuses in fear of how Blue might respond. At least part of the reason Pumpkin views the world as she does is that she hasn't had a sufficiently positive role model. This all changes with the arrival of Silver.

Silver comes to the Paradise looking for Blue to rent a room. We are immediately told that "She moves like a spider weaving a web." Whether we are familiar or not with Manuel Puig's 1976 novel Kiss of the Spider Woman and the subsequent musical, this description suggests a woman connected to danger and death. It's interesting to note the gendered response. Blue

immediately responds with some negativity, “I got one-person rooms for rent. Not enough space for your ol’ man or nothin’ (21). Silver retorts, “My ol’ man dead,” and then boldly questions the price of the room. And when she “digs in her bosom and pulls out a wad of cash,” they all watch her “in astonishment” (22). While Pumpkin “stares at Silver in awe” (21), the men are much more skeptical. Blue asserts, “Somethin’ ain’t right about that.” P-Sam counters with, “She ain’t got no man and she got a walk like that”; while Corn differently asserts, “She got some kinda sadness to her maybe” (23). When Pumpkin shows Silver her room, Silver immediately unpacks her record player and announces, “Can’t be one place and my music someplace else. Go crazy, otherwise…”(25). Later, she will “slightly” amend this to, “Can’t go nowhere without my music. A man I’ll leave behind. But his music, I’ll take forever” (53). Later, we learn that among her records are some by Bird, Dizzy, and Lester, the “Prez” of the saxophone (52,57, 77). This clearly establishes her as a force to be reckoned with in the play, and a clear contrast to Pumpkin. She is rich, independent, and knows the music. In most ways, she is the exact opposite of Pumpkin; and Morisseau is obviously setting her up as a mentor for the younger woman. While Silver is from Louisiana, but says that “every woman got to pick up and leave after a while” (27), Pumpkin has never left Detroit, and doesn’t want to. After Pumpkin praises her relationship with Blue, and Silver responds with, “Way you speak on him like ecstasy,” which Pumpkin considers to be “improper” because it’s too sexual, and asks, “ Why a woman need to speak like a gangster?” Silver responds, “(Seriously): So everybody know she ain’t to be messed with” (28). And so again, a clear contrast is being pointed out between the two women. To paraphrase James Brown, Silver “don’t take no mess,” and Pumpkin seems to be willing to take whatever mess Blue imposes on her in the name of “love.” Another

distinguishing feature is that Silver's "daddy was a bluesman" (38), and so she knows how to run a club, telling Blue that he is charging too much for admission, and that is why his business is down. Silver's primary role in the play is to act as a mentor to Pumpkin. A key moment in the play occurs when Pumpkin, after discovering that Silver is carrying a gun, attempts to imitate her, alone in Silver's room. She asserts, theatrically, "I'm a gangster woman from Louisiana and I'll… I'll drink your blood with my chittlins" (58). This is both a comic moment, a serious moment, and a significant moment of change. Prior to this, Pumpkin has recited two poems by Georgia Douglas Johnson. Both depict a woman trapped in a cage who has limited options for escape. After this, Pumpkin recites a third poem of Johnson's, "Calling Dreams," in which the speaker asserts, "I ask, nay, I demand of life." No longer is Pumpkin reciting poems about women being trapped and having no opportunities, but she has moved to a new psychological space, inspired by Silver, to think of herself in a new way, as an independent woman who will "stride into the/ morning-break!" (Collected Early Poems 81).

Soon thereafter, Silver discovers that Pumpkin has looked through her things, listened to her Lester Young, and found her gun. Instead of confronting Pumpkin and complaining about the violation of her space, Silver takes an entirely different tone and again functions as Pumpkin's mentor, telling her that she, Silver, needs a gun for "protection." She also confronts Pumpkin about "those bruises on your arm." She then discourses on the situation of women with men and those without, "Seem to me like you ain't no safer than me on my lonesome. In fact, I'll say I'm the better of us two. Cuz I know how to shoot straight and aim direct." Silver then instructs Pumpkin in how to shoot the gun, also telling her that her own husband died because she shot

him with a “Bullet in the head” (79). This was not a random act. According to Silver, her husband physically abused her; and therefore, “Any man put his hands on a woman is asking to be shot. Straight between the eyes” (85). This echoes the words of Cleage, “being scared isn’t the most terrible thing that can happen. Being unprepared is much worse” (27). Through her interaction with Silver, Pumpkin learns that her physical abuse from Blue is not unique, that it’s not at all her fault, and that she needs to stand up to Blue in order to save herself. As Cleage notes, Most of us have accepted black men’s indifference to or hostility toward sexism as good enough reasons to ignore the problem” (39). This understanding of sexism is precisely what Silver teaches Pumpkin, making her aware of the fact that Black men need to admit their guilt and engage in a recovery process in which they own their “culpability, responsibility and the element of choice,” to again quote Cleage (41). This is precisely what Blue isn’t capable of doing. The primary reason is that he is haunted by ghosts, primarily the ghosts of his father. We learn that Blue’s father killed his wife, that Blue witnessed it as a child, and that his father was then sent to a psychiatric institution, where he eventually died.

Because of his witnessing this horrible event, it makes sense that Blue would be haunted by the spirit of his father’s demons and therefore want to sell the club and move to Chicago. There are, however, two problems with this idea. As Pumpkin correctly points out, there’s no guarantee that Blue’s pain will disappear just because he is in a different physical space. The second issue has to deal with Silver. When she discovers that Blue is contemplating selling the Paradise, she offers to buy it, and notes to him that she has experience running a club. Blue’s response is to dismiss her out of hand because “I ain’t talkin’ ‘bout my plans with no simple woman” (38). This raises two additional problems. The first is the obvious sexism at work. Silver

has the money, the experience, and the requisite love of jazz. Perhaps even more importantly, if Blue sold the club to Silver, she would keep it open. If Blue sells to the city, he knows that the city will demolish it for "urban renewal," and that neighborhood gentrification will follow because his lot is the largest; and if he sells to the city, other jazz club owners will follow suit, and Paradise Valley will become a wasteland. This is a clear indication that Blue, in his individualist, capitalist mindset cares neither for the music, his fellow musicians, nor the neighborhood. Silver makes clear to Blue that if he sells the club to the city, "the soul of this place ain't never gonna forgive you" (60), and that it will "Fill you with demons…And when it done that to my daddy, …he lynched himself" (61). Clearly, Blue doesn't care, even though Pumpkin, echoing Ellison, has said that the club is "our sanctuary" (46).

By the end of the play, everything has changed. Pumpkin has gone from reciting the poems of Johnson to writing her own, in which she refers to herself as, "I become the sun" (86). Under the tutelage of Silver, she has become her own woman, ready to stand up for herself. And when Blue enters the club and thinks P-Sam is hitting on her and the two begin to fight, Pumpkin retreats upstairs, gets Silver's gun, and then fires a warning shot into the air to stop the fight. But what she sees in Blue demonstrates to her that it is too late. And even though Blue then plays a perfect note on his trumpet, Pumpkin realizes that she can't take anymore; that after P-Sam, she will be the next to be attacked; and that this physical abuse must end. The demons have come, and Blue is no longer in control of himself; and so Pumpkin fatally shoots him, and the play ends. Cleage had noted that "Domestic violence is the front lines of the war against women. Black men, consciously and unconsciously, use the threat of violence, the fact of their

superior strength, and their well known volatility to keep black women nervous and frightened"(47). Silver had said to Pumpkin, "A man with demons ain't gonna see you as nothin' but a gateway to hell. Whenever them spirits come callin', he got to fight anybody they tell him to. And if you in his way, then he gonna fight you" (83).

We are still left wondering what will happen next. Blue was going to sell the club to the city, but hadn't yet signed the papers. Pumpkin, as his common-law wife, now presumably owns the club, and she will not sell. P-Sam has hit the number, and both he and Silver can financially keep the club going and Paradise Valley intact. In an earlier conversation with Corn, Silver had described herself as "cursed" because she was childless. It appears that there is the possibility that the Paradise will become her child, and she will feel fulfilled. And so by killing Blue, Pumpkin saves herself from further abuse, saves the Paradise Club from going to hell, saves the lives and jobs of the musicians, and saves the entire community from the literal wrecking ball. With Pumpkin's refusing to sell, presumably the other club owners will back out as well. As Pumpkin says, in the play's final line, "That's right. For everybody. No more hurtin'" (97). She has, in fact, become the "gangster woman from Louisiana" (58). In Paradise Blue, Dominique Morisseau demonstrates how a community with few resources can manage to come together, work together in a truly collective way to save themselves, and that the theory of individualistic, self-serving capitalism is the road to perdition.